Introduction. An agricultural economy and its accompanying Neolithic communities emerged on the Indian subcontinent some time after 7000 B.C.E. Eventually some of the Neolithic villages further devolved into urban societies. The earliest such society was Dravidian and was known as the Harappan society. It flourished along the Indus River valley in the third millennium B.C.E. Coinciding with the decline of the Harappan society, large numbers of Indo-European migrants were moving into India from central Asia beginning around 1900 B.C.E. These peoples, known as Aryans, brought with them cultural traditions sharply different from the earlier societies. After a period of turmoil the Aryan and Dravidian cultures merged to generate a distinctive Indian society characterized by

- Regional states with kingship (rajas) as the most common form of government.
- The caste system, a complex social class system that served as a vehicle for imparting a powerful sense of group identity, as a stabilizing influence in Indian society and as a foundation for the religious belief system.
- A distinctive set or religious beliefs encompassing the doctrines of samsara and karma along with the notion of a universal soul, or Brahman. A rich literary religious tradition based on centuries of oral transmission that included such classics as the Vedas and the Upanishads.
- A rich literary religious tradition based on centuries of oral transmission that included such classics as the Vedas and the Upanishads.

A. Origins of the caste system

1. Caste and varna
   a. The meaning of caste: hereditary, unchangeable social classes
   b. The Sanskrit word varna, "color," refers to social classes

2. Social distinctions in the late Vedic Age
   a. Four main varnas, recognized after 1000 B.C.E.: brahmins (priests), kshatriyas (warriors and aristocrats), vaishyas (cultivators, artisans, and merchants), shudras (landless peasants and serfs)
   b. Later the category of the untouchables was added

3. Subcaste, or jati
   a. Represented more elaborate scheme of social classification; developed after the sixth century B.C.E.
   b. Jati, or subcastes, were determined by occupations
   c. Elaborate rules of jati life: eating, communication, behavior

4. In caste system, social mobility difficult but still possible
   a. Usually a result of group, not individual, effort
   b. Foreign peoples could find a place in society of the castes

B. Development of patriarchal society

1. Patriarchal and patrilineal society

2. The Lawbook of Manu
   a. Prepared by an anonymous sage, first century B.C.E.
   b. Dealt with moral behavior and social relationships
   c. Advised men to treat women with honor and respect
d. Subjected women to the control and guidance of men

e. Women's duties: to bear children and maintain the household

3. Sati, social custom in which widow throws self on funeral pyre

II. Religion in the Vedic Age

A. Aryan religion
   1. Aryan gods
      a. War god, Indra
      b. Gods of the sun, the sky, the moon, fire, health, disease
      c. God Varuna: ethical concern, cosmic order
   2. Ritual sacrifices were more important than ethics
      a. Priests were specialists of the ritual sacrifices
      b. Ritual sacrifices for rewards from the divine power
      c. Sacrifices, chants, soma
   3. Spirituality underwent a shift after about 800 B.C.E.
      a. Thoughtful individuals retreated to forests as hermits
      b. Dravidian notions of transmigration and reincarnation were adapted

B. The blending of Aryan and Dravidian values
   1. The Upanishads, works of religious teachings (800–400 B.C.E.)
      a. The religious forums: dialogues between disciples and sages
      b. Brahman: the universal soul
      c. Highest goal: to escape reincarnation and join with Brahman
      d. Samsara: an individual soul was born many times
      e. Karma: specific incarnations that a soul experienced
      f. Moksha: permanent liberation from physical incarnation
   2. Religion and Vedic society
      a. Samsara and karma reinforced caste and social hierarchy
      b. Upanishads were also spiritual and intellectual contemplations
      c. Taught to observe high ethical standards: discourage greed, envy, vice
      d. Respect for all living things, a vegetarian diet