



Understanding Social Structures in Ancient Indian Societies

Exploring Diverse Societies of Ancient India

World History | Grades 6-7 | Annedra Nettleton, B.Ed., M.Ed., Ed.S.

Note to teachers:

This is part 3 in a four-part series of lessons about understanding Ancient Indian Civilizations and its ancient religions and societies. There is also a single lesson plan that provides a less in-depth look at the different components if there is minimal time for teaching about this topic.

Materials:

- Social Organization Graphic Organizer (copy for each student)
- Personal Connection Reflection (copy for each student)
- Understanding Social Structures Google Slideshow presentation
- "Find Your Community" Role-Play (one role card per student)

Direct Instruction:

1. Start with a question using slides 2 and 3 of the Google Slideshow (Engage - 5 min):
 - "How did ancient Indian societies organize themselves, and how does this compare to modern communities?" (Students write brief responses on sticky notes. If time allows, have students walk around the room and discuss their responses with peers.)
 - Use slide 3 as a discussion point about social structures.
2. Present Key Information (Explain - 20 min):
 - Go through the Understanding Social Structures Google slideshow.
 - Direct students to fill out their Social Organization graphic organizer as you go through slides 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

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- Slide 11: Direct students' attention to the direct quotation.
 - **Think** – Have students individually reflect on what they notice about the direct quotation. They should gather their thoughts, and be prepared to share/discuss with peers.
 - **Pair** – Assign students to partners or small groups to share their answers and discuss perspectives
 - **Share** – Call on a few groups to share their insights with the whole class, facilitating a discussion to clarify and expand ideas.
- 3. Slide 12: Allow students to complete the Personal Connection Reflection. Discuss their results.
- 4. Slides 13, 14, and 15: Discuss some common myths about Hindu Social Organization. Direct students to fill out their Social Organization graphic organizer as you go through slides 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.
- 5. After completing the Google Slideshow, have students complete the “Find Your Community” Role-Play (one role card per student).

Reflection (5min)

- Have students answer the review questions aloud or on paper.

Assessment (15min)

- Have students complete the assessment.

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Direct Quotations to Supplement the Lesson Plan

These quotations were taken directly from the *Hindu Societies* primer produced and written by the Center for Advancing Pluralism. More resources are available at <https://pluralist.org/>. Please note that due to the language and text complexity, these quotations may not be beneficial to our students' understanding. Instead they are provided as excerpts to help you better prepare before sharing the content with students.

Slides 4, 5, 6, & 7: "A *svayam/vyakti* (oneself/individual) was usually part of a *parivāra*, which consists of an immediate family and multigenerational blood relations. A *parivāra* was usually part of a *kula* (clan), an extended family or clan with shared ancestry and kinship, whether genetic or otherwise, including relations through marriage. Subclans are often named for any significant individual and their children, or smaller clans that ally with larger clans through treaty or partnership. Many *parivāras* and/or *kulas*, when they shared some kind of distinguishing social features, might form a *jāti* (tribe).¹" (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

Slides 8 & 9: Many *kulas* and/or *jātis* would ally through treaty or marriage and form a *jana*, a clan/tribal confederation, usually with a commonly elected leader and a council made up of the leaders of the other clans. The geographical territory of a *jana* was called a *janapada* (pre-600 BCE).²" (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

Slide 10: When a group of *janas* allied through treaty or marriage, their combined *janapada* territories were called a *mahājanapada* or tribal nation. There were sixteen *mahājanapadas* in ancient India (c. 600-400 BCE), each of them containing one or more urbanized areas serving as economic and administrative centers, and numerous villages or forest settlements wherein resided both *Āryas* and those choosing to remain independent from *Ārya* society" (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

¹ Jha, Vivekananda. "Social Stratification in Ancient India: some reflections". *Social Scientist*. 19.3. 1991, p. 38.

² Clack, Timothy. "Syncretism and Religious Fusion" in Insoll, Timothy (ed.) 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*.

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Social Organization Graphic Organizer

Instructions: Fill in 2-3 key facts for each level of ancient Indian society.

Social Group	Description & Key Fact
<i>svayam</i> (Individual Person)	
<i>parivāra</i> (Family Unit)	
<i>kula</i> (Clan/Extended Family)	
<i>jāti</i> (Tribe/Community)	
<i>jana</i> (Tribal Confederation)	
<i>janapada</i> (Territory)	
<i>mahājanapada</i> (Kingdom/State)	

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Personal Connection Reflection

 **Prompt:** Think about your **own family or community** and compare it to **ancient Indian societies**. Consider the following questions:

- **Who do you live with?**
- **Who are your extended relatives?**
- **What groups do you belong to?**
- **How do people in your life work together?**

 **Task:** Discuss your own family or community with two other members of the class. During your discussion, use at least **one key term** from the lesson (e.g. *parivāra*, *kula*, *jāti*).

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Finding Your Community: Role Playing Activity

Each student receives **one role card**. The role cards are grouped into **7 different levels** of ancient Indian social organization.

- **Task:** Students walk around the room and find their “group” (e.g., individuals find a family, families form a clan, clans form a tribe).

Role Level	Examples of Role Cards	How They Find Their Group
1. <i>svayam</i> (Individual)	Farmer, Potter, Trader, Weaver	Find a <i>parivāra</i> (Family) that matches their role (e.g., two traders = same family)
2. <i>parivāra</i> (Family Unit)	Farmer Family, Potter Family, Weaver Family, Trader Family	Join with others of the same extended family to form a <i>kula</i> (Clan)
3. <i>kula</i> (Clan/Extended Family)	Potter Clan, Weaver Clan, Warrior Clan	Find other <i>kulas</i> to form a <i>jāti</i> (Community/Profession)
4. <i>jāti</i> (Tribe/Community)	Merchant Community, Metalworkers, Fishermen	Unite with other communities to form a <i>jana</i> (Tribal Confederation)
5. <i>jana</i> (Tribal Confederation)	Allied Merchants, Coastal Traders, Valley Farmers	Find others to form a <i>janapada</i> (Territory)
6. <i>janapada</i> (Territory)	Kuru Janapada, Gandhara Janapada, Kosala Janapada	Combine to form a <i>mahājanapada</i> (Kingdom/State)
7. <i>mahājanapada</i> (Kingdom/State)	Magadha Kingdom, Kosala Kingdom	The largest group—represents an organized state

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Role Card Text
You are a <i>svayam</i> (Individual). You are a farmer. You are looking for other farmers to form a family (<i>parivāra</i>).
You are a <i>svayam</i> (Individual). You are a potter. You are looking for other potters to form a family (<i>parivāra</i>).
You are a <i>svayam</i> (Individual). You are a trader. You are looking for other traders to form a family (<i>parivāra</i>).
You are a <i>svayam</i> (Individual). You are a weaver. You are looking for other weavers to form a family (<i>parivāra</i>).
You are a <i>parivāra</i> (Family). You are farmers. You are looking for other farmer families to form a clan (<i>kula</i>).
You are a <i>parivāra</i> (Family). You are potters. You are looking for other potter families to form a clan (<i>kula</i>).
You are a <i>parivāra</i> (Family). You are weavers. You are looking for other weaver families to form a clan (<i>kula</i>).
You are a <i>parivāra</i> (Family). You are traders. You are looking for other trader families to form a clan (<i>kula</i>).
You are a <i>kula</i> (Clan). You are a Farmer Clan. You are looking for other clans to form a <i>jāti</i> (Community).

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You are a *kula* (Clan). You are an Artisan Clan (Potters, Weavers). You are looking for other clans to form a *jāti* (Community).

You are a *kula* (Clan). You are a Merchant Clan (Traders). You are looking for other clans to form a *jāti* (Community).

You are a *jāti* (Community). You are the Agricultural Community (Farmers). You are looking for other communities to form a *jana* (Tribal Confederation).

You are a *jāti* (Community). You are the Artisan Community (Potters, Weavers). You are looking for other communities to form a *jana* (Tribal Confederation).

You are a *jāti* (Community). You are the Merchant Community (Traders). You are looking for other communities to form a *jana* (Tribal Confederation).

You are a *jana* (Tribal Confederation). You are the Farmers & Artisans Confederation. You are looking for other confederations to form a *janapada* (Territory).

You are a *jana* (Tribal Confederation). You are the Merchant & Warrior Confederation. You are looking for other confederations to form a *janapada* (Territory).

You are a *janapada* (Territory). You are the Kosala Janapada. You are looking for other *janapadas* to form a *mahājanapada* (Kingdom).

You are a *janapada* (Territory). You are the Magadha Janapada. You are looking for other *janapadas* to form a *mahājanapada* (Kingdom).

You are a *mahājanapada* (Kingdom). You are the Kosala Kingdom. You are looking to expand or form alliances with other *mahājanapadas* or strong *janapadas*.

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You are a *mahājanapada* (Kingdom). You are the Kosala Kingdom. You are looking to expand or form alliances with other *mahājanapadas* or strong *janapadas*.

Role Playing Reflection Questions (Class Discussion)

- Was it easy or hard to organize? Why?
- How does this compare to how modern communities form (e.g., cities, states, countries)?
- What challenges might ancient people have faced when forming these larger groups?

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Writing Task: Reflection on Myths and Facts About Ancient India

Prompt: In 2 paragraphs, explain how social organization in ancient Indian societies was structured. Compare this to how people organize themselves in modern society. Use at least **one key term** from the lesson (*parivāra*, *kula*, *jāti*, *jana*, *janapada*, or *mahājanapada*) and provide **one similarity and one difference** between ancient and modern social organization.

Scoring Rubric (10 Points Total)

Category	Points	Description
Understanding of Social Organization (Ancient Indian Societies)	3	Clearly explains how ancient Indian societies were organized, using at least one key term.
Comparison to Modern Society	3	Provides one clear similarity and one clear difference between ancient and modern social structures.
Organization & Clarity	2	Writing is structured in logical paragraphs with clear sentences.
Grammar & Mechanics	2	Writing is free from major spelling and grammar errors.