

## Hinduism

- ▣ Hinduism is the oldest religion which dated back more than 3000 years.
- ▣ It worships many gods. Yet it also adheres to the view that there is only one God, called Brahman.
  - All other divinities are aspects of the one absolute and unknowable Brahman.

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## Hinduism

- ▣ It believes in the transmigration of souls or reincarnation
- ▣ All living things are part of the same essence.
- ▣ The *karman* is the law of cause and effect.
- ▣ The goal of the individual is to escape this cycle of birth and rebirth so that the individual soul (*atman*) becomes one with Brahman.

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## Caste System

- ▣ The caste system of India in its most ancient period was divided in four classes :
  - priests (Brahmins),
  - warriors,
  - merchants,
  - and servants.
- ▣ But there is actually more than thousands of sub-castes.

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## Origins

- ▣ It is known for certain that there was, from about 2300 to 1500 BC, a highly developed civilisation in the Indus Valley.
- ▣ Around 1500 BC the Indus Valley was invaded by an Indo-European people called Aryans who imposed a new form of religion.

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## Aryan Religion

- ▣ The Aryan religion is a religion of the household, of veneration for ancestors.
- ▣ The Aryans had numerous gods.
- ▣ The complex ceremony of the Aryans involved ritual sacrifice of animals.
- ▣ Hymns were composed for these rituals called the Vedas.

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## The Vedas

- ▣ Sometime between 1500 and 1200 BC, the Rig Veda was composed. It is the oldest religious scripture in the world.
- ▣ The Rig Veda is a collection of 1,028 hymns to the gods.
- ▣ Three other collections the Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda were added later.

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## Scriptures

- Between 800 and 600 BC a body of prose writings called the Brahmanas was attached to the Vedas.
- Between 600 and 300BC, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads were added.
- The Upanishads represent the beginnings of philosophy in India and develop the concept of a single supreme being Brahman.

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## From 700 BC to AD 800

- The belief in reincarnation was firmly established.
- The doctrine of reverence for life is called *ahimsa*.
- At this same time, the primary older gods of the Vedas named Brahma, Indra, Agni, and Varuna were slowly displaced by newer deities primarily Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti.

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## Two Great Literary works

- The Mahabharata or Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty is a mass of legendary material about the struggles for power between two families.
  - It contains the famous literary works the Bhagavadgita (The Lord's Song).
- The Ramayana relates the life of Prince Rama and his adventures.

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## Other collections of literature

- The Puranas (*ca* 10th century AD) became the scriptures of the common man. Their main purpose was glorifying the gods Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma.
  - The most popular is the Bhagavata-Purana on the early life of Krishna.
- The Tantras relate the story of the Mother Goddess Shakti.

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## From AD 800 to 1800

- During this period, Hinduism divides into many philosophical schools.
- Sankara was the chief exponent of the Vedanta school of philosophy. He taught a doctrine called monism.
- Ramanuja believed that God, the soul, and matter are three separate realities.

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## Vishnu, Shiva, and Shakti

- Vishnu is the protector and the preserver of the world, his worship is called Vaisnavism.
- Shiva is both destroyer and restorer, his worship is called Shivaism.
- Shakti is the Mother Goddess. She can be either beneficial or fierce manifested sometime as Parvati or sometime as Kali.

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