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| Reading Help |

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What You Will Learn...

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| Main Ideas |

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| **1.** | Indian society divided into distinct groups. |
| **2.** | The Aryans formed a religion known as Brahmanism. |
| **3.** | Hinduism developed out of Brahmanism and influences from other cultures. |
| **4.** | The Jains reacted to Hinduism by breaking away. |

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| The Big Idea |

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

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| **Key Terms**caste systemreincarnationkarmanonviolence |

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| Taking Notes |

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| As you read, use the interactive graphic organizer to take notes on Hinduism. Pay attention to its origins, teachings, and other religions that developed alongside it. Interactive Graphic OrganizerInteractive Graphic Organizer |

 | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | **Origins of Hinduism**

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| **If****YOU****lived 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.

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| **How do you feel about remaining a weaver?** |

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| **BUILDING BACKGROUND** As the Aryans migrated 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. These groups were largely 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

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| • | 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. |

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     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*.  |  |

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| **The Caste System**As the rules of interaction between *varnas* got stricter, the Aryan social order became more complex. In time, each of the *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.     People in the lowest class, the Sudra castes, had hard lives. But there was a group of people who were even worse off, a group who didn’t belong to any caste at all. They were called untouchables because people from the castes were not supposed to have contact with them. The only jobs open to them were unpleasant ones, such as tanning animal hides and disposing of dead animals. As a result, they were seen as unclean and were the outcasts of society. **Caste Rules**To keep their classes distinct, the Aryans developed sutras, or guides, which listed the rules for the caste system. For example, people could not marry someone 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 strict rules, people spent almost all of their time with others in their same class. |

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| **The *Varnas*** |

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| Illustration of Kshatriyas | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Illustration of Kshatriyas |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif |
| **Brahmins** Brahmins were India’s priests and were seen as the highest *varna*. | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | **Kshatriyas** Kshatriyas were rulers and warriors. |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif |
| Illustration of Vaisyas | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Illustration of Sudras |
| **Vaisyas** Vaisyas were farmers, craftspeople, and traders. | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | **Sudras** Sudras were workers and servants. |

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| **Hindu Gods and Beliefs** |

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| 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. |

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| Photograph of a statue of Brahma Credit: ©Burstein Collection/Corbis | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Photograph of a statue of Siva Credit: ©Borromeo/ Government Museum and National Art Gall | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Photograph of a statue of Vishnu Credit: ©Victoria & Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, NY |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif |
| The god Brahma represents the creator aspect of Brahman. His four faces symbolize the four Vedas. | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | 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. | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | 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. |

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| **Major Beliefs of Hinduism**

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| • | 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. |

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| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | **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.

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| **“**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 I*, edited by Paul Brians, et al |
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**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 to perform sacrifices. Priests prepared 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. |

**Hinduism Develops**

The Vedas, the Upanishads, and the other Vedic texts remained the basis of Indian religion for centuries. Eventually, though, 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 such as Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu are 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. This soul holds the person’s personality, those qualities that make a person who he or she is. 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 type of form depends upon his or her **karma****, the effects that good or bad actions** **have on a person’s soul**. Evil actions during one’s life will build bad karma. A person with bad karma will be reborn into a lower caste or as a lesser creature, such as a pig or an ant.

     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 duty to accept his or her place in the world without complaint. This is called obeying one’s dharma. People could build good karma by fulfilling the duties required of their specific caste. Through reincarnation, Hinduism offered rewards to those who lived good lives. Even untouchables could be reborn into a higher caste.

     Hinduism was popular at all levels of Hindu society, through all four *varnas*. By teaching people to accept their places in life, Hinduism helped preserve the caste system in India.

**Hinduism and Women**

Early Hinduism taught that both men and women could gain salvation. However, Hinduism also taught that women were inferior to men. Women were not allowed to study the Vedas or other sacred texts.

     Over the centuries, Hindu women have gained more rights. This change has been the result of efforts by influential Hindu leaders like Mohandas Gandhi, who led the movement for Indian independence. As a result, many of the restrictions once placed on Hindu women have been lifted.

**Jains 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. One such group was the Jains (JYNZ), believers in a religion called Jainism (JY-ni-zuhm).

     Jainism was based on the teachings of a man named Mahariva. Born into the Kshatriya *varna* around 599 BC, he was unhappy with the control of religion by the Brahmins, whom he thought put too much emphasis on rituals. Mahariva gave up his life of luxury, became a monk, and established the principles of Jainism.

     The Jains try to live by four principles:Â injure no life, tell the truth, do not steal, and own 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 plants. They do not believe in animal sacrifice, such as the ones the ancient Brahmins performed. Because they do not want to hurt any living creatures, Jains are vegetarians. They do not eat any food that comes from animals.

Source: 2008 Holt, Rinehart and Winston