Caste System in India (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste_system_in_India)

In India, the caste system is a system of social stratification and which is now also used as a basis for affirmative action. Historically, it defined communities into thousands of endogamous hereditary groups called Jātis. Contemporary usage of the term Jātis and caste are synonyms. The Jātis were grouped by the Brahminical texts under four categories, known as varnas: viz Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Certain groups, now known as "Dalits", were excluded from the varna system altogether, ostracized by all other castes and treated as untouchables.

Although strongly identified with Hindus, the caste systems has been carried over to other religions on the Indian subcontinent, including Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs.

Caste is commonly thought of as an ancient fact of Hindu life, but various contemporary scholars have argued that the caste system was constructed by the British colonial regime. Reservations of a certain percentage of government jobs or vacancies in educational institutes for the historically "depressed" groups have existed since the later years of British rule. These groups are together referred to as Dalits or untouchables, and Adivassi or tribal group. After India achieved independence, the composition of these two groups was finalized into lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and their protection was enshrined in the Constitution.

The caste system has no legality in India and discrimination against lower castes is illegal in India under Article 15 of its constitution. However, sporadic Caste-related discrimination and violence continue to be reported. Since 1950, the country has enacted many laws and social initiatives to protect and improve the socioeconomic conditions of its lower caste population. These initiatives have led to many lower caste members being elected to the highest political offices including the election of K.R. Narayanan, a Dalit, as President of the nation from 1997 to 2002. The current system is based on heredity and is not changeable.