

## Explore More—Brahmanism and Early Hinduism

**Directions:** Listen to your teacher talk about the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism in India. You also will learn how these beliefs and practices evolved into early Hinduism. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

### Brahmanism

The Aryans worshiped nature gods, which represented such things as rain, the ocean, and the sun. Their most important gods were Shiva, Indra, Varuna, and Surya. Indra was both the god of war and the storm god. Sacrifice to the gods was an important part of the Aryan religion, which we call Brahmanism. The priests, called Brahmins, were responsible for conducting the religious rituals correctly. If they failed to do so, the Aryans believed their gods would not answer their prayers. Then there might be floods, famine, disease, or other natural disasters. People paid the Brahmins to make these sacrifices and to conduct the rituals. Over time, the Brahmins came up with more and more rules about the sacrifices and rituals. Brahmins also taught the idea of an afterlife.

### Early Hinduism

Over hundreds of years, the Aryans' ideas of Brahmanism blended with the ideas of the people already living in the Indus Valley. These ideas formed a set of beliefs and practices known as Hinduism. Like the Aryans, Hindus (people who follow Hinduism) believed that people were born into a particular social class, or caste. They also believed in an afterlife. Unlike Aryans, however, Hindus believed in reincarnation. This meant that Hindus believed people in lower castes were being punished for sins they had committed in earlier lives. Hindus believed that if people accepted their position in life and lived correctly, they would be reborn in a higher caste in their next life. Hindus believed in many different gods, but the chief god was Brahman. The other gods were the different faces of Brahman. For example, Shiva was the face of Brahman the destroyer. Hindus believed Brahman's major powers were to create, preserve, and destroy.



## YOUR TURN!

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. What were the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism?

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2. How did these beliefs and practices evolve into early Hinduism?

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### Questions for further discussion:

- What would you like to know more about in terms of Brahmanism and early Hinduism? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- How does the combination of religious ideas and events in the Indus Valley explain the emergence of new patterns in India?
- Think about the central beliefs, practices, and issues related to Brahmanism during the Aryan Age (1500-500 B.C.). Discuss how these relate to other religious ideas you have learned about. Place the people and events of these religions in a matrix of time and place.