

Lesson 2 The Origins of Hinduism

MAIN IDEAS

Culture A group of nomadic people moved into India and took over what was left of Harappan civilization.

Government Under Aryan rule, Indian society developed a distinct system of social classes that still affects India today.

Belief Systems Over time, the belief of the Aryans developed into the religion of Hinduism.

Aryans Move Into India

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Who were the Aryans?

The Indo-European Migrations

- Hittites (who fought Egyptians) belonged to Indo-European group
 - Indo-Europeans all spoke dialects of Indo-European language
- Most were nomads, lived in family clans, herded livestock
 - warriors rode horse-driven chariots, used long bows, bronze axes
- Indo-Europeans fled homeland around 2000 B.C. for unknown reason
 - Hittites went to Southwest Asia, many others settled in Europe

The Aryan Invasions

- **Aryans**—Indo-European herders who went east to India about 1500 B.C.
 - lived in simple houses, spoke Indo-European language of Sanskrit
- Historians once thought Aryans drove Harappans from walled cities
 - now believe that Harappan cities were in ruins before Aryans came

REVIEW QUESTION

Who were the Aryans, and where did they come from?

Changes to Indian Life

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How was Aryan society organized?

The Caste System

- Aryans spread language, religion to India's Dravidian people
- Aryan's warrior, priest, commoner classes grew into caste system
 - **caste**—social class whose members are identified by their jobs
 - thousands of caste groups organized into four categories
 - untouchables—fifth group later formed below others, did unwanted jobs

Aryan Beliefs and Brahmanism

- Early Aryan religion is called **Brahmanism** today after Aryan priests
 - worshiped nature gods, sacrificed animals to gods in sacred fires
- Ceremonies became complex, lasting days or months
 - rituals, hymns recorded in Sanskrit texts, called the Vedas
- Brahmanism changed in time to belief in one spirit governing the world
- Epic poem *Mahabharata* and its *Bhagavad Gita* section retell legends

REVIEW QUESTION

What is the caste system?

Hinduism: The Religion of India

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the religion of Hinduism develop?

Many Gods

- *Bhagavad Gita* is most important text of Hinduism
 - **Hinduism**—major Indian religion that grew from early Brahmanism
- Hindus have many gods that are part of one supreme God, life force
- Most important gods include Brahma, the creator
 - Vishnu, the protector
 - Shiva, the destroyer—destroys world so it can be recreated

Many Lives

- Hindus believe in **reincarnation**—each person has many lives
- Hindus' behavior in life determines what they will be in next life
- Reincarnation is determined by **karma** doctrine
 - good deeds mean a person will be reborn as higher being
 - evil deeds mean a person will be reborn as lower being, such as insect
- Hindus believe animals also have life force, so many are vegetarians
- Reincarnation creates cycle of birth, life, death, rebirth
 - cycle ends when person realizes his or her soul is one with God

Many Paths to God

- Hindus connect to God by individual paths; path includes job
 - Hindus carry out life's assigned duties as part of caste system
- Spiritual practices include meditation to calm mind, yoga
 - the practice of yoga includes exercise, diet, breathing techniques

REVIEW QUESTION

How can Hindus believe in one God and many different gods at the same time?

Lesson Summary

- After Harappan civilization declined, Aryan people brought their culture to India.
- Aryan society developed a class structure that was based on jobs and is called the caste system.
- Hindus worship many gods. They believe in reincarnation and karma.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Hinduism ranks third among world religions in the number of followers (after Christianity and Islam).