

Lesson 2 Origins and Beliefs of Hinduism

Lesson Summary

What Are the Roots of Hinduism?

The Indo-Aryans passed down the Vedas, their religious texts. These texts described rituals that people were to follow. Members of the priest caste, Brahmins, studied the Vedas. They were the only ones who could perform the rituals. Over time, the Vedic religion developed into Hinduism. Thinkers and teachers known as **gurus** attempted to find and teach the answers to moral questions. Their writings, the Upanishads, became holy writings for Hindus. Later, the epic poems the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* became important religious texts. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a section of the *Mahabharata* that deals with key Hindu beliefs.

Hindu Beliefs About God

Although Hindus have many different practices, Hinduism has certain basic beliefs. One is that there is a universal consciousness, or God, known as **Brahman**. Hindus worship many deities, or Gods and Goddesses. However, all deities are forms of Brahman. Hindus also believe that every person has a soul that is a form of Brahman.

Hindu Beliefs About Life

Hinduism teaches that when people die, most undergo **reincarnation**. That means that their soul is reborn in a new body. **Karma** determines how someone will be reborn. Karma is the effect of a person's actions in this and previous lives.

Hindus believe in four basic goals in life. The first is **dharma**, a person's duty. Following dharma brings good karma. The second goal is earning a livelihood with dignity. The third goal is seeking pleasure. The final goal is **moksha**, or freedom from reincarnation. The paths to moksha include knowledge, work, devotion, or meditation.

What Was the Impact of Hinduism?

Hinduism is flexible in its beliefs and practices. That encouraged its growth in India. Traders carried the religion to other lands, such as Southeast Asia. South Asians who moved overseas also helped to spread the religion. Hindu traditions remain very important in Indian life. The religion's openness to other religions helped shaped the Indian government's guarantee of religious freedom.