Hinduism

Historical Perspectives
The Vedas and the Upanishads
The Pre-Vedic Period: 2600-1700 BCE

- **The Indus Valley Civilization:**
  - Mohenjo-Daro a city of the Indus Valley Civilization built around 2600 B.C.E., located in the Sindh Province of Pakistan. That ancient 5,000-year-old city constitutes the largest of Indus Valley, widely recognized as one of the most important early cities of South Asia and the Indus Valley Civilization. Mohenjo Daro, one of the world's first cities and contemporaneous with ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, has been sometimes referred to as "An Ancient Indus Valley Metropolis."

  Although the beginning of the Indus Valley Civilization predated the founding of Mohenjo-daro, and thousands of villages and towns had been discovered throughout the region occupied by the Indus Valley people, Mohenjo-daro represented the largest, most sophisticated city discovered. As work with the archeological dig progressed, archaeologists believed that they had discovered the key city in the civilization, existing during the flowering of the Indus Valley Civilization from 2600 B.C.E. to 1700 B.C.E. Keys to the foundation of the world’s religions that appeared in the region, including Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, as well as the nations and empires that appeared later, lay within the unearthed city.

- [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mohenjo-daro](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mohenjo-daro)
The Vedic Period: 1700 – 700 BCE

The Aryans & the Collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization

- Around nineteenth century B.C.E. (1900 B.C.E.), signs began to emerge of mounting problems. People started to leave the cities. Those who remained were poorly nourished. By around eighteenth century B.C.E. (1800 B.C.E.), most of the cities were abandoned. In the aftermath of the Indus civilization’s collapse, regional cultures emerged, to varying degrees showing the influence of the Indus civilization. In the formerly great city of Harappa, burials have been found that correspond to a regional culture called the Cemetery H culture. At the same time, the Ochre Colored Pottery culture expands from Rajasthan into the Gangetic Plain.

Two Theories:

- It is in this context of the aftermath of a civilization’s collapse that the Indo-Aryan migration into northern India is discussed. In the early twentieth century, this migration was forwarded in the guise of an "Aryan invasion, and when the civilization was discovered in the 1920s, its collapse at precisely the time of the conjectured invasion was seen as an independent confirmation. In the words of the archaeologist Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler (1890-1976), the Indo-Aryan war god Indra "stands accused" of the destruction. It is however far from certain whether the collapse of the IVC is a result of an Indo-Aryan migration. It seems rather likely that, to the contrary, the Indo-Aryan migration was as a result of the collapse, comparable with the decline of the Roman Empire and the incursions of relatively primitive peoples during the Migrations Period. It could also be argued that, if there was a movement of people from the North, then this migration took place gradually, so that the incoming culture absorbed much of what was already present. If Indra (a male God) was the dominant God of the incoming Aryans, then female aspects of God seem to have been venerated by the people of the Indus Valley, and in the form of Kali or Shakti, Saraswati, Parvati (the strength of the male deities) the feminine was restored to prominence. However, this may not adequately explain why the cities were abandoned. (New World Encyclopedia)
The Vedic Period: 1700 – 700 BCE

- Core Texts:
  - Rig Veda
  - Sama Veda
  - Yajur Veda
  - Atharva Veda
  - Brahmanas
  - Aranyakas
  - Upanishads

- Agni – God of Fire
The Epic Period: 800-200 BCE

- The Mahabharata
  (includes the Bhagavad Gita)
  - Krishna, Arjuna at Kurukshetra, 18–19th century painting

- The Ramayana
  - Rama and Hanuman fighting Ravana, an album painting on paper, c1820
The Period of Philosophic Systems:  
(400 BCE to 500 CE)

This period includes a summary of arguments, commentaries, analyses and answers on prior texts, principally the Vedas. This is the period of the Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga and Mimansa schools of philosophy. Much of the work on the nature of reality, the self and knowledge is done during this time.
Period of Great Commentaries:
(400 BCE to 1700 CE)

- This period includes the work of Shankara, Ramanuja and, Madhva.
- The questions here centered around the relationship between Brahman, humans and the material world.
The Modern Period: 1700 CE -

- Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

- This period, reaching to the present encompasses the works of Gandhi, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan.

- Much of their work is on ethics, politics and justice.
Dominant Features of Hindu Philosophy:

- Practical Character
- Self-Discipline
- Self-Knowledge
- Vision
- Truth
- Religion and Philosophy
- Focus on Self
- Tolerance
- Moral Emphasis
- Karma
- Dharma
- Nonattachment
Vedic Thought: *Rita*

- “...the force of order which correlated the cosmic and the human.” (Hinduism, ed by Louis Renou, Washington Square Press, Inc., New York, 1953)

- “It is *rita* that regulates the functioning of all things, providing the structure and rhythm of existence.” (Koller, p.14)

- “Varuna, sometimes called the King of the Gods, is the divine custodian of *rita*.” (Koller, p.14)
Vedic Thought:
The Creation Hymn in the Rig Veda

- In the beginning there was neither existence nor non-existence.
- There was no atmosphere, no sky and no realm beyond the sky.
- What power was there? Where was that power?
- Who was that power? Was it finite or infinite?
- There was neither death nor immortality.
- There was nothing to distinguish night from day.
- There was no wind or breath, god alone breathed by his own energy.
- In the beginning darkness was swathed in darkness, god was clothed in emptiness.
- Then fire arose within god; and in the fire arose love.
- This was the seed of the soul.
- Sages have found this seed within their hearts;
- They have discovered that it is the bond between existence and non-existence.
- Who really knows what happened? Who can describe it?
- How were things produced? Where was creation born?
- When the universe was created, the one became many.
- Who knows how this occurred?
- Did creation happen at God’s command, or did it happen without his command.
- He looks down upon the creation from the highest heaven.
- Only he knows the answer – or perhaps he does not know.
The Upanishads: A Shift in World Views

Vedic Worldview
- Focus on this world
- Primary values: virtue, success and enjoyment
- Key to perfection: ritual
- Emphasis on community
- Prayer is important
- Samsara not mentioned
- Karma not important
- Texts: Vedas, with Brahmanas and Aranyakas
- Emphasis on plurality of existence
- Self refers to this body-mind
- Supported by Mimamsa philosophy

Upanishadic Worldview
- Focus on the other (spiritual) world
- Primary value: liberation (moksha)
- Key to perfection: knowledge
- Emphasis on the individual seeker
- Meditation (yoga) is important
- Samsara seen as a fundamental problem
- Karma is all-important
- Texts: Upanishads
- Emphasis on unity of existence
- Self refers to the Atman that is Brahman
- Supported by Vedanta Philosophy

(Koller p.17)
Brahman: Ultimate Reality

“Invisible, incomprehensible, without genealogy, colorless, without eye or ear, without hands or feet, unending, pervading all and omnipresent, that is the unchangeable one whom the wise regard as the source of all beings.” (Mundaka Upanishad I.1.6 – Koller p.18)
Atman: the Indwelling Self

“The self which is free from evil, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger and thirst, whose desire is the real, whose thoughts are true, that Self should be sought, that Self one should desire to understand. He who has realized and understands that Self, he obtains all worlds and desires.” (Chandogya Upanishad, VIII.7.1 – Koller p.19)
Prajapati Teaches Indra
Tat Tvam Asi

- Uddalaka teaches his son Shvetaketu:

- “That which is the subtle essence (Brahman), this whole world has for its Self (Atman). That is the true. That is the Atman. That art thou (tat tvam asi), Shvetaketu.” (Chandogya Upanishad, VI.8, Koller p.22)