

Hindu India

Aryans

Coming from north of the Caspian and Black Seas, Aryans invaded through the Hindu Kush mountains into the Indus River Valley and Northern India @ 1500 B.C.

- Developed new civilization that spread throughout South Asia
- Eventually developed written form of language. Priests collected hymns, legends, poems and religious rituals into holy books called "Vedas"

Social Structure (Caste System)

Complex social structure has its roots in the Vedas. Society was broken down into four main social classes called varnas. People have a social rank they are born into and that rank would never change.

- **Brahmans:** Priests who study and teach the Vedas. Perform religious ceremonies to please gods and ensure the welfare of the people
- **Kshatriyas:** Warriors and rulers who may study the Vedas, but cannot teach them. Their duty is to lead the government and head the army.
- **Vaisyas:** Common people who tended herds, traded, farmed, made and sold products.
- **Sudras:** Unskilled laborers and servants who served the upper classes.
- **Pariahs:** People who live outside the caste system. They perform all unclean work. They live outside villages and are shunned by most others.

In time, each varna will become subdivided into smaller groups called **jati** based on occupation. All groups lived in the same area and had own rules for diet, marriage and social customs. Groups did not mix socially.

Each group has duties (**dharma**) for each male member of the varna. Members must adhere to their duties strictly. "Better to do one's own duty badly, than to do someone else's duty well." Dharma is a sort of blueprint for appropriate actions and lifestyle.

Beliefs and practices evolved into the religion of Hinduism.

Hinduism

Polytheistic religion based on the beliefs and practices with roots in the Vedas and other Indian epics including the Upanishads.

- **Upanishads** tell of a universal spirit present within all life. All living things have souls and are, therefore, sacred. People must protect animals, humans and all other living things (**ahimsa**).
- All souls are part of the one eternal spirit called the Brahman Nerguna. To know true freedom, a soul must separate itself from the material world and unite with Brahman Nerguna.
- Fasting and yoga help people achieve a state of unity with Brahman Nerguna.
- Souls are reincarnated many time before they are unified with Brahman Nerguna.
- **Karma** dictates that how a person lives in this life will determine the form that the person takes in the next life. Souls can move up or down the social caste according to how a person fulfills his or her dharma.
- The ultimate aim is moksha or release from reincarnation.

Religions was the basis of daily life. Duty was placed above all else and beliefs about reincarnation influenced daily behavior.