

Vedic Brahmanism and Its Offshoots

Buddhism (Buddha) Followed by Hindūism (*Kṛṣṇā*)

The religion of the [Vedic period](#) (also known as Vedism or Vedic Brahmanism or, in a context of Indian antiquity, simply Brahmanism^[1]) is a historical predecessor of [Hinduism](#).^[2] Its [liturgy](#) is reflected in the [Mantra](#) portion of the four [Vedas](#), which are compiled in [Sanskrit](#). The religious practices centered on a [clergy](#) administering [rites](#) that often involved [sacrifices](#). This mode of worship is largely unchanged today within Hinduism; however, only a small fraction of conservative [Shrautins](#) continue the tradition of oral recitation of hymns learned solely through the oral tradition.

Texts dating to the Vedic period, composed in [Vedic Sanskrit](#), are mainly the four [Vedic Samhitas](#), but the [Brahmanas](#), [Aranyakas](#) and some of the older [Upanishads](#) ([Brhadāranyaka](#), [Chāndogya](#), [Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana](#)) are also placed in this period. The Vedas record the [liturgy](#) connected with the rituals and sacrifices performed by the 16 or 17 shrauta priests and the [purohitas](#). According to traditional views, the hymns of the [Rigveda](#) and other Vedic hymns were divinely revealed to the [rishis](#), who were considered to be seers or "hearers" ([shruti](#) means "what is heard") of the Veda, rather than "authors". In addition the Vedas are said to be "apaurashaya", a Sanskrit word meaning uncreated by man and which further reveals their eternal non-changing status.

The mode of worship was worship of the elements like fire and rivers, worship of heroic gods like [Indra](#), [chanting of hymns](#) and performance of sacrifices. The [priests](#) performed

the solemn rituals for the noblemen (Kshatriya) and some wealthy [Vaishyas](#). People prayed for abundance of children, rain, cattle (wealth), long life and an afterlife in the heavenly world of the ancestors. This mode of worship has been preserved even today in [Hinduism](#), which involves recitations from the [Vedas](#) by a purohita (priest), for prosperity, wealth and general well-being. However, the primacy of Vedic deities has been seconded to the deities of [Puranic](#) literature.

Elements of Vedic religion reach back to a [Proto-Indo-Iranian religion](#) and an earlier [Proto-Indo-European religion](#). The Vedic period is held to have ended around [500 BC](#), Vedic religion gradually metamorphosing into the various schools of [Hinduism](#), which further evolved into [Puranic Hinduism](#).^{[\[citation needed\]](#)} Vedic religion also influenced [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#).^{[\[citation needed\]](#)} However aspects of the historical Vedic religion survived in corners of the Indian subcontinent, such as [Kerala](#) where the [Nambudiri](#) Brahmins continue the ancient Sruta rituals, which are considered extinct in all other parts.

Contents

[\[hide\]](#)

- [1 Rituals](#)
- [2 Pantheon](#)
- [3 Monistic tendencies](#)
- [4 Post-Vedic religions](#)
- [5 Notes](#)
- [6 See also](#)

[\[edit\]](#) Rituals

Main articles: [Yajurveda](#) and [yajna](#)



A [shruta](#) yajna being performed. ^{[[dubious](#) – [discuss](#)]}

Specific rituals and sacrifices of the Vedic religion include, among others:

- The [Soma](#) tradition, frequently referred to in the [Rigveda](#) and descended from a common [Indo-Iranian](#) practice.
- [Fire rituals](#):
 - The [Agnihotra](#) or oblation to [Agni](#), a sun charm,
 - The [Agnicayana](#), the sophisticated ritual of piling the [fire altar](#).
- The [Agnistoma](#) or [Soma](#) sacrifice
- The New and Full Moon as well as the Seasonal (Cāturmāsya) sacrifices
- The royal consecration (Rajasuya) sacrifice
- The [Ashvamedha](#) or [horse](#) sacrifice
- The [Purushamedha](#) or sacrifice of a man, imitating that of the cosmic Purusha, cf. [Purusha Sukta](#) as well as, in its Shrauta form, the Ashvamedha.
- The rituals referred to in the [Atharvaveda](#) are concerned with medicine and healing practices, as well as black and white [magic](#).

The [Ashvamedha](#) (horse sacrifice) has parallels in the [2nd millennium BC](#) Sintashta and [Andronovo culture](#) as well as in Rome (October horse), medieval Ireland, and beyond in

Central and East Asia. In India it was allegedly continued until the 4th and even the 18th century CE (Jaya Singh at Jaipur). The practice of vegetarianism may already have arisen in late Vedic times. Although in the Rigveda, the cow's description as *aghnya* (that which should not be killed) may refer to poetry,^[3] it may be reflective of some of the social practices, as were other practices like rituals and deity worship. Incipient change to contemporary vegetarianism is seen as early as the late Brahmanas and [Upanishads](#) and may have continued under the influence of [Jainism](#) and [Buddhism](#). Buddhism, according to some, emerged out of a cultural strand distinct from Vedic thought.^[4]

The Hindu rites of [cremation](#) are seen since the Rigvedic period; while they are attested from early times in the [Cemetery H culture](#), there is a late Rigvedic reference in [RV 10.15.14](#), invoking forefathers "both cremated (*agnidagdhá-*) and uncremated (*ánagnidagdha-*)".

[\[edit\]](#) Pantheon

Main article: [Rigvedic deities](#)

The Vedic pantheon, similar to its [Greek](#), [Slavic](#) or [Germanic](#) counterparts, comprises clans of anthropomorphic deities as well as deified natural phenomena, and like the Germanic [Vanir](#) and [Aesir](#) it knows two classes of gods, [Devas](#) and [Asuras](#). The Devas ([Mitra](#), [Varuna](#), [Aryaman](#), [Bhaga](#), [Amsa](#), etc.) are deities of cosmic and social order, from the universe and kingdoms down to the individual. The [Rigveda](#) is a collection of hymns to various deities, most notably heroic [Indra](#), [Agni](#) the sacrificial fire and messenger of the gods, and [Soma](#), the deified sacred drink of the Indo-Iranians. Also prominent is [Varuna](#) (often paired with Mitra) and the group of "All-gods", the [Vishvadevas](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Monistic tendencies

In the view of some, the [Rigveda](#), in its youngest books (books 1 and 10) contains hymns for [monistic](#) thought that, however, need to be interpreted in the context of the individual hymns, where the 'monistic' trend is not visible. Often quoted are the isolated [padas](#) 1.164.46,

*Indraṃ mitraṃ varuṇamagnimāhuratho divyaḥ sa
suparṇo gharutmān,
ekaṃ sad viprā bahudhā vadantyaagniṃ yamaṃ
mātariśvānamāhuḥ*

"They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutmān. To what is One, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan."(trans. [Griffith](#))

[10.129](#) and 10.130, dealing with a creator deity, especially verse 10.129.7:

*iyám vísr̥ṣṭiḥ yátaḥ ābabhūva / yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná
/ yáḥ asya ádhyakṣaḥ paramé vyóman / sáḥ aṅgá veda
yádi vā ná véda*

"He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, / Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not." (trans. Griffith)

Ékam sāt in 1.164.46c means "being one". Such quotes and concepts received emphasis in classical [Hinduism](#), from the time of [Adi Shankara](#) at the latest, and they receive emphasis in contemporary Hinduism from monotheistic sects like [Arya Samaj](#) and some forms of Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

[\[edit\]](#) Post-Vedic religions

Vedic religion gradually evolved into [Vedanta](#), which is regarded by some as the primary institution of [Hinduism](#). [Vedanta](#) considers itself the 'essence' of the Vedas. The Vedic pantheon was interpreted by a unitary view of the universe with [Brahman](#) seen as immanent and transcendent, since the Middle Upanishads also in personal forms of the deity as [Ishvara](#), [Bhagavan](#), or [Paramatma](#). There are also conservative schools which continue portions of the historical Vedic religion largely unchanged until today (see [Śrauta](#), [Nambudiri](#)).

During the formative centuries of [Vedanta](#), traditions that opposed [Vedanta](#) and which supported the same, emerged. These were the [nastika](#) and [astika](#) respectively.

- [Hinduism](#) is an umbrella term for [astika](#) traditions in India (see [History of Hinduism](#)).
 - [Puranas](#), [Sanskrit epics](#)^[5]
 - the classical schools of [Hindu philosophy](#)
 - [Shaivism](#)
 - [Vaishnavism](#)
 - [Bhakti](#)
 - [Shrauta](#) traditions, maintaining much of the original form of the Vedic religion.

Vedic Brahmanism of Iron Age India is believed by some to have co-existed, at least in eastern North India, and closely interacted with the non-Vedic ([nastika](#)) [Shramana](#) traditions.^{[6][7][8][9]} These were not direct outgrowths of Vedism, but movements with mutual influences with Brahmanical traditions.^[6] Following are the religions that evolved out of the Sramana tradition:

- [Jainism](#), traditionally from the 9-8th century BCE during [Parsva](#)'s time. There are Jaina references to 22 pre-historic [Tirthankaras](#). In this view, Jainism peaked at the

time of [Mahavira](#) (traditionally put in the 6th Century BCE).

- [Buddhism](#), (traditionally put) from ca. 500 BC; [declined](#) in India over the 5th to 12th centuries AD in favour of Puranic Hinduism.

[\[edit\]](#) Notes

1. [^] The [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) of 2005 uses all of "Vedism", "Vedic Brahmanism" and "Brahmanism", but reserves "Vedism" for the earliest stage, predating the Brahmana period, and defines "Brahmanism" as *"religion of ancient India that evolved out of Vedism. It takes its name both from the predominant position of its priestly class, the Brahmans, and from the increasing speculation about, and importance given to, Brahman, the supreme power."*
2. [^] Stephanie W. Jamison and Michael Witzel in Arvind Sharma, editor, *The Study of Hinduism*. University of South Carolina Press, 2003, page 65: "... to call this period Vedic Hinduism is a contradiction in terms since Vedic religion is very different from what we generally call Hindu religion - at least as much as Old Hebrew religion is from medieval and modern Christian religion. However, Vedic religion is treatable as a predecessor of Hinduism."
3. [^] J. Narten, *Acta Orientalia Neerlandica*, Leiden 1971, 120-134
4. [^] Karel Werner, *The Longhaired Sage in The Yogi and the Mystic*. Karel Werner, ed., Curzon Press, 1989, page 34. "Rahurkar speaks of them as belonging to two distinct 'cultural strands' ... Wayman also found evidence for two distinct approaches to the spiritual dimension in ancient India and calls them the traditions of 'truth and silence.' He traces them particularly in the

older Upanishads, in early Buddhism, and in some later literature."

5. [^] [Encyclopedia Britannica](#) s.v. [Hindu philosophy](#): "The great epic [Mahabharata](#) represents the attempt of Vedic Brahmanism to adjust itself to the new circumstances reflected in the process of the aryanization (integration of Aryan beliefs, practices, and institutions) of the various non-Aryan communities."
6. [^] ^a ^b S. Cromwell Crawford, review of L. M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism*, Philosophy East and West (1972): "Alongside Brahmanism was the non-Aryan Shramanic culture with its roots going back to prehistoric times."
7. [^] Y. Masih (2000) In : A Comparative Study of Religions, Motilal Banarsidass Publ : Delhi, [ISBN 8120808150](#) Page 18. "There is no evidence to show that Jainism and Buddhism ever subscribed to vedic sacrifices, vedic deities or caste. They are parallel or native religions of India and have contributed to much to the growth of even classical Hinduism of the present times."
8. [^] Dr. Kalghatgi, T. G. 1988 In: Study of Jainism, Prakrit Bharti Academy, Jaipur
9. [^] P.S. Jaini, (1979), The Jaina Path to Purification, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 169 "Jainas themselves have no memory of a time when they fell within the Vedic fold. Any theory that attempts to link the two traditions, moreover fails to appreciate rather distinctive and very non-vedic character of Jaina cosmology, soul theory, karmic doctrine and atheism"

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic_Brahmanism

Astika (**Sanskrit**: आस्तिक, **IAST**: āstika; "orthodox") and Nastika (नास्तिक, nāstika; "heterodox") are technical terms in **Hinduism** used to classify **philosophical schools** and persons, according to whether they accept the authority of the **Vedas** as supreme revealed scriptures, or not, respectively.^[1] By this definition, **Nyaya**, **Vaisheshika**, **Samkhya**, **Yoga**, **Purva Mimamsa** and **Vedanta** are classified as *astika* schools; and some schools like **Charvaka**, **Jainism** and **Buddhism** are considered *nastika*.^[2] The distinction is similar to the **orthodox/heterodox** distinction in the West.

From: **<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astika>**