

What is Jati?

Jati refers to a social group or community in India, characterized mainly by occupation, endogamy (marriage within the group), and shared customs. The term 'Jati' literally means 'birth' or 'genus' in Sanskrit, highlighting that membership is typically inherited by birth.

Key Features of Jati:

- **Hereditary Group:** Membership in a Jati is passed down through birth.
- **Occupation-based Identity:** Traditionally, most Jatis are associated with specific professions, such as weaving, pottery, or trading.
- **Endogamy:** People usually marry within their Jati, reinforcing the group's identity.
- **Hierarchy:** Jatis are ranked within a complex social hierarchy; this hierarchy can vary by region.

Difference Between Jati and Varna:

While **Varna** refers to the broad four-fold classification of society in Hinduism (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras), **Jati** is a more localized and numerous grouping based on occupation and community. Varna is a theoretical and religious classification, whereas Jati is a practical social reality.

Social Significance:

Jatis have played a major role in organizing social life in India. They influence social interactions, rituals, and economic functions. Although modern legal frameworks in India outlaw discrimination based on Jati, its social effects persist in many parts of the country.

Summary:

In essence, a *Jati* is a specific hereditary social group in Indian society, traditionally linked to occupation and marriage practices, forming a complex and rich tapestry of community identities across the subcontinent.