

# Hinduism

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## Hinduism: The Term

Hinduism is an umbrella term. Some are elite others are devotional. Many practices are regional. Hinduism is a very flexible religious tradition, adapting and incorporating many traditions, and tries to provide a path for everyone.

A **hindu** is someone who:

- accepts the vedas as authoritative
- accepts the caste system (not applicable outside india)
- self defined

## The Indus Valley Civilization

Centered around harrapa and mohenjo-daro

- Active 3000-1500BCE
- urban centers
- streets in grid pattern
- indoor plumbing
- governed by theocracy

Symbols are found here that will later be incorporated

- Water - there are large tanks throughout the city meaning water was used in religious practices
- Fertility - female, male, animal, and nature symbols
- Proto-Shiva - the god of all dualities, a very thin figure seated in meditation with a helmet of horns in between the horns are vines, it has an erect phallus

## Indo-Europeans

The term for the mass migration into india around 1500BCE. At this time the indus valley civilization was in decline and were probably overcome by the incomers through war. Some scholars think they conquered through assimilation instead of war.

- about 12 tribes
- cattle herders (pastoralists)
- three classes, warriors, priests, herders
- the **Arryans** are the tribe that settled into india

The religion of the indo-europeans was called the vedic religion because they are based on the Four Vedas or the **Veda** (this is the four Vedas and the three commentaries attached to each).

# The Four Vedas

The Vedas were heard by the elders.

## Rig

- hymns of praise to gods and goddesses
- oldest and most important

## Sama

- liturgical arrangement, organizes the order in which the hymns should be sung

## Yajur

- outlines the formulas used during sacrifice
- outlines where the formulas are to be used
- describes how a sacrifice should be performed

## Atharva

- The most recent
- day to day needs of people
- spells and charms
- information on medicine

# Vedic Religion

Vedic religion focused on worship of the gods through sacrifice, petition, and praise, in order to reap benefits both now and in future life.

They believed that the breath (or **atma**) lived on after the body so they believed in heaven after death.

Most vedic gods were nature figures:

- **Ushas** the dawn
- **Varuna** cosmic order (brought good or evil to humans)
- **Agni** fire

Sacrifice was very important. Sacrifice is what brings order out of chaos. Human order is based on the sacrificial order so human and cosmic order are eternal and define.

The creation of the world and human order is outlined in the **Hymn of Parusha** from the rig veda. There is more than one creation myth, but this is the biggest. Purusha was a great being where all living and non living things are a quarter of him and the heavens are three quarters. The gods sacrificed him out of which the veda was formed along with all animals.

- mouth = brahman
- arms = kshatriya
- thighs = vaishyas
- feet = shudra
- mind = moom
- eye = sun
- mouth = indra and agni
- breath = wind
- navel = atmosphere

- head = heaven
- feet = earth
- ears = quarters

Through sacrifice:

- the world was made
- the world is sustained

Gods and humans work together to maintain order.