

The Origins of Hinduism



Connect to What You Know In an earlier chapter, you learned how Egypt battled the Hittites. The Hittites belonged to a group of peoples who all spoke dialects of a language called Indo-European. Scholars believe that the Indo-Europeans may have originally come from Central Asia.

Aryans Move Into India

▼ **KEY QUESTION** Who were the Aryans?

Most Indo-Europeans were nomads. They lived in family groups, or clans, and herded cattle, sheep, and goats. They also were warriors who rode horse-driven chariots. They fought with long bows and arrows and with bronze axes.

The Indo-European Migrations Around 2000 B.C., something drove the Indo-Europeans from their homeland in a wave of migrations. Historians do not know if a drought, a plague, or an invasion made them leave. Different groups moved to different regions. The Hittites went to Southwest Asia, and many other Indo-Europeans settled in parts of Europe.

▲ **Shiva** One of the most important deities of Hinduism is Shiva. This statue shows him dancing on the demon of ignorance.

Hindu Kush This mountain range runs along the northwest border of the Indian subcontinent. **What obstacles might the Indo-Europeans have encountered in migrating to India?** ▼



[Click here](#) to learn more about Aryan migrations into India @ClassZone.com

The Aryan Migrations In about 1500 B.C., the **Aryans** (AIR•ee•uhnz), a group of Indo-Europeans, are believed to have migrated to the Indian subcontinent. In contrast to the city-dwelling Harappans, the Aryans were herders who lived in simple houses. They spoke an Indo-European language called Sanskrit.

Did Aryan warriors in chariots conquer the walled cities and force the Harappans to flee south? For years, history books told that story. But new research suggests a different tale. Two hundred years before the Aryans arrived, Harappan cities lay in ruins. This destruction may have been the result of earthquakes and floods.

SUMMARIZE Identify the Aryans.

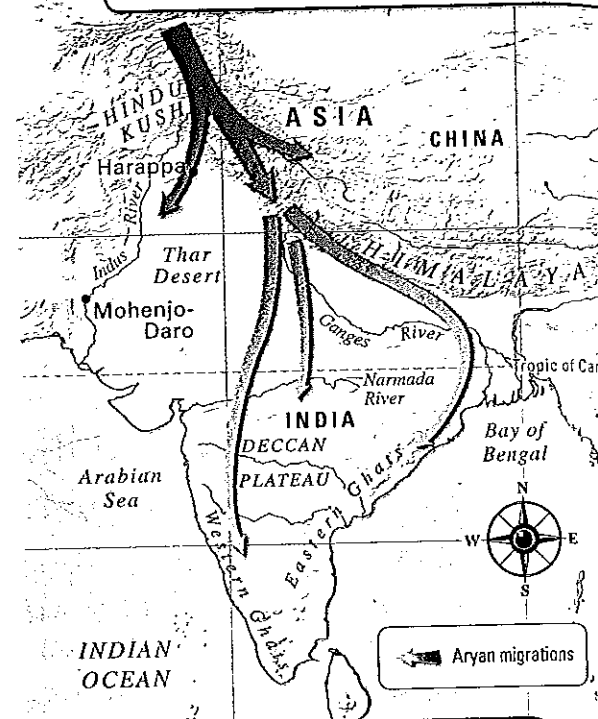
Changes to Indian Life

KEY QUESTION How was Aryan society organized?

The Aryans entered India gradually. They practiced a religion that appealed to many Dravidians—the people living in India when they arrived. As a result, Aryan religion and language spread. In turn, the Dravidians taught the Aryans about city life. Because of these interactions, India developed a complex, blended culture.

Social Structure Aryan society was organized into classes: warriors, priests, and commoners. As Indian society grew more complex, these classes developed into what was later called the caste system. A **caste** is a social class that a person belongs to by birth. These castes became associated with different jobs. Broadly, those groups are organized into four categories. The Brahmans were priests, scholars, and teachers. The Ksatriya were rulers, nobles, and warriors. The Vaisya were bankers, farmers, and merchants. The Sudra were artisans and laborers.

Centuries later, another group developed that was considered below all other groups. This group was called the untouchables. They did the jobs no one else wanted, such as disposing of dead bodies.



CONNECT Geography & History

Movement What geographic feature slowed the Aryans' move into India?

Aryan Beliefs and Brahmanism The early religion of the Aryans is now called **Brahmanism**, after the name of the Aryan priests, or Brahmins. The Aryans worshiped many nature deities. The Brahmins made sacrifices to those deities by offering animals to a sacred fire. Over time, the ceremonies became more and more complex. Some lasted for days—or even months. The rituals of the Aryan religion and many hymns to their deities are found in ancient Sanskrit sacred texts called the Vedas. The Vedas are four collections of prayers and instructions for rituals. The most important of the collections is the Rig Veda.

As time passed, Indians began to question how the world came into being. These questions led to changes in the religious ideas of the time. One change was the increasingly widespread belief that all deities were really the expression of one deity.

Later, Indians wrote about their ancient history in such works as the *Mahabharata* (MAH•huh•BAH•ruh•tuh)—an epic poem that retells many legends. The *Bhagavad Gita* (BAH•guh•vahd GEE•tuh) is part of the *Mahabharata*. (See the Primary Source from the *Bhagavad Gita* on the next page.)

▲ **CATEGORIZE** Describe the Aryan social structure.

COMPARING Languages

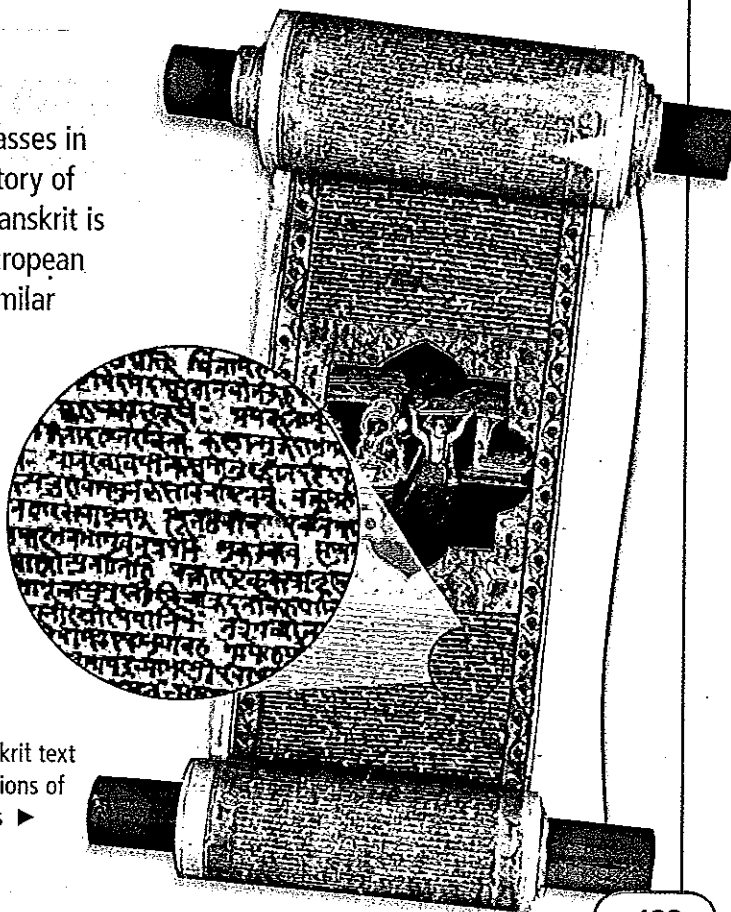
Sanskrit Sanskrit has been used by the educated classes in India for thousands of years. It is important in the history of India because it is the language of the sacred texts. Sanskrit is part of a major group of languages called the Indo-European family. Languages from the same family often have similar words for basic things.

English	father	mother	two	mouse
Sanskrit	pitar	matar	dva	mooshak
Greek	patros	matros	duo	mus
Latin	pater	mater	duo	mus
Spanish	padre	madre	dos	raton
German	vater	mutter	zwei	maus

CRITICAL THINKING

Compare Which word do you think is most alike in all of these Indo-European languages?

Scroll Sanskrit text with illustrations of Hindu stories ▶



Primary Source

Background The *Bhagavad Gita* tells the story of a warrior, Prince Arjuna. A great war is about to begin. When he looks at the enemy army, Arjuna sees many friends and relatives. He does not want to fight.

With Arjuna is his chariot driver, Krishna. In reality, Krishna (shown at right) is the deity Vishnu in human form. In this excerpt, Krishna tells Arjuna that he must do his duty.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

What arguments does Krishna use to convince Arjuna that the outcome of the battle is not important?

» from the *Bhagavad Gita*

Translated by Ranchor Prime

Do not hesitate in your sacred duty as a warrior.
For a soldier nothing is more sacred than the
fight for a just cause. . . .

If you do not take up this just fight,
you will fail in your duty and
your honor will be lost. . . .

If you die in battle you will
enter heaven.

If you win you will enjoy
the earth. . . .

Therefore rise and fight with
determination.

Fight for the sake of fighting.

Look equally on happiness
and distress, gain and
loss, victory and defeat.

In this way you will not incur sin.



Hinduism: The Religion of India

▼ **KEY QUESTION** How did the religion of Hinduism develop?

The *Bhagavad Gita* is an important sacred text of Hinduism. **Hinduism** is the modern name for the major religion of India, which developed from Brahmanism.

Many Deities Hindus worship many deities. Although they believe in many deities, Hindus also recognize one supreme God or life force. Hindus consider the other deities to be parts of the one universal God. The three most important of the other deities are Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the protector; and Shiva, the destroyer. (Shiva destroys the world so that it can be created anew.)

Many Lives Hindus believe in **reincarnation**, which means that each person has many lives. What a person does in each life determines what he or she will be in the next life, according to a belief called **karma**. In Hinduism, this is the belief that the consequences of a person's actions in this life determine his or her fate in the next life.

Reincarnation creates a repeating cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. The cycle ends only when a person achieves a mystical union with God. To achieve that, a person must come to realize that his or her soul and God's soul are one.

Many Paths to God Hindus believe they connect with God by following their own individual path. Part of that path concerns one's job, which is linked to the caste system. Devout Hindus must faithfully carry out their assigned duties in life.

Hindus have a choice of spiritual practices to grow closer to God. Two of these are also popular with many non-Hindus. Meditation is the practice of making the mind calm. Yoga is a complex practice that includes exercise, breathing techniques, and diet. In the next section, you will learn about other important religions in India.



▲ **Hindu Temple**
Shown is the entrance to the Sachiya Mata Temple complex in northwest India.

▲ **MAKE GENERALIZATIONS** Describe the development of Hinduism.

2 Section Assessment

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Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of

Aryans	Brahmanism	reincarnation
caste	Hinduism	karma

Use Your Reading Notes

2. Summarize

 Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

How did Hinduism grow out of the beliefs of Brahmanism?

The Origins of Hinduism
The Aryans migrated ...
Aryan culture changed India by ...
The main characteristics of Hinduism are ...

Key Ideas

- How did the Aryan culture differ from Harappan culture?
- What was the social structure of the Aryan caste system?
- How does karma relate to reincarnation?

Critical Thinking

- Find Main Ideas** What changed the long-held theory that Aryans drove out the Harappan people?
- Draw Conclusions** What values of a warrior culture does the passage from the *Bhagavad Gita* express?

Activity

Internet Activity Use the Internet to learn about Hindu customs concerning one of these topics: the Ganges River, cows, funerals, diet. Present your findings to the class in an oral presentation.

INTERNET KEYWORDS: *Hinduism, Ganges*