

Hinduism

- The **world's most ancient** living religion
 - o Most confined to India
 - o Some presence in Sri Lanka
 - o Other countries
- Approx. 800 million Hindus
 - o Probably the 3rd largest religion

What do you do to become Hindu?

How do you become Hindu?

- One **MUST** be born as Hindu **AND** into a caste
 - o **Implications:** in wider sense a culture and way of life as opposed to religion in a narrower sense (religion = culture)
 - o Considered the way of life which includes: religious thinking, ceremonies, worship, prayers, rituals, and cultural traditions
- How can this be explained?

Origins of Hinduism

- There is **NO** such word as "Hindu" in the sacred books of Hinduism.
 - o Hindu was derived from the word "Sindhu", meaning "Indus Valley"
- When Iranians (Persians) came to India, they called the native peoples "Hindus"
- Greeks, upon learning of them from the Iranians, called them "Indos" rather "Indos" from which we have the word "Indian"
- Thus, Hinduism is the way of life, thinking, customs, rites, rituals, etc. of the people of India
- **Sanskrit:** ancient language of Hindu

Dravidians

- Original inhabitants of India
- **Monhanjo-Dar and Harappa (underground cities)**
 - o Grid-like patterns, brick houses, running water, sewage system; people are shorter, no cheek bones, darker
- Peaceful agricultural people
- Little known about religion, probably assimilated by Aryans
 - o **Fertility cults / phallus of Shiva** in later times

Aryans

- Came from Asia Minor (Turkey and Greece)
- Through Khyber Pass; conquered Indus Valley
- People of India today are product of Dravidians and Aryan

The Religion of the Aryans

- **Dyaus Pitr, Indra (God of God)**
 - o God of Rain, parallel to Greek God Zeus
- **Varuna (natural order)**
 - o Keeps natural and physical order (rita) intact, parallel to the Roman God Ouranos (God of Nature)
- **Rudra and Marut**
 - o Winds and storms, respectively (92°F)
- **Angi**
 - o God of Fire; most worshiped and cherished God
- **Soma**
 - o God of Drink, by which one can gain immortality (amarat)

Gods are placed into three realms:

1. Celestial
 2. Atmospheric
 3. Terrestrial
- Akash = ether
 - 3.3 million Gods

Hindu Scriptures

- **Sacred Books**
 1. Vedas (written c. 1500 BCE)
 2. Upanishads (written c. 500 BCE)
 3. Epic Literature: Mahabharata (Bhagavad Gita) and Ramayana (written c. 100 CE)
 4. Rishis

The Vedas

- Vedas means “Knowledge”
- There are **four**:
 1. Rig-Veda
 2. Yajur-Veda
 3. Sama-Veda
 4. Atharva-Veda

Rig-Veda

- “Rig” means praise. Rig-Veda contains the praise of Gods (devas)
- 1028 in number (hymns in the praise of Gods)
- Aryans placed themselves into three upper castes and Dravidians into lowest
 - o Based on Varna (meaning color, specifically skin color)
- In Rig-Veda, Brahman says:

- “I created Brahmins from my mouth, Chaitryas from my arms, Vaishyas from my thighs, and Shudras from my feet.”
- Economic class division part of religion

Caste in Rig-Veda

1. **Brahmin:** Priestly class, religious authority
2. **Chaitrya:** Rulers & kings, defend country
3. **Vaishya:** tradesmen & farmers, serve people
4. **Shudras:** manual laborers, also include:
 - Parayas (untouchable)
 - Chandlas (illegitimate children)

Yajur-Veda

- Contains hymns to be recited during sacrificial ceremony
- Instructions on how to carry out rituals

Sama-Veda

- Contains hymns to be chanted with appropriate music
- **Anisha:** respect for life

Atharva-Veda

- Contains spells against demons, protection from sickness, snakes, etc.
- Emphasizes house worship, how priest should visit home, help carry out religious ceremonies
 - He should also act as a medicine man

The Upanishads

- “To sit under tree with Guru, Swami, and Sadhu”
- Written c. 500 BCE
- 128 books or chapters
- Written in prose and poetry
- By different people, at different times
- Emphasize meditations, fasting, silence, avoidance of sex, etc.
- Written in reaction to Vedas
 - Reject priestly class
 - Don't give importance to too many Gods, rituals, and sacrifices
 - Hinduism had become too ritualistic