

Chapter 4

Ancient India and China

VOICE FROM THE PAST

◆ Section 1 (pages 66–72)

THE FOUR GROUPS OF HINDUISM

The following selection comes from the *Code of Manu*, a Hindu book of sacred law written sometime during the first and second centuries B.C. The excerpt outlines the division of Hindu society into four different groups.

For the sake of the preservation of this entire creation, Purusha, the exceedingly resplendent one, assigned separate duties to the classes which had sprung from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.

Teaching, studying, performing sacrificial rites, so too making others perform sacrificial rites, and giving away and receiving gifts—these he assigned to the brahmins.

Protection of the people, giving away of wealth, performance of sacrificial rites, study, and nonattachment to sensual pleasures—these are, in short, the duties of a kshatriya.

Tending of cattle, giving away of wealth, performance of sacrificial rites, study, trade and commerce, . . . and agriculture—these are the occupations of a vaishya.

The Lord has prescribed only one occupation . . . for a shudra; namely, service without malice of . . . these other three classes.

1. The brahmins later became the priestly class. What are their duties?

2. What class do you think later became rulers and warriors in Hindu society? How do you know?

3. What class do you think later became landowners and merchants? How do you know?

4. What is the occupation of the shudras?

5. How does Hindu law expect shudras to execute their duties?
