Beliefs and Belonging

Trace how religious ideas and social divisions developed in ancient South Asia.

SS24.7.12a "Summarize how Hinduism as well as a caste system emerged from different religious beliefs and schools of philosophy."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details showing how Hindu traditions grew, circle two details showing how caste took shape, and number the two opposing views of birth-based rank 1 and 2.

Many Paths, Changing Roles

1. Imagine a village where families gather for a fire ritual. Starting around 1500 BCE, Indo-Aryan speakers moved into South Asia, where they composed hymns and practiced rituals. The Vedas praised gods such as Agni, linked to fire, and described offerings made by priests. These traditions met practices already present in the region, although we cannot trace every later custom to a single source. Over many centuries, people combined and reshaped beliefs and worship in ways that helped form Hinduism, a diverse group of traditions rather than a religion founded by one person.

2. Later thinkers asked whether rituals were enough to understand life. In the Upanishads, texts composed over many centuries, some taught that the self, or atman, is linked to a deeper reality called brahman. Ideas about karma, the belief that actions have consequences across lives, and rebirth offered ways to explain life beyond one lifetime. Some seekers aimed for moksha, release from rebirth, through knowledge or disciplined practice. Other Hindu paths emphasized devotion to a god. These schools and paths did not erase Vedic rituals; together, they made Hindu traditions more varied.

3. Social divisions also took shape over time. A Vedic hymn pictured four varnas, or broad social groups, emerging from a cosmic being. Later writers linked varna to duties and ranked the groups, placing priests above many workers. In daily life, thousands of jatis, or birth-based communities, often shaped marriage and work. These social rules were not created by one text, and they differed by place and time. Some people used ideas about karma to defend rank, while others, including devotional poets, challenged the claim that birth determined spiritual worth.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Vedic practices and contact with other traditions help Hinduism emerge?

2. How did ideas in the Upanishads and other Hindu paths add to earlier Vedic practices?

3. How did varna and jati each shape the caste system over time?

4. How could religious ideas both support and challenge caste ranking?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four sentences for a museum visitor using streams and a river as a comparison for how Hindu traditions formed and caste developed. Include Vedic beliefs, later ideas or paths, varna and jati, and a way people challenged birth-based rank.

ANSWER KEY

Beliefs and Belonging

GRADE 7 · SS24.7.12a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details showing how Hindu traditions grew, circle two details showing how caste took shape, and number the two opposing views of birth-based rank 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Vedic practices and contact with other traditions help Hinduism emerge?	**Vedic hymns and rituals met practices already present in South Asia. People combined and reshaped these traditions over many centuries.**
2	How did ideas in the Upanishads and other Hindu paths add to earlier Vedic practices?	**They offered ideas about the self, karma, rebirth, and release from rebirth, while some paths emphasized devotion. These ideas added to Vedic rituals rather than replacing them.**
3	How did varna and jati each shape the caste system over time?	**Varna described broad social groups that later writers ranked and linked to duties. Birth-based jatis often shaped people's marriage and work.**
4	How could religious ideas both support and challenge caste ranking?	**Some people used ideas about karma to defend rank, while devotional poets challenged the claim that birth determined spiritual worth.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Vedic hymns and practices already present in South Asia flowed together like streams feeding a river of Hindu traditions. Later ideas about karma and rebirth, along with paths of devotion, added new currents. As social divisions developed, varna named broad ranked groups, while jati shaped rules about marriage and work. Yet this river did not flow in one direction, since some people used karma to defend birth-based rank while devotional poets challenged it.

Accept accurate summaries in students' own words. Responses should distinguish broad varnas from birth-based jatis and avoid treating Hinduism or caste as the creation of one person or text.