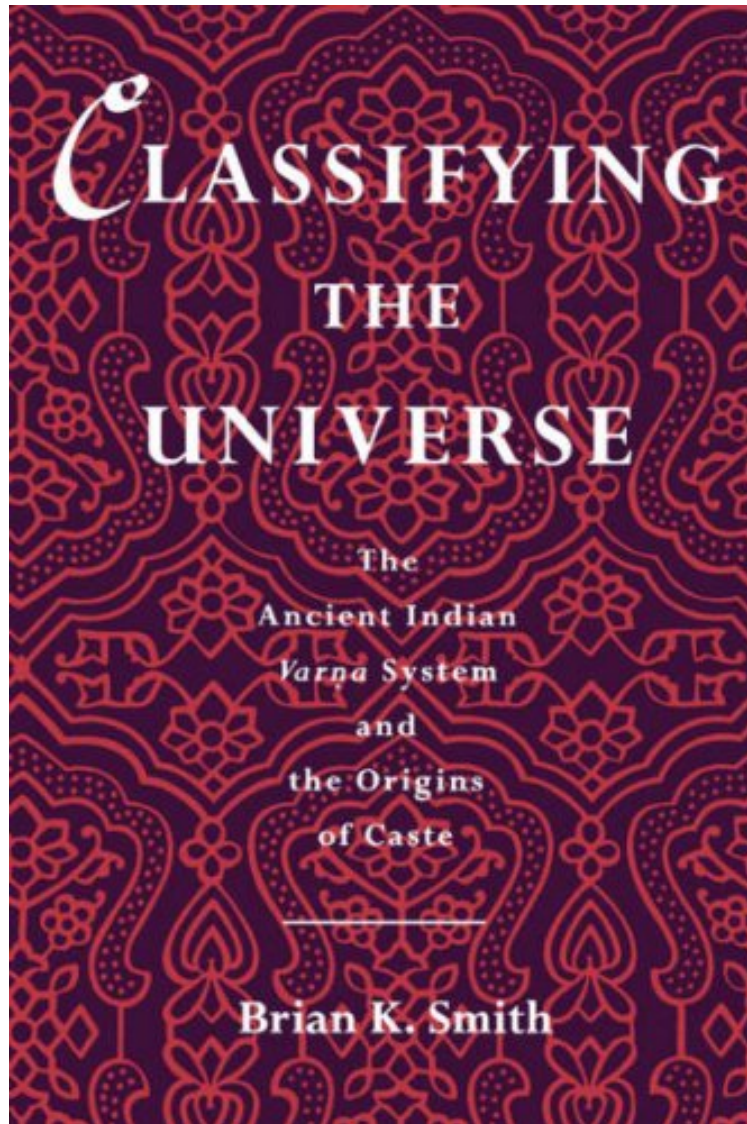


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Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste

Brian K. Smith

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Brian K. Smith : Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste*:

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monkPay no attention to the crackpot with the 1 star opinion. This is solid research, well written, and meticulously if not painfully documented. Not an easy read but well worth the effort. Smith's book is essential reading for anyone hoping to understand the history of ancient India. 8 of 37 people found the following review helpful. Makes invalid generalizations
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Presents an unconvincing case about the origins of caste. Smith seems to have been swamped by information so that he missed the woods for the trees.

The first book to analyze why India's caste system has authoritatively endured for so long, this path-breaking text provides, for the first time anywhere, an exhaustive analysis of the historical predecessor to caste: the ancient Indian varna system as it was laid out in the Vedic literature. Presenting a revisionist overview of the way the religion of the Veda is to be understood, *Classifying the Universe* demonstrates that social classes were systematically reduplicated in taxonomies that organized the universe as a whole. The classification of society, in which some groups were accorded rights and privileges withheld from others, could thus be represented as part of a primordial and universally applicable order of things. Social hierarchy, argues the author, was in this way subtly but powerfully justified by recourse to other realms of the cosmos that were similarly ordered, and this essentially religious understanding of varna is the key to comprehending the Vedic world-view in all its complexity, and the persistence of its power in the social realm.

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"Impeccable scholarship--a truly original book. Smith writes clearly and elegantly, illuminating the complex sophistication of ancient Indian taxonomies, and bringing theory into the palpable, objective universe of flora, fauna, and people, where it belongs."--Indira V. Peterson, Mount Holyoke College
ed in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
About the Author
Brian K. Smith is at University of California, Riverside.