**Question: Discuss the origin and development of Indian philosophy.**

**Answer:** The term ‘Indian philosophy’ refers to all and any of the several traditions of philosophical thought that originated in the Indian subcontinent, including Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy and Jaina philosophy.

According to tradition, Indian philosophy starts with the Vedic religion. The Vedas were texts that were composed around 2000 BCE. There are four Vedas namely Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, each of which has four parts: mantras (hymns), brahmanas (ritual procedures), aranyakas (meditations for the forest dweller) and Upanishads (philosophical speculations). The Vedic religion was a ritualistic religion. The Vedic rituals were both physical and verbal, and it was essential to perform them accurately to ensure efficacy. The rituals were addressed to natural forces such as the Sun, rain, lightning, wind and so on who were referred to as ‘Devas.’ It was thought that if man performed the sacrificial rituals correctly the devas would reciprocate by performing their respective functions in the most beneficent way. The techniques of these rituals were entrusted with the Brahmins. Other than these ritualistic ideas, the Vedas display a spirit of inquiry into the most fundamental philosophical questions, such as the idea of a unity behind the diversity of the visible world, or the question of the origin of all things.

These ideas were further explored in the Upanishads (composed towards the end of the Vedic period between 1600 BCE to 800 BCE). The Upanishads reflect the urge to seek to understand the nature of the human being through spiritual rather than ritual knowledge. They also contain the first known record of the idea that human beings are reborn again and again into circumstances resulting from their actions in previous lives. But the most important insight of the Upanishads is that one's Atman (the self within each person) is inseparable from the Brahman (the highest and the greatest, the source of all things), and that the realization of this knowledge results in one's release or moksha from continued rebirth. Thus the Upanishads introduce the idea of moksha as the supreme goal of human existence. The Upanishadic ideas gave rise to various philosophical inquiries about the relationship of Brahman to the individual on the one hand and Brahman and the world on the other.

From 600 BCE onwards, there arose many thinkers who did not accept the theories of the Vedas and the Upanishads. They were against animal sacrifice as performed in many Vedic rituals. They were also against the dominance of the higher castes, especially the Brahmin priests. Such considerations led to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism which were founded by Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira respectively in the sixth century BCE. Apart from these two, the materialist school of the Charvakas also arose which propounded that only this world exists, and that there was no future beyond the death of the individual, thus rejecting soul, rebirth, hell, heaven and ultimately God. The views of all these thinkers were based entirely on logic and experience, discarding all spiritual authority and thus were anti-Vedic in nature. They later had significant philosophical debates with the schools developed out of the Vedas and thus contributed immensely to the philosophical development of India.

Next comes what is known as the Sutra period in which both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical strands of thought developed into full-fledged schools of philosophy. Sutras were brief statements of philosophical problems, answers, possible objections and replies to them. They were brief and their meanings were not always clear. This led to commentaries and sub-commentaries being written to elaborate and explain the sutras. These collections served as foundational texts for the various systems of philosophy (darshanas) that arose out of these Sutras. The six Hindu philosophical systems developed during the Sutra period. With the coming of Islam and Christianity, Indian philosophy went into related decline, only to re-emerge in the twentieth century in the form we see it today – a mixture of Western and Indian thought.