By Brahmanism is meant the complex religion and social system which grew out of the polytheistic nature-worship of the ancient Aryan conquerors of northern India, and came, with the spread of their dominion, to be extended over the whole country, maintaining itself, not without profound modifications, down to the present day.

Our knowledge of Brahmanism in its earlier stages is derived from its primitive sacred books, originally oral compositions, belonging to the period between 1500-400 B.C.

First of all, there are four Vedas (veda means wisdom) dating from 1500 to 800 B.C., and consisting of a collection of ancient hymns (riks),the so-called Rig-Veda, in praise of the many gods; of the Sama-veda, compiled from parts of the Rig-Veda as a song-service for the soma-sacrifice; of the Yajur-Veda, a liturgy composed partly of ancient hymns and partly of other prayers and benedictions to be used in the various forms of sacrifice; and of the Atharva-Veda, a collection of popular exorcisms and magical incantations largely inherited from primitive Aryan days.

A Brief history on the development of Vedas

1. Rig Veda

The hymns of the Rig Veda are considered the oldest and most important of the Vedas, having been composed between 1500 BC to 1000 BC. More than a thousand hymns are organized into ten mandalas or circles of which the second through the seventh are the oldest and the tenth is the most recent.

Essentially the Rig Veda is dominated by hymns praising the Aryan gods for giving them victories and wealth plundered from the local Dasas through warfare. The Aryans apparently used their advances in weaponry and skill in fighting to conquer the agricultural and tribal peoples of the fading Harappan culture. Numerous hymns refer to the use of horses and chariots with spokes which must have given their warriors a tremendous advantage. Spears, bows, arrows, and iron weapons are also mentioned. As a nomadic and pastoral culture glorifying war, they established a new social structure of patriarchal families dominated by warriors and, eventually with the power of the Vedas themselves, by priests also.

The Rig Veda does mention assemblies, but these were probably of the warrior elite, which may have had some controlling influence on the kings and the tribal priest called a purohita. In general the hymns of the Rig Veda praise the gods and ask them for worldly benefits such as wealth, health, long life, protection, and victory over the Dasa peoples.

2. Sama Veda

The Sama Veda contains the melodies or music for the chants used from the Rig Veda for the sacrifices; almost all of its written verses are traceable to the Rig Veda, mostly the eighth and ninth books and most to Indra, Agni, or Soma. These are considered the origin of Indian music and probably stimulated great artistry to make the sacrifices worthwhile to their patrons who supported the priests. The Sama Veda helped to train the musicians and functioned as a hymnal for the religious rites.

The animal sacrifices did not use the Sama chants, but they were used extensively in agricultural rites and in the soma rituals for which the plant with inebriating and hallucinogenic qualities was imported from the mountains to the heartland of India. By this time the priests were specializing in different parts of the sacrifices as professional musicians and singers increased. As the sacrifices became more complex, the priestly class used them to enhance their role in the society. Many considered this musical portion the most important of the Vedas.

3. Yajur Veda

Though also following many of the hymns of the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda deviates more from the original text in its collection of the ritual formulas for the priests to use in the sacrifices, which is what yajna means. It explains how to construct the altars for new and full-moon sacrifices and other ceremonies.

By this time (10th century BC and after) the Aryan conquest has proceeded from the northwest and Punjab to cover northern India, especially the Ganges valley. The caste system was in place, and as the warriors settled down to ruling over an agricultural society, the role of the priests and their ceremonies gained influence and justified the Aryan ways to the native workers, who labored for the farmers, merchants, craftsmen, who in turn were governed by their kings and priests. Land and wealth were accumulated in the hands of a few ruling families, and with food scarce the indigenous people were enslaved or had to sell their labor cheap to the ruling classes.

By instituting more elaborate sacrifices for their wealthy patrons, the priests could grow both in numbers and wealth as well. The famous horse sacrifice was not celebrated often but was used by a king to show his lordship over potential adversaries, who were invited to acknowledge this over lordship in the ritual. The parts of the horse symbolize different aspects of the universe so that tremendous power is invoked. The complicated and obscure rituals were presided over by the priests - the three symbols of the lotus leaf, the frog (for rain), and the golden man (for the sun) representing the Aryan dominance over the land and waters of India and the natural powers that sustain agriculture.

The Soma sacrifice was the most important and could last up to twelve years. Since the Soma plant was imported from distant mountains, it had to be purchased. A ritual drama re-enacted this business and aggressive Aryan history by showing the buyer snatching back the calf, which was paid for the soma plant, after the transaction occurs. The soma plant was then placed in a cart and welcomed as an honored guest and king at the sacrifice. Animals were slain and cut up in the rites before their meat was eaten. After various offerings and other ceremonies the soma juice is poured and toasted to different gods, and finally the text lists the sacrificial fees, usually goats, cows, gold, clothes, and food.

Coronation ceremonies supported the inauguration of kings. The priests tried to keep themselves above the warrior caste though by praising soma as king of the Brahmins. Waters were drawn from various rivers to sprinkle on the king and indicate the area of his kingdom, and he strode in each direction to signify his sovereignty. The king was anointed by the royal priest, giving some water to his son, the designated prince, and ritually enacting a raid against a kinsman's cattle, once again affirming their history of conquest. The booty was taken and divided into three parts for the priest, those who drank, and the original owner. A ritual dice game was played, which the king was allowed to win. The king then rode out in his chariot and was publicly worshiped as a divine ruler.

Agricultural rites were common and regular, and chariot races were no doubt popular at some of the festivals. Thus we noted that in an agricultural society more labor was needed and could produce surplus food. The Purusha sacrifice recognized 184 professional crafts and guilds. (The Purusha (person) sacrifice symbolized human sacrifice, which may refer back to the time when a hunting and pastoral people did not allow their enemies to live because of the shortage of food but later on transfer them to be labors.

4. Atharva Veda

The latest and fourth Veda is in a different category. For a long time many referred to only three Vedas, by which complete ceremonies could be conducted with the Rg hotri reciting, the Sama udgatri singing, and the Yajur adhvaryu performing the ritual. Even later the Atharvan Brahmin's part was often performed unaccompanied by the other three priests. Also much of it draws from the customs and beliefs of pre-Aryan or pre-Vedic India.

The Atharva Veda is much longer than the Sama and Yajur and only about a sixth of it is from the ig Veda. The Atharva Veda is primarily magical spells and incantations. The line between prayer and magic and between white and black magic is usually drawn by ethical considerations. The Bheshajani are for healing and cures using herbs to treat fever, leprosy, jaundice, dropsy, and other diseases. The Aryans looked down on doctors and medicine, probably because the natives were more skilled in these than they. Other more positive spells were for successful childbirth, romance, fecundity, virility, etc.

The negative or bewitching spells were called Abhichara and attempted to cause diseases or harm to enemies; often they were aimed at serpents and demons.

In addition to physicians the Vedic Aryans also held in contempt Atharvan astrologers as well as magic, but from this came not only astrology but also the beginning of Ayurvedic medicine. Like most ancient peoples, they also believed that the main cause of disease was evil spirits, possession, or what we would call psychological factors. The magical elements, particularly the Abhichara, and the subjects of healing, herbs, and cooking, which were mostly in the woman's domain, made the Atharva Veda obnoxious to many Vedic priests.

According to the Atharva Veda (5:17:8-9), a Brahmin could take a wife from the husband of any other caste simply by seizing her hand. Book 18 contains only funeral verses. There are coronation rites for kings, though the prayer is that the people will choose the king, usually already selected by heredity or the council. Philosophy and abstraction are creeping in, as there are two hymns to the deity of time, and kama (love, desire, pleasure) is praised as "the first seed of the mind" that generated heaven. (Atharva Veda 19:52)

B Brahmanas

Next in order are the “Brahmanas” composed about 1000-700 B.C.. They are a series of verbose written in prose as sacerdotal commentaries on the four Vedas to guide the practices of the sacrifices and give explanations often mythical and fanciful for these customs and rites and found in each of the four Vedas, composed expressly for the use of the Brahmins, or priests.

Any overview of Brahmanism must illustrate that these extensive ritual and theological discourses served as guides for the priests (Brahmins) in performing rituals and sacrifices, and as explanations of the nature of Brahman, Brahma, and the beliefs intrinsic to Brahmanism as a religion.

Another primary concept in Brahmanism is karma-samsara and rebirth. This belief is that individual souls exist from beginningless time, passing on from one form of existence to another in continuous rebirth (reincarnation). The conditions or circumstances of each new existence are determined by the merits or demerits of the actions (karma) that have taken place in previous lives. The aim is then to liberate the soul from bondage to the suffering of this existence and to attainment of bliss by way of knowledge and through the ritual sacrifices explained in the Brahmanas.

After Brahmanas, they are followed (700-600 B.C.) by the Aranyakas and Upanishads, concerned chiefly with pantheistic speculations on the nature of deity and the end of man; and lastly, by the Sutras (600-400 B.C.), which are compendious guides to the proper observance of the rites and customs.

Early Brahmanism （1500 BC - 1000 BC）

The religion of the Vedic period proper was comparatively simple. It consisted in the worship of many deities, great and small, the personified forces of nature.

There were no temples in this early period. On a small mound of earth or of stones the offering was made to the gods, often by the head of the family, but in the more important and complicated sacrifices by the priest, or Brahmin, in union with the householder.

The object of every sacrifice was to supply strengthening food to the gods and to secure blessings in return. Animal victims were at this period in daily use. First in importance was the horse, then the ox or cow, the sheep, and the goat. Offerings of clarified butter, rice, wheat, and other kinds of grain were also very common. But dearer to the gods than any of these gifts, and rivaling the horse-sacrifice in solemnity, was the offering of the inebriating juice of the Soma-plant, the so-called Soma-sacrifice. Hymns of praise and petitions, chiefly for the good things of life, children, health, wealth, and success in undertakings, accompanied these sacrificial offerings.

Devotion to the Pitris (Fathers), or dead relatives, was also a prominent element in their religion. Although the Pitris mounted to the heavenly abode of bliss, their happiness was not altogether independent of the acts of devotion shown them by the living. It could be greatly increased by offerings of Soma, rice, and water; for like the gods they were thought to have bodies of air-like texture, and to enjoy the subtile essence of food. Hence, the surviving children felt it a sacred duty to make feast-offerings, called Sraddhas, at stated times to their departed Pitris. In return for these acts of filial piety, the grateful Pitris protected them from harm and promoted their welfare. Lower forms of nature-worship also obtained. The cow was held in reverence. Worship was given to trees and serpents. Formulae abounded for healing the diseased, driving off demons, and averting evil omens. Witchcraft was dreaded, and recourse to ordeals was common for the detection of guilt.

Popular Brahmanism （1000 BC - 500 BC）

In the period that saw the production of the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the Upanishads, the Vedic religion underwent a twofold change. On the practical side there was an exuberant growth of religious rites and of social restrictions and duties, while on the theoretical side, Vedic belief in the efficacy of personal deities was subordinated to a pantheistic scheme of salvation. Thus the earlier religion developed on the one hand into popular, exoteric Brahmanism, and on the other hand into priestly, esoteric Brahmanism. The former is reflected in the Brahmanas and the Sutras; the latter in the Upanishads.

Transformation of Brahmanism in later period by the Brahmins

The transformation to popular Brahmanism was largely due to the influence of the Brahmins, or priests. Owing to their excessive fondness for symbolic words and forms, the details of ritual became more and more intricate, some assuming so elaborate a character as to require the services of sixteen priests. The sacrifice partook of the nature of a sacramental rite, the due performance of which was sure to produce the desired end, and thus became an all-important center around which the visible and invisible world revolved. Hence it merited liberal fees to the officiating priests. Still it was not a mere perfunctory rite, for if performed by an unworthy priest it was accounted as both useless and sacrilegious. In keeping with this complicated liturgy was the multitude of prayers and rites which entered into the daily life of both priest and layman. The daily recitation of parts of the Vedas, now venerated as divine revelation, was of first importance, especially for the Brahmins. It was a sacred duty for every individual to recite, morning and evening, the Savitri, a short prayer in honor of the vivifying sun. A scrupulous regard for ceremonial purity, gave rise to an endless succession of purifactory rites, such as baths, sprinkling with water, smearing with ashes or cow-dung, sippings of water, suppressions of breath--all sacramental in character and efficacious for the remission of sin. There is reason to believe that the consciousness of guilt for sin committed was keen and vivid, and that in the performance of these rites, so liable to abuse, a penitential disposition of soul was largely cultivated.

The doctrine of Karma and Rebirth

In popular Brahmanism of this period the idea of retribution for sin was made to embrace the most rigorous and far-reaching consequences, from which, save by timely penance, there was no escape. As every good action was certain of future recompense, so every evil one was destined to bear its fruit of misery in time to come. This was the doctrine of karma (action) with which the new idea of rebirth was closely connected. While the lasting bliss of heaven was still held out to the just, different fates after death were reserved for the wicked, varying, according to the nature and amount of guilt, from long periods of torture in a graded series of hells, to a more or less extensive series of rebirths in the forms of plants, animals, and men. From the grade to which the culprit was condemned, he had to pass by slow transition through the rest of the ascending scale till his rebirth as a man of honorable estate was attained.

This doctrine gave rise to restrictive rules of conduct that bordered on the absurd. Insects, however repulsive and noxious, might not be killed; water might not be drunk till it was first strained, lest minute forms of life be destroyed; carpentry, basket-making, working in leather, and other similar occupations were held in disrepute, because they could not be carried on without a certain loss of animal and plant life. Some zealots went so far as to question the blamelessness of tilling the ground on account of the unavoidable injury done to worms and insects. But on the other hand, the Brahmin ethical teaching in the legitimate sphere of right conduct is remarkably high. Truthfulness, obedience to parents and superiors, temperance, chastity, and almsgiving were strongly inculcated. Though allowing, like other religions of antiquity, polygamy and divorce, it strongly forbade adultery and all forms of unchastity. It also reprobated suicide, abortion, perjury, slander, drunkenness, gambling, oppressive usury, and wanton cruelty to animals. Its aim to soften the hard side of human nature is seen in its many lessons of mildness, charity towards the sick, feeble, and aged, and in its insistence on the duty of forgiving injuries and returning good for evil. Nor did this high standard of right conduct apply simply to external acts. The threefold division of good and bad acts into thought, words, and deeds finds frequent expression in Brahmanic teaching.

Division of Society

Intimately bound up in the religious teaching of Brahmanism was the division of society into rigidly defined castes. In the earlier, Vedic period there had been class distinctions according to which the warrior class (Kshatriyas, or Rajanas) stood first in dignity and importance, next the priestly class (Brahmins), then the farmer class (Vaisyas), and last of all, the servile class of conquered natives (Sudras). With the development of Brahmanism, these four divisions of society became stereotyped into exclusive castes, the highest place of dignity being usurped by the Brahmins. As teachers of the sacred Vedas, and as priests of the all-important sacrifices, they professed to be the very representatives of the gods and the peerage of the human race. No honor was too great for them, and to lay hands on them was a sacrilege. One of their chief sources of power and influence lay in their exclusive privilege to teach the youth of the three upper castes, for education then consisted largely in the acquisition of Vedic lore, which only priests could teach. Thus the three upper castes alone had the right to know the Vedas and to take part in the sacrifices, and Brahmanism, far from being a religion open to all, was exclusively a privilege of birth, from which the despised caste of Sudras was excluded.

Rite of Initiation and Twice Born

The rite of initiation into Brahmanism was conferred on male children only, when they began their studies under a Brahmin teacher, which took place generally in the eighth year of the Brahmin, and in the eleventh and twelfth years for the Kshatriya and the Vaisya respectively. It consisted in the investiture of the sacred cord, a string of white cotton yarn tired together at the ends, and worn like a deacon's stole, suspended on the left shoulder. The investiture was a sort of sacrament in virtue of which the youth was freed from guilt contracted from his parents and became “Dvi-ja, twice-born”, with the right to learn the sacred Vedic texts and to take part in the sacrifices. The period of studentship was not long for members of the warrior and farmer castes, but for the young Brahmin, who had to learn all the Vedas by heart, it consumed nine years or more. During this period, the student was subjected to severe moral discipline. He had to rise before the sun, and was not allow to recline until after sunset. He was denied rich and dainty foods, and what he ate at his two daily meals he had to beg. He was expected to observe the strictest chastity. He was bound to avoid music, dancing, gambling, falsehood, disrespect to superiors and to the aged, covetousness, anger, and injury to animals.

Marriage was held to be a religious duty for every twice-born. It was generally entered upon early in life, not long after the completion of the time of studentship. Like the initiation rite, it was a solemn sacramental ceremony. It was an imperative law that the bride and groom should be of the same caste in the principal marriage; for, as polygamy was tolerated, a man might take one or more secondary wives from the lower castes. For certain grave reasons, the household might repudiate his wife and marry another, but a wife on her part had no corresponding right of divorce. If her husband died, she was expected to remain for the rest of her life in chaste widowhood, if she would be honored on earth, and happy with him in heaven. All knowledge of the Vedic texts was with held from woman, but she had the right to participate with her husband in the sacrifices performed for him by some officiating priest. One important sacrifice remained in his own hands--the morning and evening offering of hot milk, butter, and grain to the fire on the hearth, which was sacred to Agni, and was kept always burning.

Asceticism Varnashramadharma

A strong tendency to asceticism asserted itself in the Brahmanism of this period. It found expression in the fasts preceding the great sacrifices, in the severe penances prescribed for various kinds of sin, in the austere life exacted of the student, in the conjugal abstinence to be observed for the first three days following marriage and on certain specified days of the month, but, above all, in the rigorous life of retirement and privation to which not a few devoted their declining years. An ever increasing number of householders, chiefly Brahmins, when their sons had grown to man's estate, abandoned their homes and spent the rest of their lives as ascetics, living apart from the villages in rude huts, or under the shelter of trees, eating only the simplest kinds of food, which they obtained by begging, and subjecting themselves to extraordinary fasts and mortifications. They were known as Sannyasis, or Yogis, and their severity of life was not so much a penitential life for past offenses as a means of acquiring abundant religious merits and superhuman powers. Coupled with these mortifications was the practice of Yogi (union). They would sit motionless with legs crossed, and, fixing their gaze intently on an object before them, would concentrate their thought on some abstract subject until they lapsed into a trance. In this state they fancied they were united with the deity, and the fruit of these contemplations was the pantheistic view of religion which found expression in the Upanishads, and left a permanent impress on the Brahmin mind.

The Rise of New deity – Pranjapati Lord of Creatures /Brahma

The marked monotheistic tendency in the later Vedic hymns had made itself more and more keenly felt in the higher Brahmin circles till it gave rise to a new deity, a creation of Brahmin priests. This was “Pranjapati, lord of creatures”, omnipotent and supreme, later known as “Brahma, the personal creator” of all things thus looking up to a supreme lord and creator. The gods of the ancient pantheon were not repudiated, but were worshipped still as the various manifestations of Brahma.

Eternality of Brahma

Another Brahmin principle is that every form of conscious individuality, whether human or Divine, implies a union of spirit and matter. And so, outside the small school of thinkers who held matter to be eternal, those who stood for the supreme personal god explained the world of visible things and invisible gods as the emanations of Brahma. They arrived at a personal pantheism. But speculation did not end here. To the prevailing school of dreamy Brahmin ascetics, whose teachings are found in the Upanishads, the ultimate source of all things was not the personal Brahma, but the formless, characterless, unconscious spirit known at Atman (self), or, more commonly Brahma‚ (Brahma‚ is neuter, whereas Brahma, personal god, is masculine.) The heavens and the earth, men and gods, even the personal deity, Brahma, were but transitory emanations of Brahma, destined in time to lose their individuality and be absorbed into the great, all-pervading, impersonal spirit. The manifold external world thus had no real existence. It was Maya, illusion. Brahma‚ alone existed. It alone was eternal, imperishable.

Way of Salvation in Brahmanism

This impersonal pantheism of the Brahmin ascetics led to a new conception of the end of man and of the way of salvation. The old way was to escape rebirths and their attendant misery by storing up merits of good deeds so as to obtain an eternal life of conscious bliss in heaven. This was a mistake. For so long as man was ignorant of his identity with Brahma and did not see that his true end consisted in being absorbed into the impersonal all-god from which he sprang; so long as he set his heart on a merely personal existence, no amount of good works would secure his freedom from rebirth. By virtue of his good deeds he would, indeed, mount to heaven, perhaps win a place among the gods, but after a while his store of merits would give out like oil in a lamp, and he would have to return once more to life to taste in a new birth the bitterness of earthly existence. The only way to escape this misery was through the saving recognition of one's identity with Brahma. As so as one could say from conviction, "I am Brahma," the bonds were broken that held him fast to the illusion of personal immortality and consequently to rebirth. Thus, cultivating, by a mortified life, freedom form all desires, man spent his years in peaceful contemplation till death put an end to the seeming duality and he was absorbed in Brahma‚ like a raindrop in the ocean.

The pantheistic scheme of salvation just described, generally known as the Vedanta teaching, found great favor with the Brahmins and has been maintained as orthodox Brahmin doctrine down to the present day. But it made little progress outside the Brahmin caste. The mass of the people had little interest in an impersonal Brahma‚ who was incapable of hearing their prayers, nor had they any relish for a final end which meant the loss forever of conscious existence. And so, while the priestly ascetic was chiefly concerned with meditation on his identity with Brahma, and with the practice of mortification to secure freedom from all desires, the popular mind was still bent on prayer, sacrifices, and other good works in honor of the Vedic deities. But at the same time, their faith in the efficacy of these traditional gods could not be but weakened by the Brahmin teaching that freedom from rebirth was not to be obtained by acts of worship to personal deities who were powerless to secure even for themselves eternal conscious bliss. The result was popular development of special cults of two of the old gods, now raised to the position of supreme deity, and credited with the power to secure a lasting life of happiness in heaven.

It was in the priestly conception of the supreme personal Brahma that the popular mind found its model for its new deities. Brahma was not a traditional god, and seems never to have been a favorite object of cult with the people.

How the Brahmins consolidated their social position during popular Brahmanism period

The new philosophy of sacrifice transformed the religious outlook of the Vedic Aryans. Firstly, now the spontaneity or simplicity of religious feeling that we find associated with the sacrifice in the age of the Rg Veda is no longer there. The age represented by the Samaveda, Yajurveda and the Brahmanas is an age of forms, concerned more with the externals of religion than its spirit. Symbolic significance is attached even to the smallest details. Secondly, the priests because of being the custodians of the cult of sacrifice now arrogated to themselves such powers in this regard that they claimed that they could also ruin even the patron for whom they officiated by deliberately committing errors. Now the efficacy of the sacrifice depended on the correct pronunciation of the mantras recited, for it was their sound rather than their meaning that was credited with power.

Here, we witness the transformation to popular Brahmanism was largely due to the influence of the Brahmins, or priests. Owing to their excessive fondness for symbolic words and forms, the details of ritual became more and more intricate, some assuming so elaborate a character as to require the services of sixteen priests. The sacrifice partook of the nature of a sacramental rite, the due performance of which was sure to produce the desired end, and thus became an all-important centre around which the visible and invisible world revolved. Hence it merited liberal fees to the officiating priests. Still it was not a mere perfunctory rite, for if performed by an unworthy priest it was accounted as both useless and sacrilegious. In keeping with this complicated liturgy was the multitude of prayers and rites which entered into the daily life of both priest and layman. The daily recitation of parts of the Vedas, now venerated as divine revelation, was of first importance, especially for the Brahmins.

The Brahmin priests enjoy a very important position in the ritual. They are mediators between princes and gods. They propitiate gods with prayers and offerings and thus pleased the gods actually take part, as it were, in the combat of humans and make their favoured party victorious. Sometimes both the combatants pray the same gods for assistance, but the gods help the party whom they favour, and the other party is vanquished. The spiritual idea that he who has God on his side obtains success or victory, thus seems to be present here.

Therefore they are using religion as the most effective means, they begin to evolve a religious philosophy in which sacrifice becomes the most powerful instrument of securing happiness here and hereafters. They turn the simple Vedic sacrifice into a very complicated ritual. This ritual needs specialization, only the Brahmins can perform sacrifices successfully. Thus there are Brahmins who specialized in various aspects of the sacrifice such as making preparation for the sacrificial ceremony, offering of sacrifice, singing songs of praise and so on.

Also in the religious teaching of Brahmanism was the division of society into rigidly defined castes. With the development of Brahmanism, these four divisions of society became stereotyped into exclusive castes, the highest place of dignity being usurped by the Brahmins.

This change is reflected in the alter portion of the Rg Veda, where the origin of the society divided into four classes or caste is explained in Purusa Sukta, it belongs to the 10th mandala of the Rg Veda. The Brahman literatures that follow this Vedic texts depict this change more graphically.

“Brahmins were born from the mouth of Brahma,

Kasitriya was born from his hand,

Vaishya born from his thights and Sudra born from his feet.”

Manusmrti –Law of Manu

The Brahmana literatures that follow this Vedic texts depict this change more graphically. At this stage the rulers were acquiring power and the Brahmins feel threatened with regard to their social position. Hence during this period the Brahmana literature shows the efforts made by the Brahmins to strengthen and stabilized their position at the top rung of the social ladder.

They also allocated themselves the duties which enable them to control even the rulers, i.e., Kings were consecrated by Vedic rites and ruled with the help of the royal priest or Purohito was also supposed to advise the king in peace and protect him in war. The season of dew after the monsoons ended was considered the time for "sacking cities," as ambitious kings came into conflict with each other in wars.

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In addition to the discussions of sacerdotal matters, the *Brahmanas* do contain some stories meant to explain or rationalize their religious practices. Some of these are quite imaginative, though the usual pattern is for the hero to discover a rite to perform or a chant to intone which miraculously solves whatever problem is pressing to give a happy ending.

Conclusion

The Brahmanic religion places an emphasis on the role of society and the individual in maintaining the cosmic Rita. Rita is the proper structure of existence, the right order, in which there is a uniformity and symmetry to all existence, which is strengthened and maintained by strict observance of the proper sacrifices. Later this concept was broadened to include all human activity as having a proper cosmological pattern to follow, known as dharma.

Another primary concept in Brahmanic is karma-samsara and rebirth. This belief is that individual souls exist from beginningless time, passing on from one form of existence to another in continuous rebirth (reincarnation). The conditions or circumstances of each new existence are determined by the merits or demerits of the actions (karma) that have taken place in previous lives. The aim is then to liberate the soul from bondage to the suffering of this existence and to attainment of bliss by way of knowledge and through the ritual sacrifices explained in the Brahmanas.