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HISTORY OF HINDUISM

Pre-Vedic and Vedic Age

Domenic Marbaniang

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Pre-Vedic and Vedic Age

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ABBREVIATIONS

RV – Rig Veda

SV – Sama Veda

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HISTORY OF HINDUISM

It is generally understood that the term ‘Hindu’ was not historically associated with what is now regarded as the Hindu religion. According to Nehru, *Arya dharma* was the term generally used to inclusively identify all religious systems that originated in India (then known as *Aryadesha*, meaning ‘the land of the Aryans or the Noble Land’). Buddha is said to have always called his way to salvation ‘the Aryan Path’. The term *Vedic dharma* was used for religious systems that claimed to be derived from the Vedas. The term *Sanatana dharma*, Nehru held, could be used of any ancient religion in India, though it has been monopolized in recent times by some who claim Hinduism to be the *Sanatana* or ancient religion.¹ The term *dharma* itself didn’t mean ‘religion’ in the sense that it is used today; it meant more ‘duty’, ‘way of righteousness’, or ‘the right way of living’.

In his *A History of India*, Burton Stein notes that it is important to ‘distinguish between Aryan Brahminism and the Hinduism that took its form during the early centuries of the present era.’² ‘Brahminism’ more relates the the caste-oriented system of religion the Brahmins to be the superior priestly class. In recent times, ‘Brahminism’ has been

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1946, 1989) pp.74-75

² Burton Stein, *A History of India*, edited by David Arnold (UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998), p.79

strongly criticized and opposed by the majority Dalits (lower class social groups considered as outcastes by the caste Hindus).

To historians, the term ‘Hindu’ was more a geographical term denoting the land or people who lived beyond the river Sindhu or Indus. Thus, Hindu (derived from Sindhu) was the same as India (derived from Indus). The use of the word ‘Hindu’ in connection with a particular religion only occurred in recent times. John Keay in *India: A History*, notes that the very term *sindhu* means ‘river’ in Sanskrit; hence, “*sapta-sindhu*’ meant ‘[the land of] the seven rivers’, which was what the Vedic *arya* called the Panjab.”³ He goes on to observe:

The Indus, to which most of these seven rivers were tributary, was the *sindhu par excellence*, and in the language of ancient Persian, a near relative of Sanskrit, the initial ‘s’ of a Sanskrit word was invariably rendered as an aspirate – ‘h’. *Soma*, the mysterious hallucinogen distilled, deified and drunk to excess by the Vedic *arya*, is thus *homa* or *haoma* in old Persian; and *sindhu* is thus *Hind[h]u*. When, from Persian, the word found its way into Greek, the initial aspirate was dropped, and it started to appear as the route ‘Ind’ (as in ‘India’, ‘Indus’, etc.). In this form it reached Latin and most other European languages. However, in Arabic and related languages it retained the initial ‘h’, giving ‘Hindustan’ as the name by which Turks and Mughals would know India. That word also passed to Europe to give ‘Hindu’ as the name of the country’s indigenous people and of what, by Muslims and Christians alike, was regarded as their infidel religion.⁴

³ John Keay, *India: A History* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000), p.57

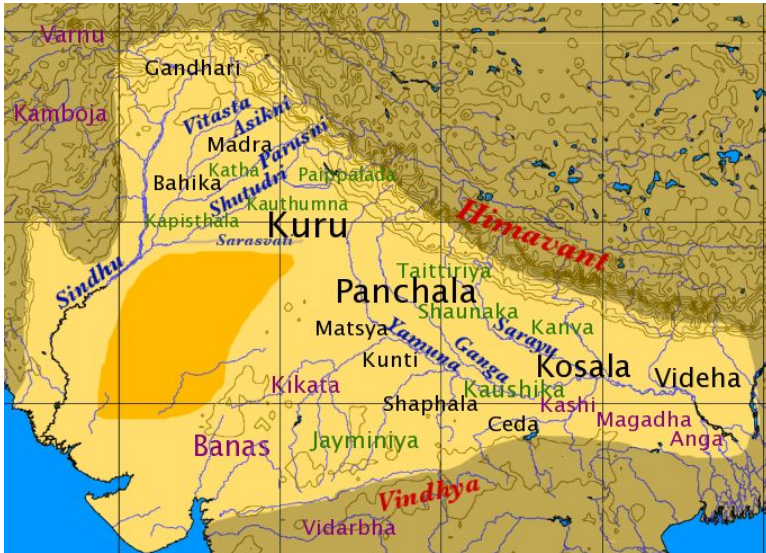
⁴ Ibid, pp.57-58

The land is twice referred to as *Hoduw* in the Bible, noting that the Persian King Xerxes' kingdom, in the 5th century BC, extended to India.⁵

Thus, the very term *Hindu* as referring to a religion originated through a process of geographical identification by those outside of India. However, though it may succumb to over-generalization (for instance, erroneously clumping the outcastes and tribals under Hinduism as well), the use of the term *Hindu* for the more popular and dominant form of faith and practice of the people beyond the river should not be considered irrational at all. For instance, we would consider the motley of polytheistic beliefs and practices in ancient Greece as Greek (for instance, when we talk about 'Greek mythology'), but 'Greek' was not the

Map 1: Vedic India

⁵ Esther 1:1; 8:9



Source: Wikipedia

name of a religion in its established form. The same holds for also Egyptian and African religions. They received their general names from their general territories. But, then in the same manner that not every Greek was a follower of the “Greek religion” as such, not every Indian was a follower of the dominant Aryan religion. Interestingly, however, there seems to be many similarities between the Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Indian polytheistic religions; for instance, in concepts of the after-life, heaven and hell, sacrifices, temples, hymns, rituals, liturgy, magic, taboos, etc. More specifically, while the gods and goddesses seem to be identical, the myths and theology spun around them, along the linguistic-historical-geographical lines, differ in many ways. The only major point where classical Hinduism came to differ from most of the developing polytheistic systems in the world

was in its elevation of the Brahmin and the hierarchy of the caste-system. That is one reason why it is also referred to as Brahminism within the Aryan fold of religions. Later Hinduism, of course, assimilated a number of philosophical interpretations allowing a very inclusivist pluralism that was able to make Hinduism look like anything other than the explicit foreign religions (Christianity, Islam, etc) or the Indian heterodox religions (Buddhism and Jainism). The essential nucleus of Brahminic Hinduism generally includes the following:

- a) belief in the sacredness of the Vedas,
- b) belief in the sacredness of the caste-hierarchy
- c) belief in one of the various forms of religious practice or devotion accepted in the Upanisads or the Bhagavad Gita (that celebrates a form of inclusivism and syncretism of animistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, and monist tendencies).
- d) belief in naturalistic theology (in which God is not the “wholly other” metaphysically (as in the Judeo-Christian), but only the “wholly other” epistemically; that is to say, that God and nature do not differ in substance, they only differ in degree and experience).

INDIA: THE LAND OF HINDUS ONLY?

Since history past, the present territory of India has been home to myriads of tribes and people groups that have had nothing to do with mainstream Aryan Hinduism. In fact, till recent centuries, till the advent of the British, many of these had no contact with each other. The religions of the tribes of the North-Eastern region, of the Chota Nagpur plateau, and of

the Himalayan region were as various as the tribes themselves and had no contact with Hinduism until the late twentieth century. Many of these tribes converted to Christianity through the work of missionaries who came during the later Colonial period. Some tribes, such as those in Manipur, assimilated into Hinduism around the 17th century. But, in general, Hinduism as it was known and practiced among the people of the plain regions in the Aryan and Dravidian regions was unknown to these.

In recent times, there have been movements among the southern Dravidians against historical Sanskritisation of their languages (especially Tamil), cultures, and religion by Brahmin missionaries who, it has been pointed out, succeeded in not only converting the kings and kingdoms to Brahminism but also in introducing a varied form of caste-system in the south.⁶ Gavin D. Flood writes:

The earliest Tamil literature developed before the onset of Sanskritization and so is originally quite distinct from Sanskrit literature. Sanskritization is the process whereby local or regional forms of culture and religion - local deities, rituals, literary genres - become identified with the 'great tradition' of Sanskrit literature and culture: namely the culture and religion of orthodox, Arya, Brahmins, which accepts the Veda as revelation and, generally, adheres to *varnasrama-dharma*.⁷

The process of Sanskritization only began to significantly

⁶ Ebe Sunder Raj, *The Confusion Called Conversion*, 3rd edn. (New Delhi: TRACI, 1998), pp.68-75

⁷ Gavin D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.128. *Varasrama-dharma* means religion related to the caste-system.

influence the south after the first few centuries CE and Tamil deities and forms of worship became adapted to northern Sanskrit forms. Yet, nevertheless, a thriving Tamil culture flourished and Tamilnadu became the central region for the development of Hinduism after the Muslim Mughals established their empire in the north. Enormous temple complexes, unsurpassed by any in the north, grew up at Cidambaram, Srirangam, Madurai and Tanjavur. These became bastions of classical, orthodox Hindu doctrines and practices associated with Brahminical worship of the deities and with the cult of the deified king. In the process of Sanskritization, indigenous Tamil deities became identified and absorbed into Aryan, vedic deities. The Tamil deities Mudvalan and Tirumal became identified with Siva and Visnu, Korravai the goddess of war with Durga, and the important deity Murukan, with Siva's son, Skanda, the god of war.⁸

Some Dravidian groups resorted to de-sanskritisation (or reversing the influence of Sanskrit language and culture over theirs) in an attempt to undo the damages that caste-promoting Brahminism did to the dalits⁹ of India.¹⁰ A form of desanskritisation to reject all Hindu identity and its full import in order to reassert the pre-Hindu Meetei identity has also become part of the history of the Meetei people in Manipur.¹¹

Desanskritisation in order to reassert a pre-Hindu or

⁸ *Ibid*, p.129

⁹ Dalits are the ones who were regarded as outcaste and untouchable by the caste-Hindus.

¹⁰ Richard Pais, "Dalit Movement-A Case of Desanskritisation" in D.M. Ravi Prasad and G. Bhadraru (Eds), *Eradication of Caste and Birth of New Humanity* (Deep & Deep Publications, 2004), pp.53, 54

¹¹ Rajendra Kshetri, *The Emergence of Meetei Nationalism: A Study of Two Movements Among the Meeteis* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), p.90

pre-Brahminic identity is an attempt to resolve a deep identity-crisis; however, in an age of globalization and progress, one doubts if any form of culturalism or “cultural nationalism” is in any way conducive to the dynamics of cultural progress that only happens by being open to receive anything that is good beyond one’s own cultural boundaries and thus enriching one’s own. Of course, if desanskritisation means disavowing the caste-system and embracing a fraternity, equality system, that would be an example of cultural dynamics; since one is giving up what is a hindrance to growth in order to embrace what is conducive to growth. However, if it only means refraining to use Sanskrit words or certain forms of clothing, then the result would only be a form of cultural nationalism that idolizes the distant past identity, nurtures residues of historical bitterness into aversion, and stagnates self. Languages and cultures become enriched by borrowing from others. On the other hand, cultures can also get degraded by unhealthy borrowings. Individuals must learn the wisdom to choose what to assimilate and what to reject. New words, concepts, and goods keep adding up to our culture to the extent that there is a vast amount of change that one can see within a few decades (especially, in the present age of increasing globalization). But, to revert back to an ancient faith, just for the sake of cultural identity is not a step towards freedom; it is a step towards stagnancy and bondage of religion. The really liberating way is to give up the hindering and oppressive elements of faith (or even a false faith that is corrupt) and embrace the way of freedom. Sadly, that has not always been the case in history.

The social-evils of the caste-system that suppressed and oppressed the dalits had become so vile by the turn of the twentieth century that freedom leaders such as B.R.

Ambedkar, in 1927, publicly condemned *Manusmriti* (the chief Hindu treatise of law that promoted the caste-system) and burnt copies of the text. Ambedkar realized that the caste-system was so integral to Hinduism that the dalits could never find social emancipation as long as they remained identified with Hinduism. So, after evaluating many options, he along with some 380,000 supporters converted to Buddhism in 1956.¹² According to Bishow J. W. Pickett, the Methodist Episcopal Bishop in Bombay with whom Ambedkar had a number of discussions on faith, Ambedkar had earlier been very much influenced by the Biblical message of liberation and had twice inquired whether the Bishop would secretly baptize him on the understanding that within a few years he would publicly declare his faith.¹³ It seems that Ambedkar was afraid that identifying himself with Christianity could deter the cause of nationalism in India. But, subsequently, Ambedkar chose Buddhism against Christianity for several reasons, one of which was, according to Bishop Pickett, that the Indian Christians, especially converts from the Depressed Classes, did not live up to the Gospel – they didn't care for their fellow people and even tried to hide their caste-identity as if ashamed of it.¹⁴ Not that Ambedkar denied the sincerity of missionary work in India, which he considered to be of a great sacrificial and benevolent quality; but, he was shocked to see not just the prevalence of the caste-system in the churches of South India but also the callousness of converts who didn't reflect the nature of Christ in anyway

¹² Burton Stein, *A History of India*, p.321 & Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, 4th edn. (Bangalore: TBT, 2003), p.147 & Christopher B. Queen and Sally B. King (eds), *Engaged Buddhism* (New York: New York Press, 1996), p.54

¹³ Christopher Queen and Sally King, *Engaged Buddhism*, p.53

¹⁴ Christopher Queen and Sally King, *Engaged Buddhism*, p.53

observable. He decided “not to add to the number of such Christians.”¹⁵

The caste-system, however, had been during the same period denounced by many Hindu reformers and revivalists such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, and Vivekananda. The contemporary nationalistic Hindu group, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), has publicly condemned the *Manusmriti* as being a pseudograph masquerading as the real one. Instead, it upheld the *Bhagavad Gita* as the *Adi Manusmriti*. In a statement released on its site, it has claimed:

The Manu Smriti or the Yaagyavalkya Smriti has no connection with Adi Manu or the Sage Yaagyavalkya. The Smritis were written during the reign of Pushyamitra about 2200 years ago. There is no reference of such Smritis in the Mahabharata.

Caste untouchability never existed in our society. It is the creation of the Muslim rule because those who put up a fight and did not convert to Islam were punished for their dedication and commitment to their indigenous moorings, ethos and, therefore, thrown out of the society as ‘untouchables’. These heroic people are enlisted as scheduled castes. We must differentiate between the scheduled castes and the Shudras. Shudras were held in esteem before the advent of the Smritis and the scheduled castes are of recent origin created during the Muslim rule.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad totally rejects the Manu Smriti as it has no place in a civilized & cultured society. The Srimadbhagavad Gita is, in fact, the Adi Manu Smriti

¹⁵ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, p.149-150 & Christopher B. Queen and Sally B. King (eds), *Engaged Buddhism* (New York: New York Press, 1996), p.53

(Original Code/Law of Manu) as revealed and related by Bhagwan Sri Krishna in Chapter IV of the Gita.¹⁶

There are others who contend, however, that the caste-system only became highlighted and prominent after the British census of 1901-1911 in which it classified the various people groups of India according to the *varna* caste-system. But while these modern attempts to rid Hinduism of the stains of the Brahminic caste-system highlight the present attitude of certain groups towards the caste-system, they are to be understood as more a result and not the cause of movements against casteism in India. The Constitution of India (1952) made discrimination on the basis of caste and untouchability a crime against human fundamental rights. It also granted special privileges to the oppressed groups to help them rise up in the social strata.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The various Hindu scriptures, especially the *Itihasas* (histories), try to give a historical timeline of the Hindu world. While groups such as the VHP accept this timeline as authoritative, modern historians don't consider these *Itihasas* as historically valid. For instance, a document on the VHP site states that the Hindu deity Rama was born "in the solar dynasty in Ayodhya lakhs of years ago in the *Treta Yuga* - the second of the four Yugas, or ages of mankind – to rescue the world from global terrorism, wickedness and sensuousness and leave it happy, healthy and blessed for future

¹⁶ Ashok Singhal, "VHP's view of 'Manu Smriti' and other Smritis", vhp.org. Accessed on April 13, 2015

generations.”¹⁷ The present religio-political movement towards the construction of the Rama Temple in Ayodhya derives strong cultural-political motifs from the personality of Rama (as described in the *Ramayana*¹⁸) and his temple that is considered by them to have been demolished by Muslim invaders in the 15th century AD. But, the Hindu chronicles, not being open to historical research, are not considered to be authentic by historians; they are considered to be mythical.

The Hindus generally consider Manu to be their progenitor, who along with seven sages, they believe, survived the Great Flood that deluged the world. They consider Manu to be their first king and law-giver. His book of law, *Manusmriti*, now discounted by some Hindu groups, is considered to be the first original law book in history. It is interesting to see very slight similarities between the flood stories and law-giver stories of Manu and others like the Biblical Noah (*Nuh*), Hawiin Nu’u, Roman Numa, the Chinese Nuwa, and the Germanic Minnos. While the historicity of Manu is not established, some historians have conceded the date of the Great Flood to be 3012 BC (almost close to the date of the Biblical Noah’s flood). John Keay notes:

Some historians have dated the Flood very precisely to 3102 BC, this being the year when, by elaborate computation, they conclude that our current era, the *Kali Yug* in Indian cosmology, began and when Manu became the progenitor of a new people as well as their first great king and law-giver. It is also the first credible date in India’s history

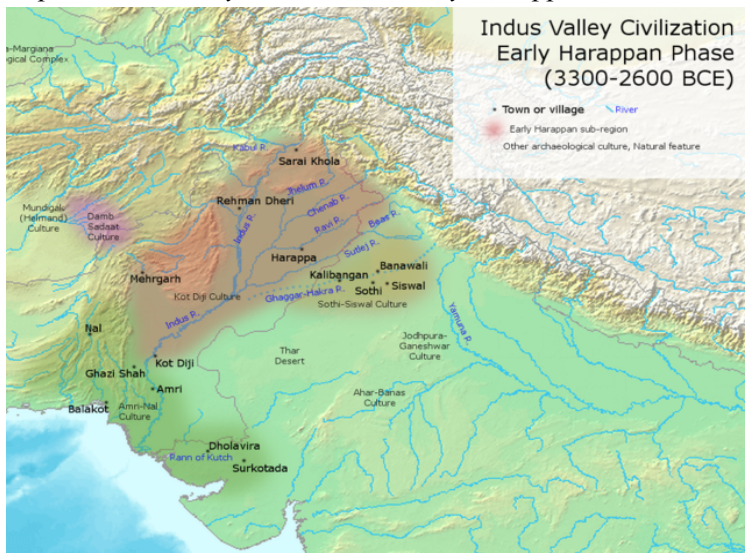
¹⁷ “Shri Rama Janma Bhumi Movement At A Glance”
<http://vhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/AT-A-GLANCE-RJB.pdf>.
Accessed on April 13, 2015.

¹⁸ The second longest Hindu epic recounting the tale of Rama, considered an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

and, being one of such improbable exactitude, it deserves respect.

...3102 BC sticks in the historical gullet... Corroboration of the idea that it may, after all, apply to a Flood has since come from excavations in distant Iraq of one of Mesopotamia's ancient civilisations. There too archaeologists have found evidence of an appalling inundation. It submerged the Sumerian city of Shuruppak, and has been dated with some confidence to the late fourth millennium BC. In fact, 3102 BC would suit it very well.¹⁹

Map 2: Indus Valley Civilization, Early Harappan Phase



Source: Wikipedia

While there are a few similarities between the story of Manu and the story of Noah (Heb. *Nuh*), the differences are many. The biblical Noah built a huge ark while Manu builds a boat.

¹⁹ John Keay, *India: A History*, pp.2-3

The biblical Noah escapes with seven members of his family and samples of all living animal and bird species; Manu escapes with seven sages. In Noah's story, it is God who warns Noah about the great Flood to come and protects Noah and his family. In Manu's story, a fish warns Manu of the Flood to come and saves him and the seven sages. Still, despite the differences, it is interesting to see that stories of a Great Flood feature in the cosmologies of not just the Hindus and the Jews but also in the cosmologies of many other peoples. However, historians do not date the *Manusmriti* to 3102 BC; they date it the 2nd or 1st century BC.²⁰

PRE-VEDIC AGE (c3000-1700 BC)

The earliest traces of some form of religion in the Indian sub-continent were discovered at the excavated sites of the Harappan Civilization (also known as the Indus-Valley Civilization) that is dated to have flourished between c3000-1700BC.

Modern scholarship seems to be more in favor of the theory that the Harappan Civilization was closer to Dravidian than to Aryan. This is concluded on the basis of meticulous study especially of the Indus script on seals and on figures discovered at the sites.

Asko Parpola of Helsinki University, who specializes in the Indus script, has tried to argue a relationship between the

²⁰ "Manu-smriti," *Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*.
Version 2011.00.00 and "The Laws of Manu," *Microsoft Encarta Premium*
2009. Version 16.0.0.1117

Indus and Tamil languages.²¹ In his lecture, “A Dravidian Solution to the Indus Script Problem,” delivered at the World Classical Tamil Conference, Coimbatore, in June 2010, Parpola suggested that the underlying language of the Indus script was Proto-Dravidian and tried to identify in it astrological symbols and also religious deities that were supposedly borrowed later by the Aryans. Eminent among these deities were the Aryan/Dravidian fertility god Rudra/Shiva and the Tamil god of war Murukan who, Parpola suggests, were descended from a Proto-Dravidian deity mentioned in the Indus inscriptions. He begins by identifying the fish sign in the seals (see Fig.1) as indicating the name of a deity. Parpola suggests that the Indus inscriptions can

be understood in context of the “fertility cult connected with fig trees, a central Hindu myth associated with astronomy and time-reckoning, and chief deities of Hindu and Old Tamil religion.”²²

In 2006 and 2008, at Sembiyankandiyur of Tamilnadu, a celt and pottery having inscriptions resembling the Indus script were excavated strengthening the proto-Dravidian hypothesis.

²³ In November 2014, the Indian scholar on Indus script, Iravatham Mahadevan, presented evidences to show that the Indus language was actually an early form of the Dravidian.

²¹ Asko Parpola, “Indus Script: Penetrating Into Long-Forgotten Picto+Graphic Messages,” <http://www.harappa.com/script/parpola6.html>. Accessed on April 13, 2015

²² Asko Parpola, “A Dravidian Solution to the Indus Script Problem,” delivered at the World Classical Tamil Conference, Coimbatore, in June 25, 2010 (Chennai: Central Institute of Classical Tamil).

²³ “Discovery of a Century” in Tamilnadu, *The Hindu*, May 1, 2006. “From Indus Valley to Coastal Tamilnadu”, *The Hindu*, May 3, 2008. Thehindu.com

He concluded that ‘the Earliest Old Tamil, which has retained the Dravidian roots

Fig 1: Indus Valley Seals



Source: Wikipedia

of the Indus phrase still, is firmly interlinked, but with modified meanings.”²⁴ In the paper titled “Dravidian Proof of the Indus Script via the Rig Veda: A Case Study”, he concluded:

- (a) The language of the Indus Civilisation was an early form of Dravidian.
- (b) Due to the migration of a section of the Indus population southwards, forming some settlements in South India, the Indus Dravidian influenced the South Dravidian languages. The earliest attestations of such influence are found in Old Tamil.
- (c) The Vedic Age succeeded the Indus Civilisation. The RV [Rig Veda] itself is a product of the composite culture. The time interval between the Indus texts and the RV must have

²⁴ “Indus Script Early Form of Dravidian”, *The Hindu*, November 15, 2014.

been sufficiently long to account for the dim recollections and mythologisation seen in the Vedic equivalents of the Indus names and titles.²⁵

In his recent paper at the Dravidian University, Kuppam, Mahadevan notes that “The Indus religion as revealed by pictorial depiction on seals and sealings included worship of a buffalo-horned male god, mother-goddesses, the pipal tree, the serpent and possibly the phallic symbol, all of which are known to have been derived from the aboriginal population.”²⁶ Nevertheless, Mahadevan acknowledges that he doesn’t claim to have deciphered the Indus script; but, he only was presenting the results of his long research.²⁷

Much about the religion of the significant Harappan civilization seems to still be obscure, mainly owing to disagreements and lack of consensus regarding attempts to decipher the Indus inscriptions. However, it has been generally opined that the possible features of the Harappan religion may have been:

- a. Fertility cult (as evident through figures with explicit and exaggerated sexual organs)²⁸
- b. Mother-goddess cult²⁹

²⁵ Iravatham Mahadevan, “Dravidian Proof of the Indus Script via the Rig Veda: A Case Study”, *Bulletin of the Indus Research Center*, No.4, Nov 2014 (Chennai: Indus Research Center), p.37

²⁶ “Interpreting the Indus Script: The Dravidian Solution”, <http://203.124.120.60/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/Kuppamadd.pdf>

²⁷ “Dravidian Proof...”, p.40

²⁸ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Medieval India* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2009) pp.171-172

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.171

- c. Worship of trees³⁰
- d. Offerings to deities³¹
- e. Pre-eminence of the fish and fig symbols
- f. Astrology and astro-deities

However, this interpretation of the inscriptions and figurines is not conclusive. There are alternative interpretations as well; for instance, in his *Ancient Pakistan: An Archaeological History*, Mukhtar Ahmed challenges theories that approach studies in Harappa with an assumption that the key to interpreting the findings lies in Vedic religion. In opposition, he finds a connection between Harappa and continuing folk practices of people in Pakistan. He challenges the tendency of scholars who wish to interpret the figurines religiously as if the roots of the Indo-Aryan religion were in the Harappan Civilisation, for which Ahmed believes there is no conclusive evidence.³²

It still needs to be known what happened to the Harappan civilization and why it is not mentioned in any of the Vedic writings; also, the nature of the relation between the Harappan, Indo-Aryan, and the Dravidian civilizations, if any, still need to be discovered. To some extent, however, at least the following have been established as the discontinuities between the Harappan and Vedic cultures:

³⁰ Edwin Oliver James, *The Tree of Life* (Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1966), p.23

³¹ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient...* p.171

³² Mukhtar Ahmed, *Ancient Pakistan: An Archaeological History, Vol. IV.* (Foursome Group, 2014), pp.236-243

1. The absence from Harappan of horse and the chariot with spoke wheels which were the defining features of Indo-Aryan societies.³³
2. The absence from Vedic literature of any reference to the Harappan civilization (to its great cities).³⁴
3. The absence from Rig Veda of the essential characteristics of Harappan urbanization like "cities with a grid pattern in their town plan, extensive mud-brick platforms as a base for large structures, monumental buildings, complex fortifications, elaborate drainage systems, the use of mud bricks and fired bricks in buildings, granaries or warehouses....".³⁵
4. The absence from Rig Veda of the elaborate system of commerce used in the Harappan. "There are no references to different facets or items of an exchange system, such as centres of craft production, complex and graded weights and measures, forms of packaging and transportation, or priorities associated with categories of exchange."³⁶
5. The absence from Rig Veda "of a sense of the civic life founded on the functioning of planned and fortified cities. It does not refer to non-kin labour, or even slave labour, or to such labour being organized for building urban structures."³⁷

³³ Iravatham Mahadevan, "Interpreting the Indus Script..." Also see R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryan* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1995), p.17

³⁴ <http://www.harappa.com/script/mahadevantext.html>

³⁵ Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002), p.110

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.110

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.110

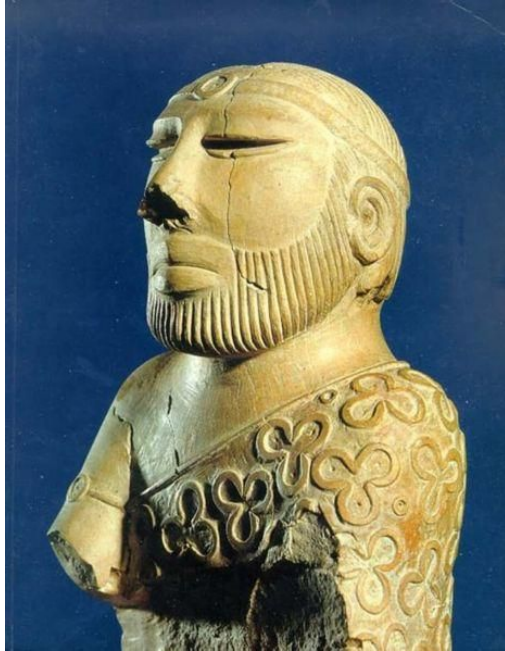
6. Religious discontinuities: “Terracotta figurines are alien and the fertility cult meets with strong disapproval. Fire altars... are of a shape and size not easily identifiable at Harappan sites as altars. There is no familiarity from mythology with the notion of an animal such as the unicorn, mythical as it was, nor even its supposed approximation in the rhinoceros, the most frequently depicted animal on the Harappan seals. The animal central to the *Rig-Veda*, the horse, is absent on Harappan seals.”³⁸
7. No mention of script or seals in the Rig Veda.³⁹
8. Sculptured representation of the human body seems unknown in the Rig Veda.⁴⁰

Fig 2: Priest-King at Mohenjadarro

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.110

³⁹ *Ibid*,p.110

⁴⁰ *Ibid*,p.110



Source: Wikipedia

However, if the fertility cult was really prevalent among the Harappans as most historians think it was, the following facts about their beliefs can be generalized through a psychological and theological analysis (on the basis of archaeological findings):

1. **Naturalistic Spirituality.** The Harappans seemed to believe in divine immanence to a naturalistic extent. This meant that they didn't have the concept of a transcendent God as Creator of the world. The worshipping of sex organs or exaggerating sexual symbolism in ritual became the way of stimulating fertility, either through the appeasement of some

fertility deity or through tapping into assumed fertility powers of nature. Creative power became immanent and naturalistic. If a fertility deity was involved, some form of appeasement through offerings and sacrifices might have also existed. In essence, the divine and the natural are so fused together that the divine assumes the natural in aggrandized forms.

2. **Polytheism.** The findings seem to indicate a number of gods and goddesses that the Harappan may have venerated.
3. **Idolatry.** Obviously, the Harappan religion was idolatrous, indicating either a belief in the idol itself or in the spirit/power represented by the idol.
4. **Priestcraft.** An elaborate religious system of a polytheistic, naturalistic nature makes it possible that there were architects and mediators of religion; either rulers who were considered to be divine or priest-kings, or just priests. In fact, there is a sculpture unearthed at Mohenjadaro (see Fig.2) that is considered to be of a priest-king.
5. **Burial.** Skeletons of buried humans give evidence that the Harappans practiced burial customs. The body would be decked with ornaments, possibly wrapped in a shroud, and placed in a wooden coffin along with offerings in pots.⁴¹

However, there are also alternative methods of approaching this. As early as 1935, C.L.Fabri noticed almost striking, meticulous, similarities between the signs on the Harappan seals and the signs published in the plates of Cunningham,

⁴¹ “Burial of Adult Man, Harappa”, <http://www.harappa.com/indus/71.html>
Accessed on April 14, 2015

Theobald, and Walsh, which made it convincing to believe that these seals (now discovered in thousands) were early examples of punch-marked coins used for commerce in the Indus Valley.⁴² To Fabri, then, the key to understanding the significance of the seals lied in the decipherment of the Indus Script. Historians have now found evidence of the presence of Harappan merchants in Sumer during the Ur III period (c.2112-2000 BC). From various seals discovered, it seems the Harappans had contacts with cities like Lagash, Ur, Kish, Eshnunna, and Umma.⁴³ It was in this period, as the Bible records, that Abram left Ur to move towards Palestine.⁴⁴ In her book, *The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit*, Malati J. Shendge tries to find in Akkadian (rather than in the proto-Dravidian) the key to understanding the Harappan language. She thinks it more appropriate to consider Akkadian as the original language from which languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin descended when the Akkadian speakers were dispersed in different directions. She looks at the Biblical record in Genesis as embodying “some ancient knowledge on the movements and migrations of clans.”⁴⁵ She notes that the Biblical Shinar is the same as Sumer and is the place from where the Bible tells us the dispersion of people took place. Shendge goes on to find similarities between Akkadian and Sanskrit. The hypothesis is that Sanskrit descended from the Harappan language, which in turn

⁴² C.L.Fabri, “The Punch-marked Coins: A Survival of the Indus Civilisation”, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (Apr., 1935), pp. 307-318 (Cambridge University Press)

⁴³ Jane McIntosh, *The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2008), pp.183-184

⁴⁴ Genesis 12

⁴⁵ Malati J. Shendge, *The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit* (New Delhi: SMA Publications, 1997), p.96

descended from Akkadian. In another paper, she concludes that:

The Aryas were a foreign refugee group which trekked to the Indus valley already inhabited by the Asuras and others. They clashed and the political power of the Asuras received a serious jolt (1850 B.C.) but they continued to rule even upto 1300 B.C. The Aryas became acculturated in the Asura culture and language. The Asura language Sumero-Akkadian changed to the language of Rgveda by about 1500 B.C. The Rgveda, other Vedas and Vedic literature as well as the Indus civilization are the creations of the Asuras and their allies and as much represent the indigenous genius and effort. The Indus civilization is the matrix of Indian culture, and India's history begins with the Indus civilization, the Rgveda representing its literary creativity.

...Thus Sanskrit, as per this view point, has descended from Sumero-Akkadian, a mixed language. It follows logically from this that the ancestors of Greeks and the Romans may have been in touch with the Sumero-Akkadian speaking population to which the similarities between these languages should be traced. And instead of a hypothetical construct like the proto-Indo-European, a real language like Akkadian mixed with Sumerian may be considered a parent. This should possibly help to dissolve the many intriguing difficulties. It is worth a trial. If found unworkable, it can be abandoned at any stage which will fix the limit of this postulate. However, in a scientific pursuit, it is necessary to try new alternatives.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Malati Shendge, "Obstacles to Identifying the Origins of India's History and Culture," p.11. <http://jies.org/Shenge.pdf>

If Malati's hypothesis is true, we may find a key to understand the religion of the Harappans in the religion of Sumerians, especially since they seem to have continued to have commerce with each other. Harappan religion was as polytheistic, idolatrous, and nature-related as was the Sumerian and Chaldean. In addition, both the Dravidians and the Aryans have their origin in Sumer, or the plains of Shinar from where they were dispersed. That might also explain the similarities in the signs found in the Indus seals and inscriptions found elsewhere (from Sumer to the South-East Asia). In addition, it might also explain the similarities in the Flood story of Manu, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and the Biblical story of the Flood. Perhaps, one might also find the roots of the caste-system in the master-slave class system, that seems apparent from an analysis of dwelling units and terracotta (of elaborately dressed mistresses versus scantily dressed slaves) found in the Indus Valley. The priest-kings of Harappa could have become the Brahmins of the Vedas later on. But, at this juncture where there is a lack of conclusively deciphered documentary evidence from the Harappan sites, historical interpretation only abounds in inductive hypothetical generalizations. As far as the origin of tribes such as the Santhals is concerned, anthropologists have found evidences in their folklore of their relationship with the world of the Bible. They have found striking similarities between the Biblical account and the story of creation and the global flood among the Santhals, which points at the Mesopotamian region as their place of origin.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See Stephen Murmu, "Understanding the Concept of God in Santal Traditional Myths," *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.38 No.1.(Serampore Theological Department, 1996). Also Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (USA: Regal Books, 1981, 2005), pp.47-50.

VEDIC AGE (c.1750-600 BC)

The Vedic Age begins with the supposed arrival of the Aryans and the composition of the Rig Veda. Again, there are differences of opinion regarding whether the Aryans really arrived or they were the original inhabitants of the land. For instance, in his *History of India*, Mountstuart Elphinstone wrote, “There is no reason whatever for thinking that the Hindus ever inhabited any country but their present one; and as little for denying that they may have done so before the earliest trace of their records or traditions.”⁴⁸ Elphinstone argued this from the absence of any Vedic allusion “to a prior residence, or to a knowledge of more than the name of any country out of India.” However, his arguments do not convince most historians. Keay notes:

..it is certainly curious that the Vedas say nothing of life in central Asia, nor of an epic journey thence through the mountains... The usual explanation is that, by the time the Vedas were composed, this migration was so remote that all memory of it had faded...⁴⁹

Allowing “first for a major time-lapse (say two hundred years) between the Late Harappan phase and the Aryan arrival in India, and then for a plausible memory gap (say another two hundred years) between arrival and the composition of the earliest Vedas,”⁵⁰ Keay suggests the period between 1500 BC and 1300 BC as the time of the Aryan arrival. He is among the group of scholars that favor a more gradual

⁴⁸ Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India: The Hindu and Mohametan Periods*, 5th edn. (London: John Murray, 1866), p.54

⁴⁹ John Keay, *India: A History*, p.27

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.27

migration theory to the previous Aryan-invasions theory. He thinks the multiple waves of migration theory best fits the fact of the Aryanisation of the entire sub-continent. However, as we have seen earlier, there are other theories to account for the fact of Aryanisation (or Sanskritisation). For instance, there is the Brahminic mission theory as well as the Asura composition of the Rig Veda theory. But, whatever, we are only left more with theories and not established facts with regard to the origin issues. Nevertheless, we have at least one advantage: the Rig Veda, considered to be the only existent earliest record of people in the Indian sub-continent.

Vedic Society

Scholarly consensus agrees on the point that the Aryan religion as practiced in the Rig Veda was simpler and devoid of the caste-system. In his *History of India (1867)*, James Talboys Wheeler separated the Vedic age from the Brahminic age (also now called the Age of the Epics or the Puranic Age) and points out the following chief differences between the two:

In the Vedic period the Brahmins were scarcely known as a separate community; the caste system had not been introduced, and gods were worshipped who were subsequently superseded by deities of other names and other forms. In the Brahminic period the Brahmins had formed themselves into an exclusive ecclesiastical hierarchy, endowed with vast spiritual powers, to which even the haughtiest Rajas were compelled to bow. The caste system had been introduced in all its fulness, whilst the old Vedic gods were fast passing away from the memory of man, and giving place to the three leading Brahminical deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Again, the Vedic period is characterized by a patriarchal simplicity,

which is wanting in the Brahminic age, when the luxury and splendour of the Hindu Rajas had reached a climax side by side with the increased power and influence exercised by the Brahminical hierarchy.⁵¹

However, the 90th hymn “Purusha” of the 10th Book in the Rig Veda does mention castes in the following words:

When they divided Puruṣa how many portions did they make?
What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his
thighs and feet?
The Brahmin was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rājanya
made.
His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the Śūdra was
produced.⁵²

But, many scholars consider the above text to have been interpolated by later protagonists of the Varna (caste) system. However, Dalit leader and architect of the Indian Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, thought it untrue to a study of the Vedas to consider that the caste-system was absent from the Vedic age. However, he did try to point out that the fourth caste, Shudra (considered to be the lowest) was not original to the Vedic age, though texts such as the Purusha Sukta quoted above could have been tampered with by Brahmin priests of the latter period.

There are some scholars who maintain that the Varna system did not exist in the age of the Rig Veda. This statement is based on the view that the Purusha Sukta is an interpolation which has taken place long after the Rig Veda was closed.

⁵¹ James Talboys Wheeler, *The History of India from the Earliest Ages, Vol I: The Vedic Period and the Mahabharata* (London: N. Trubner & Co, 1867), p.6

⁵² *Rig Veda*, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], at sacred-texts.com

Even accepting that the Purusha Sukta is a later interpolation, it is not possible to accept the statement that the Varna system did not exist in the time of the Rig Veda. Such a system is in open conflict with the text of the Rig Veda. For, the Rig Veda, apart from the Purusha Sukta, does mention Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas not once but many times. The Brahmins are mentioned as a separate Varna fifteen times, Kshatriyas nine times. What is important is that the Rig Veda does not mention Shudras as a separate Varna. If Shudras were a separate *Varna* there is no reason why the Rig Veda should not have mentioned them. The true conclusion to be drawn from the Rig Veda is not that the Varna system did not exist, but that there were only three *Varnas* and that Shudras were not regarded as a fourth and a separate *Varna*.⁵³

Ambedkar theorized that the Shudras originally belonged to the Kshatriya class and quotes Shanti Parva of Mahabharata 60.38-40 as a primary piece of evidence, where it says: “It has been heard by us that in days of old a Sudra of the name of Paijavana gave a *Dakshina* (in one of his sacrifices) consisting of a hundred thousand *Purnapatras*, according to the ordinance called *Aindragni*.” This mentioning of Paijavana in the text, however, was in order to give evidence from history of a Shudra who observed this rule that offering of sacrifices was mandatory for Shudras as well as it is for the upper castes. According to this rule, since the Shudra is not allowed to utter the *mantras*, he was to offer sacrifices called the *Purnapatras* without observing the vows laid down by the Vedas.⁵⁴ However, the very fact that these rules come later on and are requiring a citation of an example from the past seems

⁵³ B. R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras? Vol.I* (Thackers, 1970)

⁵⁴ Kisari Mohan Ganguli (tr), *The Mahabharata* (1883-1896), sacred-texts.com, pp.131-132

to indicate that the *Varna* system as it came to be stipulated in this section of the Mahabharata was not prevalent during the Vedic age. In fact, according to K. M. Ganguli, translator of the Mahabharata in English (thus far the only complete translation):

The Santi Parva is a huge interpolation in the Mahabharata, in the genre known as 'wisdom literature.' The narrative progression is placed on hold almost from the first page. Instead we get a long and winding recapitulation of Brahmanic lore, including weighty treatises on topics such as kingcraft, metaphysics, cosmology, geography, and mythology. There are discussions of the Sankya and Yoga philosophical schools, and mentions of Buddhism. It is apparent that the Santi Parva was added to the Mahabharata at a later time than the main body of the epic.⁵⁵

Widow Remarriage

Rig Veda 10.18 and Atharva Veda 18.3 have references to the widow during the time of funeral. There have been interpretations that saw these hymns as ratifying the custom of Sati (in which a widow was cremated alive with her dead husband). However, the interpretations are controversial owing to the obscurity of the text. Some have looked at these verses as a call to the widow to rise up from mourning and return to the world of life or resume her place in the world where battles are still to be fought.⁵⁶ In fact, it is suggested that it is the brother of the widow's husband who raises his sister-in-law up with the words, "Rise up, woman, into the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp.131-132

⁵⁶ Carl Olson, *The Many Colors of Hinduism* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), p.265

world of the living.”⁵⁷ The brothers and relatives seem to be pleading the widow to release her husband’s body for cremation. It is also suggested that the hymn also pronounces on the widow a blessing at her second marriage with the words in RV.10.18.9: “Go up O woman to the world of living; You stand by this one who is deceased; Come! to him who grasps your hand, Your second spouse (didhisu), You have now entered into the relationship Of wife and husband.”⁵⁸ The controversial nature of this passage will be evident from comparing it to Griffith’s translation of the same as “From his dead hand I take the bow be carried, that it may be our power and might and glory. There art thou, there; and here with noble heroes may we o’ercome all hosts that fight against us.”⁵⁹

Nevertheless, there is modern consensus on the interpretation that the Vedic texts only describe a form of mimetic death of the widow with her husband. She was wedded to him for life; but, on his death, she became dead to him and he to her, whereby she was expected to return to the world of the living, where she was free from her former husband, now to remarry another. This interpretation seems more in keeping with the ancient law-systems of the then world. For instance, the Code of Hammurabi (ca.2250 B.C.), states:

If a widow with small children has come to a decision to enter the house of a second man, she shall not enter without legal authority.

⁵⁷ Elena Efimovna Kuz’mīna, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians* (Leiden: BRILL, 2007), p.188

⁵⁸ Arun R. Kumbhare, *Women in India: Their Status Since the Vedic Times* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009), pp.14,15

⁵⁹ *Rig Veda*, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], at sacred-texts.com

Before she enters the house of another man the judges will make decisions about the affairs in her first husband's house and entrust her first husband's household to that woman and her second husband, and they shall make them deposit a written statement.

They shall take care of the house and bring up the children.

They shall not sell the furniture for silver.

Anyone who buys the belongings of a widow's sons shall forfeit his silver.

The property shall return to its owner. (L177)⁶⁰

For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to [her] husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of [her] husband. So then if, while [her] husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. (Romans 7:2-3, *The Bible, NKJV*)

Vedic Scriptures

“Veda” means “knowledge.” The chief scriptures of the Vedic age were the four Vedas: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda. These were chiefly books of hymns that were sung or chanted during the sacrifices. They were composed in Vedic Sanskrit. Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanisads were attached to each of these Vedas later on. In the original format, the four Vedas are referred to as the Samhitas (or Collection). The Vedas are considered to have been orally passed on and put to writing only later on. The original texts of the hymns are thought to have been metrical in nature. However, with the establishment of Shakas

⁶⁰ *Hammurabi's Laws*, tr. by M. E. J. Richardson (London: T&T Clark, 2000), p.99

(branches) of theological learning in various parts of Northern India, these Vedic texts were annotated with Brahmana discussions on the text. The metrical texts were also considered to have been tampered with by the application of rules of sound combination resulting in a somewhat obscure text. There have been various attempts to restore the original metrical text in recent times, one of which by Barend A. van Nooten and Gary B. Holland is made available online by the University of Texas.⁶¹

The four main divisions of the Vedas are as follows:

1. *Samhitas*: These were collections of metrical hymns, prayers, and songs usually sung or chanted during the performance of various rites and sacrifices.
2. *Brahmanas*: These were prose commentaries and theological discussions on the meaning of the various texts, sacrifices, and ceremonies.
3. *Aranyakas*: Also known as the “forest texts”, these were, partly appended to the Aranyakas and partly independent, commentaries and meditations by hermits living in the forest on the significance of the rituals and sacrifices described in the Vedic hymns.
4. *Upanisads*: These were also usually either part of the Aranyakas or independent of them, without any absolute dividing point. For instance, The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* is both an Aranyaka and an Upanishad and forms the last part of the *Satapatha-Brahmana*, a Brahmana of the *White Yajur-Veda*.⁶² The Upanishads are mystical

⁶¹ *The Rig Veda*, <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/RV/>
 Accessed on April 24, 2015.

⁶² Dominic Goodall, R.C. Zaehner (eds), *Hindu Scriptures* (University of California Press, 1996), xi

contemplations on the meaning of the world, soul, life, death, and reality.

The four *Samhitas* are as follows:

1. *Rig Veda*: The word *Rig* comes from *ṛc* and means “praise, verse”. Thus, *Rig Veda* is the book of Praise-knowledge. The Veda is organized into 10 books, known as *Mandalas*, each consisting of several hymns or *Suktas*. The *Suktas* consist of stanzas called *ṛc* that can be further analysed into *pada* (foot) or verses.
2. *Sama Veda*: The collection is derived from the word *Saman*, meaning “melodies”; thereby, *Sama Veda* is the book of the “knowledge of melodies”. It is considered that the hymns in this book were mainly used during the Soma sacrifice and many of the hymns are repeated from the *Rig Veda*.
3. *Yajur Veda*: *Yajus* means “sacrificial formula”; thus, *Yajur Veda* gives the “knowledge of sacrificial formulas”. There are two primary versions of this, viz. the *Shukla Yajur Veda* (White Yajur Veda) and the *Krishna Yajur Veda* (Black Yajur Veda). While the White Yajur Veda focuses on liturgy, the Black Yajur Veda has more explanatory material about the rituals.⁶³
4. *Atharva Veda* is the book of the “knowledge of magic formulas” (*atharvan*). It is a collection of spells, prayers, charms, and hymns with “prayers to protect crops from lightning and drought, charms against venomous serpents, love spells, healing

⁶³ *The Texts of the White Yajurveda*, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith [1899], at sacred-texts.com

spells,” containing hundreds of verses, some derived from the Rig Veda.⁶⁴

Following is the list of the Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads appended to each Veda, as classified by A.K. Bhattacharya:⁶⁵

RIG VEDA:

Brahmanas: *Aitereya* and *Kaushitaki* or *Sankhayana*

Aranyakas: *Aitereya* and *Kaushitaki* or *Sankhayana*

Upanishads: *Aitereya* (part of *Aitereya Samhita*) and *Kaushitaki* (part of *Kaushitaki* or *Sankhayana Aranyaka*)

SAMA VEDA:

Brahmanas: *Chandogya*, *Tandya* and *Jaiminiya* or *Talavakara*

Aranyaka: *Jaiminiya* or *Talavakara* and *Chandogya*

Upanishads: *Chandogya* (part of *Chandogya Brahmana*) and *Kena* (part of *Jaiminiya* and *Talavakara Brahmana*)

YAJUR VEDA:

Shukla Yajur Veda:

Brahmanas: *Satapatha*

Aranyaka: *Brihadaranyaka*

Upanishads: *Isha* (part of *Vajasaneya Samhita*) and *Brihadaranyaka* (part of *Satapatha Brahmana*)

Krishna Yajur Veda:

Brahmana and **Aranyaka** are considered together in *Taittiriya Samhita* and contains *Maitrayani Brahmana*

Upanishad: *Katha* and *Svetasvatara*

⁶⁴ *Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1895], at sacred-texts.com

⁶⁵ Ashim Kumar Bhattacharya, *Hindu Dharma: Introduction to Scriptures and Theology* (London: iUniverse, 2006), pp.6,7

ATHARVA VEDA:

Brahmanas: *Gopatha*

Aranyaka: None known

Upanishads: *Prasna, Mundaka* and *Mandukya*

Vedic Theology

There have been various interpretations of Vedic theology throughout history. But, one of the most original was suggested by Max Muller (1823-1900), an authority on the Sanskrit language and translator of several ancient scriptures, which helped him compare religions not only theologically but also linguistically. In his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India* (1878), Max Muller considered Vedic religion to preliminarily involve mainly the worship of the Sky God or the Heavenly Father. He writes:

Five thousand years ago, or, it may be earlier, the Aryans, speaking as yet neither Sanskrit, Greek, nor Latin, called him Dyu patar, Heaven-father.

Four thousand years ago, or, it may be earlier, the Aryans who had travelled southward to the rivers of Penjab, called him Dyaush-pita, Heaven-father.

Three thousand years ago, or, it may be earlier, the Aryans on the shores of the Hellespont, called him Ζευς πατηρ [Zeus *pater*], Heaven-father.

Two thousand years ago, the Aryans of Italy looked up to that bright heaven above, *hoc sublime candens*, and called it *Ju-pitar*, Heaven-father.

And a thousand years ago the same Heaven-father and All-father was invoked in the dark forests of Germany by

our own peculiar ancestors, the Teutonic Aryans, and his old name of *Tiu* or *Zio* was then heard perhaps for the last time.⁶⁶

Muller thought that personification of natural elements turned to deification of these as deities, later on. For instance, He saw that the name Dyaus (*Zeus* or *Jupiter*, light-giver, a fitting name for the sky) was later replaced by various gods, who represented some of the principal activities of the sky, such as thunder, rain, storm, evening and morning, night, day, etc.⁶⁷ Thus, gradually there originated a pantheon of deities in the Vedas.

James Wheeler classified the more important Vedic deities as follows:

Rain.

Indra, god of the firmament

Varuna, god of the waters

Fire.

Agni, god of fire.

Surya, the sun.

Soma, or Chandra, the Moon.

Air.

Vayu, the god of wind.

Maruts, the breezes who attended upon Indra.

The God or judge of death, Yama

⁶⁶ Max Muller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India* (London: Longmans, 1901), p.223

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.218

There are also various personifications to whom hymns are address, such as Earth, Sky, Food, Wine, Months, Seasons, Day, Night, and Dawn.⁶⁸ However, Surendranath Dasgupta was of the opinion that the gods of the Vedas were impersonal in nature, as their names Agni (Fire), Vayu (Wind), etc also indicated.⁶⁹ He classified the gods as terrestrial, atmospheric, and celestial. Subodh Kapoor divides the Vedic gods into three groups: the gods of earth such as Agni and Soma; the gods of the atmosphere such as Indra and the Maruta; and, the gods of heaven such as Mitra and Varuna.⁷⁰ There seems to be a three-tier relationship between nature and the divine: earth-atmosphere-heaven.

However, there seems evidence that the various names considered now popularly as deities were not different gods but names of the One. For instance Rig Veda 1.164.46 states:

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly
nobly-winged Garutmān.

To what is One, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama,
Mātariśvan.⁷¹

The White Yajur Veda Book 32 also points to the oneness of God in the phrase “is That”. Thus, “Agni is That; the Sun is That; Vāyu and Chandramās are That. The Bright is That; Brahma is That, those Waters, that Prajâpati. All twinklings of the eyelid sprang from Purusha, resplendent One. No one hath

⁶⁸ Wheeler, *The History of India...*, pp.9,10

⁶⁹ Surendranath Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.1(Cambridge, 1922) , p.16 at Gutenberg.net

⁷⁰ Subodh Kapoor (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Vedic Philosophy*, Vol. 8 (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2002), p.2280

⁷¹ *Rig Veda*, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], at sacred-texts.com

comprehended him above, across, or in the midst. There is no counterpart of him whose glory verily is great.” (WYV 32.1-3).⁷² The word *pratima* translated as “counterpart” by Griffith can also be translated as “image”; thus, the verse seems to speak against the idolization of the deity. He is also called the Bright, Bodiless, Woundless, Sinewless, the Pure which evil hath not pierced, far-sighted, wise, encompassing, and self-existent (WYV 40.8). In the Upanishads, however, the Self itself is declared to be the only true reality. The Self as all is declared as having both form and also being formless (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.1). The “oneness” verses of the Vedas seem to fit well with the later non-dualistic interpretations of reality and as such could have been precursors of the doctrine, if not later interpolations. Yajur Veda 40 indubitably reflects the beginning of non-dualistic tendencies:

- 5 It moveth; it is motionless. It is far distant; it is near.
It is within This All; and it surrounds This All externally.
- 6 The man who in his Self beholds all creatures and all things
that be, And in all beings sees his Self, thence doubts no
longer, ponders not.
- 7 When, in the man who clearly knows, Self hath become all
things that are, what wilderment, what grief is there in him
who sees the One alone?
- 8 He hath attained unto the Bright, Bodiless, Woundless,
Sinewless, the Pure which evil hath not pierced.
Far-sighted, wise, encompassing, he self-existent hath
prescribed aims, as propriety demands, unto the everlasting
Years.
- 9 Deep into shade of blinding gloom fall Asambhûti's [the
Uncreated's] worshippers. They sink to darkness deeper
yet who on Sambhûti [the Created] are intent.

⁷² *The Texts of the White Yajurveda*, tr. Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1899], at sacred-texts.com

- 10 One fruit, they say, from Sambhava [Possibility], another from Asambhava [Impossibility]. Thus from the sages have we heard who have declared this lore to us.
- 11 The man who knows Sambhûti [Creation] and Vinâsa [Annihilation] simultaneously, He, by Vinâsa [Annihilation] passing death, gains by Sambhûti [Creation] endless life.
- 17 The Real's face is hidden by a vessel formed of golden light.
The Spirit yonder in the Sun, the Spirit dwelling there am I.
OM! Heaven! Brahma!⁷³

Obviously, to know Creation and Dissolution at the same time means to transcend the phenomenal world of time, birth, death, and history and be eternal. The Veda aims at eternal life; but finds a possibility only in the inherent immortality of the Self.

Demonology

In Vedic literature, gods and demons seem to be equal in power, though demons became less powerful beings later on. According to Moncure Daniel Conway, demons in Indian literature were previously gods who became demonized later on. He compared this phenomenon with the demonization of deities in Zoroastrianism and suggests a possible political purpose behind the same; possibly, the politics of demonization began in Persia leading to the migration of some of these tribes, whose gods were demonized, into Asia.

The most powerful priesthood carried the day, and they used every ingenuity to degrade the gods of their opponents. Agathodemons were turned into kakodemons. The serpent, worshipped in many lands, might be adopted as the support

⁷³ *The Texts of the White Yajurveda*, tr. Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1899], at sacred-texts.com. Parenthetical suggestions, mine.

of sleeping Vishnu in India, might be associated with the rainbow ('the heavenly serpent') in Persia, but elsewhere was cursed as the very genius of evil.

The operation of this force in the degradation of deities, is particularly revealed in the Sacred Books of Persia. In that country the great religions of the East would appear to have contended against each other with especial fury, and their struggles were probably instrumental in causing one or more of the early migrations into Western Europe. The great celestial war between Ormuzd and Ahriman—Light and Darkness—corresponded with a violent theological conflict, one result of which is that the word *deva*, meaning 'deity' to Brahmans, means 'devil' to Parsees.

The Zoroastrian conversion of *deva* (deus) into *devil* does not alone represent the work of this *odium theologicum*. In the early hymns of India the appellation *asuras* is given to the gods. Asura means a spirit. But in the process of time *asura*, like *dæmon*, came to have a sinister meaning: the gods were called *suras*, the demons *asuras*, and these were said to contend together. But in Persia the *asuras*—demonised in India—retained their divinity, and gave the name *ahura* to the supreme deity, Ormuzd (Ahura-mazda). On the other hand, as Mr. Muir supposes, *Varenya*, applied to evil spirits of darkness in the Zendavesta, is cognate with Varuna (Heaven); and the Vedic Indra, king of the gods—the Sun—is named in the Zoroastrian religion as one of the chief councillors of that Prince of Darkness.⁷⁴

Max Muller considered *Asura* to be the "oldest name for the living gods" and connected it with the Zend *Ahura*.⁷⁵ Another

⁷⁴ Moncure Daniel Conway, *Demonology and Devil-lore* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1879), pp.25,26 [Gutenberg.org]

⁷⁵ Max Muller, *Lectures...*, p.197

theory looks at the Asuras as actually the original inhabitants of India that absorbed the Aryan influx and became the authors of the Rig Veda.⁷⁶ The theory of looking *asuras* as the dark-skinned people vanquished by the *devas* (“the shining ones”) is being discounted by scholars. Wash Edward Hale notes that *Hiranyahasta* (a term by which the asuras are described in the Rig Veda) "does not mean "dark-skinned." It means "having golden hands" and occurs once in the RV with asura-as an epithet of Savitr, the sun (RV.1.35.10)."⁷⁷ Also, according to C.N. Rao, the *Asuras* were the first gods of India.

There was a perpetual fight...during the course of which some of the Asuras seems to have called truce and agreed to occupy a subordinate and yet important position in the Aryan fold. Varuna, for instance, is an Asura and yet a god of the Aryans. How this came to pass may be accounted for by the fact that originally he was a powerful rival of Indra and passages can be quoted from the Rigveda to show that for some time they were each contending for the upper hand. But in course of time, Varuna contented himself with remaining in the Aryan fold by accepting sovereignty over the 'Antariksha' and administering the Rita or the Law.... Similarly with the Maruts, originally Asuras, but accepting a subordinate yet important position in the hierarchy of the Aryan gods. It is remarkable that no Suras are mentioned in the Rigveda, but only Asuras and the word Suras is only a late formation on mistaken etymology.⁷⁸ That is why also the Asuras are called the Purvadevatah.

⁷⁶ Malati Shendge, “Obstacles to Identifying the Origins of India's History and Culture”.

⁷⁷ Wash Edward Hale, *Asura in Early Vedic Religion* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), p.19

⁷⁸ Chilukuri Narayana Rao, *An Introduction to Dravidian Philology* (Asian Educational Services, 1929), pp.37,38. *Purvadevatah* means “previous or older gods”

Rao's view seems to accord with the theory that the Asuras went through a process of demonization, and were not yet demonized in the Rig Veda.

It is interesting to also note that Asura is in the beginning seen in connection with Surya (sun) and Savitar in the Rig Veda. In RV.1.35, both Savitar and Asura are called the golden-handed one, and while Savitar is the one who drives away sicknesses and bids the Sun to come and is the one who spreads the bright sky through darksome region, Asura is the one who drives away Rakshasas and Yatudhanas and is referred to as God who is present and is praised by hymns in the evening. Asura is also referred to as the gentle and kind Leader (RV 1.35.7; 1.35.10). In RV.3.29.14, Agni (Fire) is considered to have been brought to life from the Asura's body. In RV.3.38.4 and 3.38.8, the Sun is referred to as Asura and Savitar. In 3.53.7, Angirases and Virupas are called Asura's heroes, the Sons of Heaven. In 3.56.8, Asura's heroes Savitar, Varuna, and Mitra are considered to rule over the three bright realms of the Sky, the Waters, and the Earth. In 4.53.1, Savitar is called the sapient Asura; also, in 5.49.2. In 5.63.3, Varuna and Mitra, the Lords of earth and heaven cause rain on earth by the power (maya) of Asura. In 5.63.4, Mitra-Varuna hide the Sun with cloud and flood of rain and water drops. In 7.6.1, Asura is called the "high imperial Ruler, the Manly One in whom the folk shall triumph... who is as strong as Indra" and is called "the Fort-destroyer." In 8.20.17 and 10.67.2, the Creator Dyaus is referred to as "the Asura". In 8.42.1, Varuna is referred to as the Asura who the heavens, and measured out the broad earth's wide expanses. It is only in 10.138.3, that we first see Arya mentioned along with Asura. In this verse, Indra

is said to have overthrown the forts of Pipru who was a conjuring Asura.

Evidence seems to support the theory of Asura-Ahura homogeneity. Also, it has been discovered that one Mitanni treaty does list the names of some of the Vedic gods like Varuna, Mithra, and Nasatya in an order similar to the Vedas. Excerpts from the 14th century B.C. Hatti-Mitanni treaty give the names of the Vedic deities as follows: *Mitrassil Arunassil, Indara Nasattiyanna* (KBo I 3 Vo 24).⁷⁹ The order of the names looks the same as the order of pairs in Rig Veda 10.125.1 “Varuna and Mitra, Indra and Agni, and the Pair of Asvins”, i.e. the Nasatyas. KBo I 1 Vo 55-56 (of the Hatti-Mitanni treaty) has a slight change in the rendering: *Mitrassil Uruwanassil, Indar Nasattiyanna* leading to a conjecture that *Uruwana*, or *Ruwana* meaning “the one in charge of flowing waters,” is Varuna the creator of the water blocking monster *Vritta* that Indra is praised for killing.⁸⁰

Asura as a divine class continues to feature in the Sama Veda where Indra is referred to as Asura in SV.6.2.12.2. However, in 6.3.5.2, Surya (Sun) is referred to as the slayer of “Dasyus, Asuras, and foes”, hinting possibly to the first demonizing instance of the class. In 9.3.7.3, Indra is referred to as the one who overthrew the great might of the Asura.

In Yajur Veda, we begin to see the casting off of Asura from the solar realm to the territory of the night. In 1.3.14 Agni is referred to as Rudra, the Asura of the mighty sky. However,

⁷⁹ Arnaud Fournet, “About the Mittanni-Aryan Gods”, *Journal of the Indo-European Studies*, Vol.38, No.1&2., 2010. Academia.edu

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

by 1.5.1, we begin to see the first conflict between the gods and the Asuras in which the gods win. Agni (previously mentioned as an Asura) is seen as the one who runs away with the wealth that the gods deposited in him. In 1.5.9 we first find the statement that the day belongs to the gods and the night belongs to the Asuras, who entered night with the treasures of the gods. The gods, perceiving that “the night is Agni’s” begin praising Agni thinking he will restore to them their cattle, and Agni does deliver them their cattle from “night to day”. In 1.6.11 it is seen that the gods deceived the Asuras with the help of Agni. In 2.2.6, Agni has become associated with the gods, and the place of the gods is the Agni Vaishvarana, the year. From that place the gods drove away the Asuras. In 2.3.7, the gods are seen as defeated by the Asuras and as, having lost power and strength, made servants. However, Indra tries to pursue but cannot win and so he turns to Prajapati’s stipulated sacrifice by which he receives power and strength. Therefore, it is said that through the sacrifice and Agni, the gods defeated the Asuras. In 2.4.1, we find the first classification of sides. gods, men, and the Pitrs (fathers) on one side; Asuras, Rakshashas (giants), and Pishachas (cannibals) on the other. Thus, appears the first classification of the demonic triad in Vedic history.

In the White Yajur Veda 40.3, the Asuras are considered to inhabit the worlds that are enwrapt with blinding gloom. To them, when life on earth is done, depart the men who kill the Self.

Anthropology

Humans are referred to as mortals in the Vedas (SV.1.5.2). Men are Manu’s race (SV.2.2.8). Manu appointed Agni as the chief priest (RV.1.13.1; 1.14.11; SV.5.1.10). Agni, kindled by

mortals is the immortal fire that mediates between the immortal gods and mortal men. Humans are divided into two groups: the law-abiders versus the Dasyus (or Dasas), the riteless, lawless ones (SV.3.1.3.2; 6.2.20.3). The Dasyus are said to be on the side with Asuras and foes (SV.6.3.5.2). After death, the soul departs to a place prepared by Yama, the god of death (RV.10.14.2). There is no talk of reincarnation yet during the Vedic period. Also, Yama is not the god of hell, but the god of the place where the fathers have gone.

Soteriology

The invocations in the Vedas usually call for blessings of rain, cattle, fruitfulness, and for defeat of the evil foes. In RV.1.24.14, we find a prayer to Varuna the Asura to lose the devotee of the bonds of sins. In RV.1.34.11, the Ashvins are invoked at the time of sacrifice to “make long our days of life, and wipe out all our sins: ward off our enemies; be with us evermore.” In 1.129.5, though used as a comparative for Indra, the concept of the Priest as one who drives all the sins of man away is found. In 2.28.9 and 5.85.8, Varuna is seen as the one who drives away all sins. In 7.86.5, there are two kinds of sins from which the devotee prays for deliverance: sins committed by the fathers and sins committed by self. In 10.105.8, the prayer is that Indra would grind off all sins and the observance is that he is not pleased with prayerless sacrifices.

Integral to the Vedic religion is the concept of Sacrifice (for which the Vedic hymns were mainly composed). Sacrifice is the means of obtaining blessings, protection, and ascendance to the realm of the gods. Food was offered to the gods through the sacrificial rite, and the sacrifice destroyed the evil spirits and rakshashas.

Some humans attained the life of spirits (RV.10.15.1). RV.10.15.14 talks of those who were consumed by fire and those not cremated, both of whom are invoked to be granted the world of spirits and their own body; suggesting that both cremation and burial were accepted in the Vedas. Shukla Yajur Veda 30.5 mentions hell as the place where murderers go. Atharva Veda 12.4.36 states that hell is reserved for anyone who doesn't give a Cow to Brahmins when they ask for it.

Vedic Worship

There is no indication of temples in the Vedic period. Also, there is no record of idol worship in the Vedas. However, there is mention of altars. The altar (*vedi*) was considered to be earth's extremest limit; and sacrifice, the navel of the world (RV.1.164.35). One of the altars was made to sit on the earth, was considered to be eye-shaped, and the sacrifice was directed sun-ward. Trimmed ladle was used to pour oil into the altar's fire (RV.6.11.5). However, there were altars of various other shapes as well.

B.G. Sidharth suggests a possible "connection between the fire altars in Turkmenistan (Togolok) and Afghanistan (Dashly) and the Harappan civilization, particularly Kalibangan, where there are seven fire altars, and also with the Harappan seal showing worship at a fire altar with seven accompanying deities."⁸¹ He tries to reconcile these archaeological discoveries with the concept of the seven fires

⁸¹ B.G. Sidharth, *The Celestial Key to the Vedas: Discovering the Origins of the World's Oldest Civilization* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1999), p.101

in the Rig Veda which he considers to be purely astronomical and connected with the myth of the Pleiades or Krittika and the seven stars of the Great Bear or Sapta Rishi (the Seven Sages).

For the Vedic priests, the altar was not just a random structure; it had cosmic relationship—it was earth's extremest limit, the sacrifice was the center of the world. Meticulous calculations were made to assure the positioning of it. Astronomical, geometrical, and mathematical calculations came into play when situating and constructing an altar. Some have suggested intricate astronomical relations in the choice of the number of stones and pebbles to be placed around the altar.⁸² The A.B. Keith notes that the altar was arranged to represent earth, atmosphere, and heaven, and the same arrangement is devised in the fire-pan.⁸³ There were elaborate procedures of determining the shape and size of altars, setting up of fire; various kinds of sacrifices and offerings; timings for setting up the altars and performing the sacrifices, etc. For instance, the *Garhapatya* altar was round whereas the *Ahavaniya* altar was square. There were new moon and full moon sacrifices, four-month or seasonal sacrifices, first-fruit sacrifice,⁸⁴ *pravargya* or hot milk sacrifice, and animal sacrifice.⁸⁵ One important sacrifice was the Soma sacrifice in which animals like goats and cows were sacrificed to various deities.

⁸² M. I. Mikhailov, N. S. Mikhailov, *Key to the Vedas* (Minsk: Belarusian Information Center, 2005), p.201

⁸³ A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1925), p.466

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp.313-335

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 326-332

The chief priest was Agni (Fire). Since Fire is kindled by mortals and assumes an immortal nature, it is considered to be the mediator between mortals and immortals; it carries the sacrifices to the gods and draws the gods to men (RV.1.1.1-3). Agni is considered the sapient-minded priest (1.1.5), the dispeller of the night (1.1.7), the ruler of sacrifices, guard of Law eternal, and the radiant one (1.1.8). Therefore, utmost care was taken in kindling the sacrificial fire.

Shatapatha Brahmana

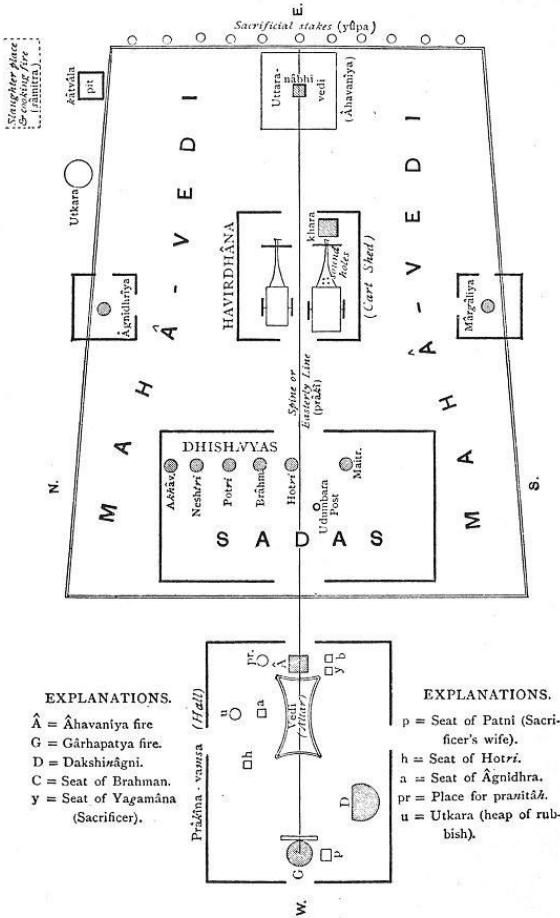
The *Shatapatha Brahmana*, a part of the White Yajur Veda, dated between 700 BC and 300 BC, elaborates details of the various rituals used in Vedic worship. The name *Shatapatha* means “hundred paths”. The Brahmana contains portions that may have been orally transmitted through generations before committed to writing about 300 B.C. It is a valuable source of information regarding the thought and life of the Vedic people. Some notable points are as follows:

1. The gods and Asuras sprung from Prajapati and were both soulless mortals until the gods decided to place the immortal element of fire (Agni) within themselves, thereby becoming immortal (2.2.2.8-14).

The term *Upavas* for “fasting” is given a rationale. *Upa* means "near" and *vas* means "abide" or "dwell". It is stated that on the day of fasting (*upavas*), the gods betake themselves to the house of the sacrificer, who would be offering sacrifices of food for the gods to eat. Therefore the day is called *upavasatha* (or the day of fasting). The rationale behind this fasting is that it is improper for the host to eat before the guests, staying in his house, have eaten; "how much more would it be so, if he were to take food before

the gods (who are staying with him) have eaten: let him therefore take no food at all." (1.1.1.7-8). However, the sacrificer is permitted to eat plants and fruits from the forest since there is no offering made of things from the forest, and "that of which no offering is made, even though it is eaten, is considered as not eaten." (1.1.1.9).

Map 3: Plan of the Sacrificial Ground⁸⁶



2. *Brahman* is a general name for priests, and there were brahmanas also among the Asuras (1.1.4.14).

⁸⁶ *Satapatha Brahmana Part II (SBE26)*, Julius Eggeling tr. [1885], at sacred-texts.com, p.475

3. The food of the gods is *amrita* (ambrosia, or not dead), for they are immortals; therefore, rice must be grinded (killed), and then bestowed with immortal life before offering to the gods. Sacrifice, thus, involves the concept of death and immortality (1.2.1.19-22).
4. In a sacrifice, the animal or grain being offered dies; however, by giving *dakshina* to the priest, one invigorates the offering, making it successful (2.2.2.1-3).
5. Anyone who makes an offering without giving *dakshina* (gift to the officiating priest) gets sins wiped off on self (1.2.3.4).
6. Rice and barley are ordained as the five-fold animal sacrifice for two reasons: (a) the gods first offered a man as the sacrifice, but the sacrificial essence left him and entered a horse; they offered the horse, the essence left the horse and entered the ox; they offered the ox, but the essence left it and entered the sheep; they offered the sheep, but the essence left it and entered the goat; they offered the goat, but the essence left it and entered the earth; so, they digged in the earth and found it in the form of rice and barley (1.2.3.6-7). (b) The rice-cake, as rice-meal is the hair; when water is poured on it, it becomes skin; when mixed, it becomes flesh; when baked, it becomes hard as bone; and when taken off the fire and sprinkled with butter, it changes into marrow. "This is the completeness which they call 'the fivefold animal sacrifice.'" (1.2.3.8).
7. Ghee or clarified butter is an important part of the sacrificial rite; it is likened to a thunderbolt (3.3.1.3).
8. The sacrifice is the representation of the sacrificer himself (1.3.2.1).
9. The altar is compared to a woman of honor who must be clothed in the presence of gods and priests. The altar represents the earth, and the *barhi* grass with which it is covered represents the plants fixed firmly on the earth (1.3.3.8-10).
10. Only Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas were considered able to sacrifice (3.1.1.9).

11. The housewife (*patni*) participates in the sacrificial rite (1.2.5.21; 3.4.1.6).
12. The one who wishes to perform the rite of consecration must shave his hair and beard and cut his nails because that part of the body where water does not reach is considered impure (3.1.2.2).
13. Elaborate measurements are given for the construction of the altars, with rationale for each measurement in the Brahmana.
14. Breath is declared to be the one God, of whom the myriads are just powers, proceeding first as one and half Wind, then the three world where all gods dwelt, and then into thirty three, and three hundred and three and three thousand and three (11.6.3.10).
15. The world of the fathers is differentiated from the world of the gods (1.9.3.2). The sacrifice aims to go to the world of gods (1.9.3.1).

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

This Upanishad is considered to have been committed to writing around the 7th century BC, and thus gives us a glimpse into the philosophical mind of the Vedic period. The Upanishad essentially distinguishes itself from the *karmic* practices of Vedic religion and takes recourse to mystical musings. An oft quoted prayer of the Upanishad is:

*Asato ma sadgamaya,
Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya,
Mrityormamritam gamayeti (1.3.27)*

Lead me from untruth to truth,
Lead me from darkness to light,
Lead me from death to immortality.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad rebels against the hegemony of the gods over humans. It declares the human self to be the source of even the gods and proclaims salvation through Self-realization. Following are some significant teachings of this Upanisad.

1. Death/Hunger (Hirayagarbha also known as Prajapati and Brahma) is the source of all things; the creator of mind, water, fire, and all things (1.2).
2. In the beginning was Aatma (Self) all alone in the form of Purusha (person). Husband and wife were created when Viraj parted his body into two (1.4.3) because he didn't want to be alone. From this original division were produced all pairs of male and female beings, from the cow and bull down to the ants, in the world. (1.4.4).
3. Purusha, though mortal, created immortals, gods; in fact, each god is his manifestation, for he is all gods (1.4.6).
4. The self is Brahman; anyone who realizes this becomes all this and not even the gods can prevent this for he himself is their Self (1.4.10). But, anyone who worships another god thinking, "He is one, and I am another," is like an animal to the gods. As the spider comes out with its thread, or as small sparks come forth from fire, thus do all senses, all worlds, all Devas, all beings come forth from that Self (2.1.20).
5. The gods don't like that men should come to Self-realization, for who would like his animal to be taken away from him? (1.4.10).
6. The Brahmana caste is declared to be better than Kshatriya for the source of the Kshatriya (though having royal power) is the Brahmana (1.4.11).
7. The way of salvation through knowledge is revealed. All the works of merit will exhaust in the end, but he who meditates only upon the world called the Self never has his work exhausted. (1.4.15).

8. The five-fold sacrifice is the Self itself: mind, speech, breath, eye, and ear (1.4.17).
9. There are two forms of Brahman, the material and the immaterial, the mortal and the immortal, the solid and the fluid, sat (being) and tya (that), (i.e. sat-tya, true) (2.3.1).
10. The Brahman is described as 'Not this, not this' (*neti neti*), since he can only be described *via negative*. However, its name is 'The Truth of truth' (*Satyasya Satyamiti*) (2.3.6).
11. The essence of the phenomenal (ageing, dying) self is desire; the essence of the absolute Self is no-desire (4.4.4,5).
12. On death, the self becomes disembodied and immortal, the Prana, Brahman, the Light (4.4.7).
13. Non-duality is reality; when all that is is the Self, then there exists not another. In fact, the non-dual Self is imperceptible (4.5.15).

Thus, we have seen the Vedic age to be an age of altars, sacrifices, gods, demons, and spirits. One also observes a gradual emergence of the significance of the three upper castes. But, a breakthrough is seen in the denunciation of both the altar and the caste through the proclamation of the non-dual Self in the Upanishad.

Summary

1. The four Vedas are the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva Vedas.
2. Vedic religion seems to be popularly polytheistic, with deities such as Indra, Mithra-Varuna, Surya, and Agni being prominent; however, there is also evidence that these were but names of the One God that the Vedas worshipped (RV.1.164.46).
3. Vedic religion saw a gradual division of the Devas (gods) from the Asuras who were demonized later on.

4. The caste-system seemed to be slowly developing through the Vedic period.
5. Vedic sacrifices were offered for the expiation of sins, for natural blessings, for protection from enemies, and for salvation of soul.
6. There is yet no indication of the doctrine of reincarnation of souls.
7. While the Brahmanas are *karmic* in nature and have detailed instructions for those who wish to perform sacrifices through the Brahmins, the Upanishads look at *karmic* religion as secondary and proclaim Self-realization as true salvation.
8. The quest of Vedic religion is truth, light, and immortality.
9. There is seen a rise of the Brahmana class above the Kshatriyas and an intensification of sacrificial rites and *dakshina* system.

CONCLUSION

The reader will have rightly observed the great variance of modern Hinduism from the Vedic one. Several historical factors have contributed to the multifarious variations in Hinduism. At the very beginning the prevalence of anti-Vedic philosophies, paralleling prevalent, did have a bearing. For instance, the Charvakas, known as the anti-supernaturalists and secularists of the time gave no credence to the Vedas at all. In the 6th and 5th century BC, Jain and Buddhist movements turned a great number of away from a Brahmanism that had greatly degenerated into an oppressive or overly demanding form of Hindu-dom. These sects were soon labeled as *nastik* (unbelieving ones) by the mainstream Brahmins. However, the protests did have some transformatory effects on Hinduism that was beginning to distinguish itself from the new mega movements. Aryan deities began to gain prominence. There were philosophical developments as well along the line with various schools of Vedic philosophy beginning to emerge. Temple Hinduism only appeared quite later on in history as various myths also got woven around these as more rivers and natural objects got sacralized. Avatara theology gained prominence as Vaishnaism (cult of Vishnu) and Shaivism (cult of Shiva) became more popular. The era of Muslim invasions also had their impact in giving rise to various syncretistic and monotheistic movements. In the modern period, interaction with Christian thought played a significant role in the emergence of neo-Hinduism as propounded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Mahatma Gandhi. British evangelicalism strongly countered several social evils

like Sati (widow burning), child marriage, and caste system, giving rise to an era of reformation. At the same time, there were protests against the devaluing of Hinduism. People like Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati tried to revive in Hindus pride for the Vedic religion. Among the Brahmo Samajis, the excitement about Vedic monotheism continued for a while until a delegation sent to Benares to study the Upanishads found out that the Upanishads did not actually teach monotheism, but non-dualism. Several syncretistic movements emerged. Some fundamentalist and cultural movements also arose. In modern times, popular Hinduism is powerfully influenced by temple culture and various guru movements. However, a comparison of practices and beliefs now with the religion of the Vedas will reveal a significant amount of departure of the present form from the ancient one. Rebirth fiction and daily astrology continue to assume modern outlook on movies, news channels, and Television serials. However, there are anti-superstition movements as well.

At the present moment, scholars agree that Hinduism is no longer a single religion anymore. It is a motley of sometimes mutually contradictory beliefs and practices. In recent times, a Hindu theological forum criticized and tried to ban the popular worship of Shirdi Sai Baba from the temples. It only provoked nation-wide protest. The forum voiced the argument that Shirdi Sai Baba had a Muslim heritage and he is not a deity of the Vedic times; but, the protest countered saying Hinduism is open to worship of anything—tree, river, planets—so, what’s wrong in worshipping Shirdi. Thus, while there are some who wish to assume an authoritative stance, their authority is not accepted by all. Evidently, popular Hinduism doesn’t practically accept Vedic Hinduism as the seal of religion; in fact, very few Hindus even know what the

Vedas say. Popular Hinduism is more about family and social rituals, festivals, temple worship, and cultic following.