

Early Hinduism

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- 1200 BC – the composition of the first book of the Vedas (Rig Veda)
- c. 700-500 BC - Main composition of the first book of the Vedas (Rig Veda)
- Collection of hymns mainly addressed to nature deities
- Oral collection
- Main gods: Surya (sun); Indra (thunder);
- Introduction of the Caste System- 4 classes grouped according to occupations

The 4 classes were:

- Brahmins or Priests
- Kshatriyas or Warriors
- Vaisya or Merchants
- Sudras or Untouchables
- Initially the caste system was flexible and individuals could gain higher or lower status through choice of profession and marriage but later on it became very rigid.

Later Hinduism 4th -6th C AD

- Main trinity: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer)
 - Vishnu:
Key points:
10 incarnations - many of which are animalistic in nature. Rama and Krishna also figure as two of the well known incarnations
 - Siva :
Key points:
Role of Shiva as a destroyer
- First Hindu temple built in the Gupta period. Iconographic representations of Hindu gods.

Epics

- Ramayana and Mahabharata

Ramayana

Key points:

Date: 3rd-2nd century B.C. It is the story of Rama, a prince of Ayodhya who, along with his wife, Sita, and brother, Lakshman, is

exiled for fourteen years. The epic describes his adventures culminating in the abduction of his wife by the demon, Ravana, and the war waged to rescue her. After the completion of his exile, Rama returns to his kingdom and assumes rule.

The festival of Diwali is associated with the return of Rama.

Mahabharata

Key points:

Date: 6th century B.C. This is a complex story of the struggle for the throne between two sets of rival cousins, Pandavas and Kauravas. The Pandavas lose their kingdom to the Kauravas in a game of dice. As a result they are exiled for fourteen years. The story describes their adventures. At the end of their exile the Pandavas return to claim their kingdom but on the Kaurava refusal, they go to war. In the war, the Pandavas are assisted by Krishna. The text of the Bhagvad Gita is recited by Krishna in order to strengthen the Pandavas' resolve to destroy their brethren.

Vedic Deities

Indra

Key points:

- King of the gods
- Storm god
- His weapon is the thunderbolt which he carries in the right hand
- He is fair complexioned and has a golden skin
- He rides a horse or is seen riding a chariot drawn by two tawny horses with flowing manes and tails.
- He has a violent nature
- He has an insatiable thirst for the intoxicating soma, which gives his strength
- He is the defender of the gods and men against the demon Vritra or Drought
- Brings rain to the plains after a long dry season
- Also seen as a fertility god
- He rearranged the universe after the plan of a house with walls, corner posts, doors, etc.
- He regulates the heavens, days, months, seasons, etc.
- His consort is Indrani
- Often invoked by both men and gods for protection from other demons
- In the later period, he is depicted as a more dignified ruler with a consort, Indrani, A white four tusked elephant, Airavata, replaces the horses as his

mode of transport.

Varuna

Key points:

- Guardian of the cosmic law
- Seen as the creator of the universe
- Using sun as his instrument, he measures out the three worlds- the earth, heavens and the air between them
- His breath is the winds;
- Causes rain to fall and rivers to flow and thus supports mankind
- He lives in a thousand-column, thousand-door gold palace in the sky

Prithvi

Key points:

- Goddess of the earth
- Symbolised as a cow
- Worshipped as a fertility god and along with Dyaus is thought to have engendered all other gods and men
- Daughter Ushas or the Dawn and sons, Agni or Fire and Indra.

Dyaus

Key points:

- God of the Sky or Heavens
- Symbolised as a bull
- Worshipped as a fertility god and along with Prithvi is thought to have engendered all other gods and men
- Daughter Ushas or the Dawn and sons, Agni or Fire and Indra.

Maruts

Key points:

- Spirits of tempests and thunder
- Sons of Rudra and companions of Indra
- They were handsome young men, vigorous and courageous
- They wore golden helmets and golden breastplates and they draped bright skins on their shoulders
- They also wore gold bracelets on their arms and ankles
- They rode the whirlwind and directed the storm
- Their transport was a golden-wheeled chariot, which sparkled in lightning, and

drawn by three fleet-footed deer.

- Their weapons are bows, arrows and axes.
- They came to Indra's aid in his battle with Vritra to release the clouds.

Vayu

Key points:

- God of air or wind
- Said to have been born from the breath of Purusha or the Primeval Man.
- Gives life to all the gods and humans
- Sometimes thought to be the father of the Maruts
- Rides in a chariot driven by deer

Agni

Key points:

- God of fire
- He is the son of Prithvi and Dyaus and the brother of Indra
- Like Indra, Agni is born fully matured
- On his birth, he consumes his parents
- His main source for sustenance is clarified butter which he licks with his seven tongues
- Important deity of an early pantheon; replaced by Indra;
- Functioned as a mediator between the gods and humans. As a messenger of the gods, he visits humans
- He acts as the vehicle of sacrifices and conducts the gods to places of worship
- Although Agni is seen as a destroyer as he consumes everything, nevertheless he is also making recreation possible
- Agni is constantly being reborn- in heaven as the sun; in the atmosphere as lightning and on earth as the sacrificial and domestic hearth fire.
- Appears as a red man with three flaming heads, three legs and seven arms and wearing a garland of fruit
- Known for always telling the truth

Rudra

Key points:

- Lord of cattle and wild life;
- Later becomes Siva

- Appears as a ruddy man with a wild temper, murderous, spitting like a wild beast and riding a boar
- Lord of thieves
- Divine archer who shot the arrows of death and disease at gods, men and cattle
- As well as his destructive aspect, Rudra is also revered as the lord of wildlife (creative aspect) and as a divine physician (healing aspect)
- As a healer, he is depicted as most beautiful of gods and brilliant like the sun.
- As lord of the cattle he is depicted as a bull
- Son of Ushas and Prajapati (Creator)

Surya

Key points:

- Sun god
- He has golden hair and arms
- Rides a golden chariot driven by seven mares or alternatively by a mare with seven heads
- He is the Divine Vivifier, who stimulates the understanding of the mortals, commands the waters and winds and exercises dominion over everything, moving or static, and even other gods
- Considered to be the son of Dyaus
- Important deity of an early pantheon; replaced by Indra;

Ushas

Key points:

- Goddess of Dawn
- Daughter of Dyaus and sister of Agni
- She wears crimson robes and a veil (dupatta) of gold
- Depicted as a gentle bride
- She is both young and eternal, bringing all living beings to life, waking sleepers from their seeming death and sending men on to their appointed tasks
- She brings wealth and light to all, whether great or humble
- She is revered as the friend of humankind and the link between the heaven and earth
- Her vehicle is a shining chariot driven by seven ruddy cows.

Ashwins

Key points:

- Twin sons of Surya
- They were horsemen born of a nymph who changed herself into a mare
- Also known as the twin gods of the morning
- Described as young, handsome, agile and brilliant.
- They were physicians of gods in the heavens
- Their benevolence to men

Vishnu**Key points:**

- A minor deity in the early pantheon
- aided Indra in his battle against Vritra
- As a manifestation of the sun's energy, he envelops all things with the dust of his beams
- In the early Vedic texts, his chief exploit concerns the taking of three steps to measure the universe

Brahma**Key points:**

- Creator of the Universe
- Part of the Hindu Trimvarate
- He is believed to be the son of the supreme being and his energy
- He hatched from a golden cosmic egg, which floated on cosmic waters
- Also thought to have been born from a lotus which sprang from Vishnu's navel.
- God of Wisdom
- The four Vedas are believed to have sprung from his four heads
- He rides a goose
- Depicted with red skin and wearing white robes
- In his four arms he carries the Vedas
- He created a female partner of his own known as Satarupa/Savitri/Sarasvati/Gayatri/Brahmani
- Acquired 4 heads so as to see his consort from all directions. When she rose into the sky, he sprouted another head to look at her
- Brahma and his consort produced the human race