

Origins of Hinduism

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Indian society divided into distinct groups under the Aryans.
2. The Aryans practiced a religion known as Brahmanism.
3. Hinduism developed out of Brahmanism and influences from other cultures.
4. A few groups reacted to Hinduism by breaking away to form their own religions.

The Big Idea

Hinduism, the largest religion in India today, developed out of ancient Indian beliefs and practices.

Key Terms

caste system, p. 131

Hinduism, p. 133

reincarnation, p. 133

karma, p. 134

Jainism, p. 134

nonviolence, p. 135

Sikhism, p. 135



hmhsocialstudies.com

TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on Hinduism. Pay attention to the religion's origins, its teachings, and other religions that developed alongside it.

If YOU were there...

Your family are skillful weavers who make beautiful cotton cloth. You belong to the class in Aryan society who are traders, farmers, and craftspeople. Often the raja of your town leads the warriors into battle. You admire their bravery but know you can never be one of them. To be an Aryan warrior, you must be born into that noble class. Instead, you have your own duty to carry out.

How do you feel about remaining a weaver?

BUILDING BACKGROUND As the Aryans moved into India, they developed a strict system of social classes. As the Aryans' influence spread through India, so did their class system. Before long, this class system was a key part of Indian society.

Indian Society Divides

As Aryan society became more complex, their society became divided into groups. For the most part, these groups were organized by people's occupations. Strict rules developed about how people of different groups could interact. As time passed, these rules became stricter and became central to Indian society.

The Varnas

According to the Vedas, there were four main *varnas*, or social divisions, in Aryan society. These *varnas* were:

- Brahmins (BRAH-muhns), or priests,
- Kshatriyas (KSHA-tree-uhs), or rulers and warriors,
- Vaisyas (VYSH-yuhs), or farmers, craftspeople, and traders, and
- Sudras (SOO-drahs), or laborers and non-Aryans.

The Brahmins were seen as the highest ranking because they performed rituals for the gods. This gave the Brahmins great influence over the other *varnas*.

The Caste System

As the rules of interaction between *varnas* got stricter, the Aryan social order became more complex. In time, each of the four *varnas* in Aryan society was further divided into many castes, or groups. This **caste system** divided Indian society into groups based on a person's birth, wealth, or occupation. At one time, some 3,000 separate castes existed in India.

The caste to which a person belonged determined his or her place in society. However, this ordering was by no means permanent. Over time, individual castes gained or lost favor in society as caste members gained wealth or power. On rare occasions, people could change caste.

Both men and women belonged to castes. Early in the Aryan period, women had most of the same rights as men. They could, for example, own property and receive an education. Over time, however, laws were passed to limit these rights.

By the late Aryan period, a segment of early Indian society had developed that did not belong to any caste. This group was called the untouchables. They could hold only certain, often unpleasant, jobs.

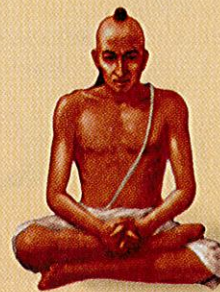
Caste Rules

To keep their classes distinct, the Aryans developed sutras, or guides, which listed all the rules for the caste system. For example, people were not allowed to marry anyone from a different class. It was even forbidden for people from one class to eat with people from another. People who broke the caste rules could be banned from their homes and their castes, which would make them untouchables. Because of these rules, people spent almost all of their time with others in their same class.

READING CHECK Drawing Inferences How did a person become a member of a caste?

The Varnas

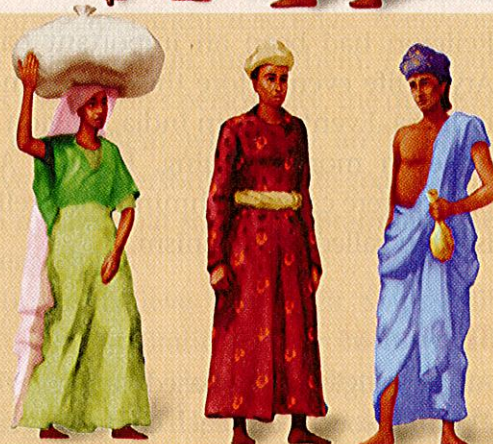
QUICK
FACTS



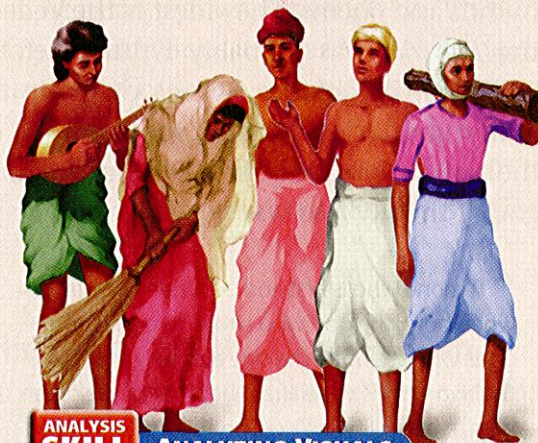
Brahmins
Brahmins were India's priests and were seen as the highest *varna*.



Kshatriyas
Kshatriyas were rulers and warriors.



Vaisyas
Vaisyas were farmers, craftspeople, and traders.



Sudras
Sudras were workers and servants.

ANALYSIS
SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

Why do you think priests were at the top of Indian society?

Hindu Gods and Beliefs

Hindus believe in many gods, but they believe that all the gods are aspects of a single universal spirit called Brahman. Three aspects of Brahman are particularly important in Hinduism—Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu.

Major Beliefs of Hinduism

QUICK FACTS

- A universal spirit called Brahman created the universe and everything in it. Everything in the world is just a part of Brahman.
- Every person has a soul or *atman* that will eventually join with Brahman.
- People's souls are reincarnated many times before they can join with Brahman.
- A person's karma affects how he or she will be reincarnated.



The god Brahma represents the creator aspect of Brahman. His four faces symbolize the four Vedas.

Brahmanism

Religion had been an important part of Aryan life even before the Aryans moved to India. Eventually, in India, religion took on even more meaning. Because Aryan priests were called Brahmins, their religion is often called Brahmanism.

The Vedas

Aryan religion was based on the Vedas. There are four Vedas, each containing sacred hymns and poems. The oldest of the Vedas, the *Rigveda*, was probably written before 1000 BC. It includes hymns of praise to many gods. This passage, for example, is the opening of a hymn praising Indra, a god of the sky and war.

“The one who is first and possessed of wisdom when born; the god who strove to protect the gods with strength; the one before whose force the two worlds were afraid because of the greatness of his virility [power]: he, O people, is Indra.”

—from the *Rigveda*, in *Reading about the World, Volume 1*, edited by Paul Briens, et al

Later Vedic Texts

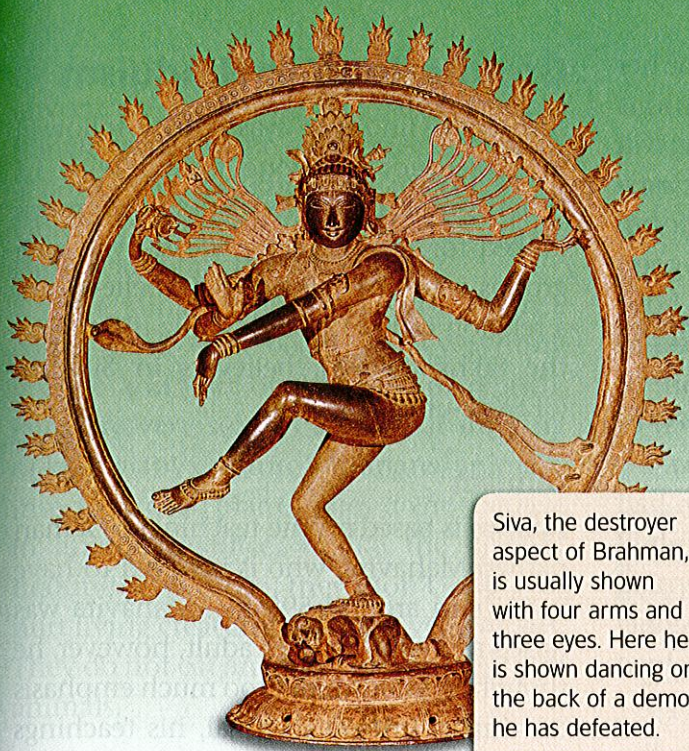
Over the centuries, Aryan Brahmins wrote down their thoughts about the Vedas. In time these thoughts were compiled into collections called Vedic texts.

One collection of Vedic texts describes Aryan religious rituals. For example, it describes how sacrifices should be performed. Priests placed animals, food, or drinks to be sacrificed in a fire. The Aryans believed that the fire would carry these offerings to the gods.

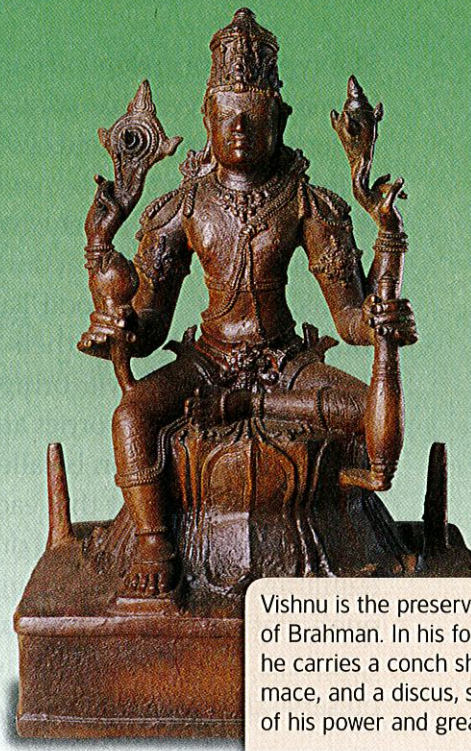
A second collection of Vedic texts describes secret rituals that only certain people could perform. In fact, the rituals were so secret that they had to be done in the forest, far from other people.

The final group of Vedic texts are the Upanishads (oo-PAHN-ee-shads), most of which were written by about 600 BC. These writings are reflections on the Vedas by religious students and teachers.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas What are the Vedic texts?



Siva, the destroyer aspect of Brahman, is usually shown with four arms and three eyes. Here he is shown dancing on the back of a demon he has defeated.



Vishnu is the preserver aspect of Brahman. In his four arms, he carries a conch shell, a mace, and a discus, symbols of his power and greatness.

Hinduism Develops

The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the other Vedic texts remained the basis of Indian religion for centuries. Eventually, however, the ideas of these sacred texts began to blend with ideas from other cultures. People from Persia and other kingdoms in Central Asia, for example, brought their ideas to India. In time, this blending of ideas created a religion called **Hinduism**, the largest religion in India today.

Hindu Beliefs

The Hindus believe in many gods. Among them are three major gods: Brahma the Creator, Siva the Destroyer, and Vishnu the Preserver. At the same time, however, Hindus believe that each god is part of a single universal spirit called Brahman. They believe that Brahman created the world and preserves it. Gods like Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu represent different aspects of Brahman. In fact, Hindus believe that everything in the world is part of Brahman.

Life and Rebirth

According to Hindu teachings, everyone has a soul, or *atman*, inside them. This soul holds the person's personality, the qualities that make them who they are. Hindus believe that a person's ultimate goal should be to reunite that soul with Brahman, the universal spirit.

Hindus believe that their souls will eventually join Brahman because the world we live in is an illusion. Brahman is the only reality. The Upanishads taught that people must try to see through the illusion of the world. Since it is hard to see through illusions, it can take several lifetimes. That is why Hindus believe that souls are born and reborn many times, each time in a new body. This process of rebirth is called **reincarnation**.

Hinduism and the Caste System

According to the traditional Hindu view of reincarnation, a person who has died is reborn in a new physical form.

THE IMPACT TODAY

More than 800 million people in India practice Hinduism today.

The type of form depends upon his or her **karma**, the effects that good or bad actions have on a person's soul. Evil actions will build bad karma. A person with bad karma will be born into a lower caste or life form.

In contrast, good actions build good karma. People with good karma are born into a higher caste in their next lives. In time, good karma will bring salvation, or freedom from life's worries and the cycle of rebirth. This salvation is called *moksha*.

Hinduism taught that each person had a *dharma*, or set of spiritual duties, to fulfill. Fulfilling one's *dharma* required accepting one's station in life. By teaching people to accept their stations, Hinduism helped preserve the caste system.

READING CHECK Summarizing What determined how a person would be reborn?

Groups React to Hinduism

Although Hinduism was widely followed in India, not everyone agreed with its beliefs. Some unsatisfied people and groups looked for new religious ideas. Two such groups were the Jains (JYNZ), believers in a religion called Jainism (JY-niz-uhm), and the Sikhs (SEEKS), believers in Sikhism (SEEK-iz-uhm).

Jainism

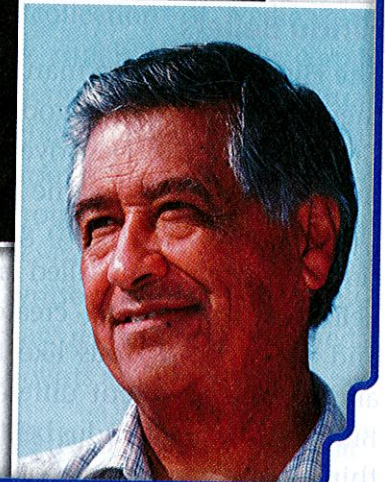
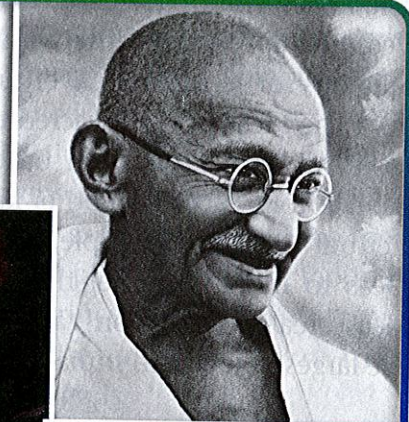
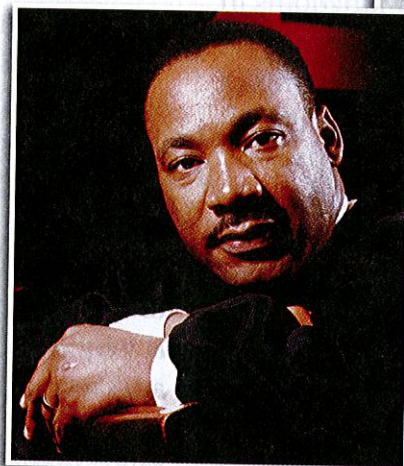
Jainism is based on the teachings of a man named Mahavira, who is believed to have been born around 599 BC. Mahavira was raised as a Hindu. As an adult, however, he thought Hinduism put too much emphasis on rituals. Instead of ritual, his teachings emphasize four basic principles: injure no life, tell the truth, do not steal, and own

LINKING TO TODAY

Nonviolence

In modern times, nonviolence has been a powerful tool for social protest. Mohandas Gandhi led a long nonviolent struggle against British rule in India.

This movement helped India win its independence in 1947. About 10 years later, Martin Luther King Jr. adopted Gandhi's nonviolent methods in his struggle to win civil rights for African Americans. Then, in the 1960s, Cesar Chavez organized a campaign of nonviolence to protest the treatment of farm workers in California. These three leaders proved that people can bring about social change without using violence. As Chavez once explained, "Nonviolence is not inaction. It is not for the timid or the weak. It is hard work. It is the patience to win."



Mohandas Gandhi (top),
Martin Luther King Jr. (above),
and Cesar Chavez (right)

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

How did these three leaders prove that nonviolence is a powerful tool for social change?

no property. In their efforts not to injure anyone or anything, the Jains practice **nonviolence, or the avoidance of violent actions**. The Sanskrit word for this nonviolence is *ahimsa* (uh-HIM-sah). Many Hindus also practice *ahimsa*.

The Jains' emphasis on nonviolence comes from their belief that everything is alive and part of the cycle of rebirth. Jains are very serious about not injuring or killing any creature—humans, animals, insects, or even plants. They do not believe in animal sacrifice, unlike the ancient Brahmins. Because they don't want to hurt living creatures, Jains are vegetarians. They do not eat any food that comes from animals.

Sikhism

Founded centuries later than Jainism, **Sikhism has its roots in the teachings of the Guru Nanak, who lived in the AD 1400s**. The title *guru* is Sanskrit for "teacher." Like Mahavira, Nanak was raised a Hindu but grew dissatisfied with the religion's teachings. He began to travel and came into contact with many other religions, including Islam. His teachings blended ideas from Hinduism with ideas from Islam and other religions. Over time, these teachings were explained and expanded by nine other gurus.

Sikhism is monotheistic. Sikhs believe in only one God, who has no physical form but can be sensed in the creation. For Sikhs, the ultimate goal is to be reunited with God after death. To achieve this goal, one must meditate to find spiritual enlightenment. Because they believe that achieving enlightenment may take several lifetimes, Sikhs also believe in reincarnation. Sikhism teaches that people should live truthfully and treat all people equally, regardless of gender, social class, or any other factor.

Sikhs pray several times each day. They are expected to wear five items at all times as signs of their religion: long hair, a small comb, a steel bracelet, a sword, and a special undergarment. In addition, all Sikh men wear turbans, as do many women.

READING CHECK Finding Main Ideas

What are two religions that developed out of Hinduism?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW You have learned about three religions that developed in India—Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In Section 3, you will learn about another religion that began there—Buddhism.

Section 2 Assessment



hmhsocialstudies.com
ONLINE QUIZ

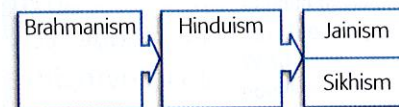
Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Identify** What is the **caste system**?
b. Explain Why did strict caste rules develop?
- a. Identify** What does the *Rigveda* include?
b. Analyze What role did sacrifice play in Aryan society?
- a. Define** What is **karma**?
b. Sequence How did Brahmanism develop into **Hinduism**?
c. Elaborate How does Hinduism reinforce followers' willingness to remain within their castes?
- a. Recall** What are the four main teachings of **Jainism**?
b. Draw Conclusions How do you think Guru Nanak's travels influenced the development of **Sikhism**?

Critical Thinking

5. Analyzing Causes

Draw a graphic organizer like this



one. Using your notes,

explain how Hinduism developed from Brahmanism, and how Jainism and Sikhism developed from Hinduism.

FOCUS ON WRITING

- 6. Illustrating Hinduism** Now you have a new possible topic for your poster. How might you explain a complex religion like Hinduism?