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Popular Religions and Multiple Modernities: A Framework for Understanding Current Religious Transformations

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Received: 1 August 2019; Accepted: 22 September 2019; Published: 1 October 2019

Abstract: Popular, ethnic, and folk religions endure in all regions of the planet, but specially in underdeveloped or developing non-Western countries. The main objective of this paper was to propose a framework for understanding this popular religious trend. Although religion in general has previously been linked to multiple modernities, the revitalization of popular religions has not. While Eisenstadt's original theory of multiple modernities has been criticized on several aspects, his interpretative approach is valid provided that the contradictory dynamics of modernizing processes are recognized. The epistemological shift suggested by this article involves recognizing the biases that Western sociology has brought to its analysis of religions. Once we treat modernities as multiple, the specificity of each modernity opens up the spectrum of religious alternatives that flourish in every geo-cultural area. The growing diversity of popular religious expressions in the Global South stems from the fact that they are supported by thousands of believers. Their lived religions spills beyond religious institutions. These popular religiosities are the main sources of religious diversities and religious resistance in the context of multiple modernities. Lived religion and symbolic action allow us a better understanding of the magical-religious expressions of peoples of the world.

Keywords: popular religions; multiple modernities; lived religion; religious diversity

1. Introduction

Popular, ethnic, and rural folk religions endure in all regions of the planet, but specially in underdeveloped or developing non-Western countries. In many places, they are vigorous; this is especially true of urban popular religions in areas undergoing rapid modernization.

Yet the relationship between popular religion and modernization is complex. The renaissances in the major religious traditions—Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.—in various parts of the world have multiple connections to modernization (Hefner 1998; Offutt 2014). This calls for an explanation that goes beyond mere criticism of the classic theories of secularization (Casanova 2006).

In Christianity, we have the emergence and expansion of Pentecostalisms of various kinds (Vijgen and Haak 2018), including the vertiginous diffusion of Catholic Charismatics (Eckolt 2013). Many new Evangelical churches as well as independent cults have accentuated Christian religious diversity, especially in the Global South (Pew Research Center 2011).

African and ethnic religions are growing not only in their lands of origin; they are present now in transcultural contexts (Adogame and Spickard 2010). We observe an increasing number of popular expressions of the Asiatic great religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Shinto). Folk and traditional religions attract growing numbers, although, unlike other popular religions, they are declining slightly as a percentage of a growing population (Pew Research Center 2015a). Popular religious expressions are found in Islamic contexts: in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab countries, and in Asiatic

Islamic; each has singular characteristics. New transnational religious movements (Michel et al. 2017) and revitalized indigenous religions are emerging throughout the globalized world (Parker 2002).

Although they reflect only the surface of this phenomenon, the available statistical data demonstrate a decline in non-believers, and that in the near future, there will be more believers than today, in both raw numbers and proportional to the world population (Johnson and Zurlo 2015; Johnson and Grim 2018; Pew Research Center 2015c). In any case, popular religions and spiritualities are spreading in mass society through the new technologies of communication and information, and through migrations. They are bypassing the established churches and elitist forms of religions.

The main objective of this paper was to propose a new framework for understanding this popular religious trend in the context of multiple modernities. Although religion in general has previously been linked to multiple modernities (Beriain 2014; Hefner 1998; Michel et al. 2017; Offutt 2014; Smith and Vaidyanathan 2011), the revitalization of popular religions has not.

A revised theory of multiple modernities will allow us to comprehend how popular religions are being reinvigorated throughout the world, especially in peripheral modernities. In the first part of this paper, we briefly develop a conceptual and methodological approach. In the second part, we review the popular religions phenomenon in order to advance a critical analysis of the multiple modernities theory. In the light of these sections, we sketch a conceptual framework for a revised theory and draw some conclusions.

2. Conceptual Scope and Methodology

Our main interest is in the diverse popular religious expressions that can be found, in the most varied circumstances, in the Global South. This diversity is not a matter of the proliferation of churches, denominations, sects or movements, religious leaders, and/or new prophets. More important is the fact that these entities are supported by thousands of faithful, whose religiosity spills beyond such formal religious institutions. This popular religiosity is the main source of religious diversities in the context of current multiple modernities.

My approach adopts an unconventional perspective that outlines a non-western-centric approach to popular religions. For this reason, we must begin with some conceptual clarifications.

First, we are referring here to religious diversity and not to religious pluralism. Indeed, our focus is on the analysis of the real diversity of religious expressions and not merely on religions' institutional forms. Pluralism should not be confused with diversity, as Beckford and Richardson (2007) have stated. The normative, regulatory, and political perspective of pluralism is very different from the descriptive level of empirical and phenomenal diversity. The challenges of religious diversity in terms of pluralism in democratic construction are enormous (Levine 2009).

Second, we start from the fact that popular religions in the Global South are being reinvigorated and are not declining (Pew Research Center 2015a). Therefore, we leave aside the long-standing controversy about the theory of secularization (Bruce 2011; Casanova 2006; Martin 2005; Yamane 1997). My focus is centered in popular religions, the spiritual and religious expressions of the masses, the powerless, the simple people who in a thousand ways express their faith in superior or superhuman realities and who maintain a special bond with these realities that is reflected in their daily lives and in their local communities.

Let us remember that there are, from a theoretical point of view, basically two orientations for the understanding of popular religions. There is the neo-Durkheimian approach that analyzes popular religions' integrative role as a sacred canopy (Berger 1967) that guides, offers meaning, cohesion, and social integration. And there is the neo-Marxist approach (Maduro 1980) that analyzes religion as an ideological factor that contributes, within the framework of social conflicts, to hegemony or counterhegemony in society.

Given the religious dynamics in Latin America over the last forty years (Parker 1993, 2005, 2016), it is relevant to remember that Marx's old slogan about religion being the "opium of the people" (Löwy 2006) stands as a background to the sociological debate about popular religions. Such

controversial affirmation contains a partial truth, not in the sense that the symbolic religious was illusory, but in the literal sense of the opium that is a relief for the suffering:

"Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (Marx 1969, p. 304).

Therefore, with Gramsci (1954, 1972; Nesti 1975) we can affirm that in every expression of popular religion, there is a potential protest against oppression, a sort of a historical form of the "cry of the oppressed", a form of response to dominant society and culture.

In this respect, Byrd (2016) aesthetic-expressive component of religion is more pertinent to understanding popular religious expressions than are its cognitive-instrumental or moral-practical components. This aspect of religion articulates itself in rituals, icons, sacred music, architecture and fine art, as integrated within religious worldviews.

Finally, popular religions are a social product. They are socially constructed by people and communities. It is true that pain, suffering and anguish, love, and hope, have no geopolitical or geocultural boundaries. Yet, they have symbolic (and sometimes very real) borders because forms and semiological codes frame the answers with which cultures, religions, and spiritualities seek to channel those personal and collective feelings. Cultural and religious perceptions and mores are constantly being built into the geographic and geo-cultural landscape so that the landscape itself becomes a series of icons and mnemonics that signal religious identity and collective socio-religious meanings (Harvey 2014).

In this essay, we develop a framework to understand the role played by popular religions in the making and remaking of religions and spiritualities in the contemporary world. We say *framework* rather than *theory* because the phenomenon is complex and evolving. *Our* proposal is to give relevance to a bottom-up perspective: a view from the religious experience of the socially disadvantaged groups and classes and from peripheral regions and continents. This opens a different window than the one usual in the sociology of religion. It produces a set of propositions about contemporary religious evolution that should be considered hypothetical and that should be verified by in-depth examinations of popular religions in multiple sociocultural and historical circumstances.

3. Popular Religions within Multiple Modernities

The growing religious diversity and contemporary evolution of popular religions and spiritualities, mainly in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, reveals new cultural and religious patterns that can only be understood within the context of what has been called 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000, 2003, 2013). However, the theory of multiple modernities has not considered popular religions nor have the abundant studies on popular religions around the world approached this phenomenon in comparative intercontinental and transnational systematic terms.

Religion is a distinctive cultural and institutional element of what Eisenstadt calls multiple modernities. But both Eisenstadt and Berger, in their analysis of religious pluralism in the framework of multiple modernities, do not address popular religions (Eisenstadt 2000, 2003; Berger 2014). These subjects of study are off their radar since their analysis focuses mostly on the social, cultural and mainstream religious phenomena, leaving aside the elite-popular dialectic, or the social classes divide, in such dynamics. Then, to understand our assessment and criticism of the concept of multiple modernities, it is necessary to take a brief comparative look at the phenomenon of worldwide popular religions to appreciate their common features and their differences precisely in the diverse contexts generated by multiple modernities.

Here are two examples of popular religion, taken from recent news. Although by no means exhaustive, they highlight the main issues raised by our subject.

On 8 December 2018, in Chile—a country where the Catholic Church is in a deep crisis of legitimacy because of pedophile clerics—more than one million faithful made a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Lo Vásquez on the route between the country's two megacities: Santiago and Valparaíso. Chile has

only 18 million inhabitants. Many of the pilgrims were young people, replicating their grandparents' devotion to the Virgin Mary. They traveled by bicycles and not on foot, and they organized through the internet and social networks, not through churches. Their religious expression simultaneously demonstrated their religious and ecological commitment to the future.

A few weeks later, on a single day in India, an estimated 30 million Hindus attended the Kumbh Mela, a religious festival in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, where the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers meet. This ritual has become the largest in the world, with as many as 120 million attending during the entire festival period (estimate for 2013). The Hindu tradition says that drops of the nectar of immortality fell into these sacred rivers from an urn, or kumbh, that was being fought over by the gods and demons. Now millions of pilgrims come every three years to pray that the holy waters will emancipate them from the cycle of rebirth (Safi 2019).

Despite the many competing definitions of the term popular religion (Long 2005), there is a common understanding that each world religion comes in both official and popular forms. These forms exist in a dialectical tension with each other, with the popular form sometimes submitting but also sometimes rejecting the official form's authority (Possamai 2015; Vrijhof and Vaardenburg 1979; Nickerson 2008). These forms are intertwined but asymmetric: official religion defines the 'correct' and orthodox way of believing and practicing and controls religious institutions, but popular religion appeals to people's actual religious needs.

Official religion cannot just abolish the popular form, because in doing so it threatens its ties to ordinary people: peasants, workers, urban dwellers, the poor, and the downtrodden. These are the underprivileged, powerless, and subaltern social classes common in all stratified societies, who build all aspects of their culture in tension with the dominant culture (Hall 1981). They do this for religion too. These ordinary people embrace religious expressions—rituals, cults, and beliefs—that express their search for a relationship with the extraordinary (the divine, the supernatural). These expressions may be individual or communitarian, and they typically seek a more direct, effective and affective way to reach the untouchable in their everyday lives. They often involve icons and the human body. They represent a less intellectual and dogmatic type of religiosity than official religion approves.

Beyond their diverse local traditions and their multi-coloured symbolisms, the popular and ethnic religions of Latin America, Africa, and Asia share some common features. These include such things as: an attachment to life, the relevance of health and healing, a perception of evil, ritualistic and semiological symbolisms, the presence of supernatural and extraordinary energies (e.g., miracles), and a more or less accentuated distance from Western thought and rationality. Most popular religions are syncretic forms of cultural and religious traditions that can be hardly recognized if we rest upon a culturally constructed Western category—'religion'—which may not be significant in other cultural and historical contexts (Parker 2010; Stewart and Shaw 1994).

In Latin America, the dominant examples are the various popular Catholicisms, which mingle Indigenous and Iberian Catholic traditions, supplemented by African influences in the Caribbean and Atlantic coasts (Bidegain and Soler 2010; Fitó 2009; Guanche 2008; San Pedro Nieto 2006). The violent or pacific encounter between counterreformation Catholicism, the multiple native religions, and the slave trade, produced various syncretic religions that combined elements of at least two and often three of these traditions (Parker 1993, 2005, 2016; Marzal 2013). The diversity of the "Latin modernity" (the Latin American way of being modern, which has its own logics) is built on this syncretic soil. We can see this in both Pentecostal preaching and in folk-religious ritualism. It is impossible to understand Latin American religiosity without understanding this colonial encounter.

On the other side of the planet, popular religions in Eastern Asia have gained growing attention from scholars in recent decades. At one end of the development spectrum, there is a revitalization of popular religions in modernizing China; on the other end, there is the patent persistence of Japanese popular religiosity despite Japan's high modernity. Though religious statistics emphasize the relative non-religiousness of that region (Pew Research Center 2015b), this view reflects the lack of official religious membership (Hackett et al. 2015). In addition, there are many traditional

East Asian practices that present themselves as philosophies and not religions in the Western sense (Ma and Meng 2011; Yeung 2003; Parker 2018). Indeed, popular religion in China has often been studied under a Western-oriented optic, with magic having a predominant role (Weber 1951).

In modern China, the three teachings—Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism—often interact with each other, so lived religion freely integrates them into many popular and syncretic rituals. These include devotion to the ancestors, pilgrimages, shrines, and shamans (Ma and Meng 2011; Clart 2012). Some scholars emphasize the elements of popular resistance present in such activities (Chau 2005), but that is only part of the picture, even recently. Traditional Japanese popular practices are more integrated into the experience of a great web of being, in which the land, the spirits, and human beings animated the world and the cosmos. It was not something to believe, it was just the way the cosmos was. This is why religious practices in Japan (especially Shinto) are historically not considered "religion" in the western sense (Kisala 2008). The vision of the planet as a living organism that to be cared for with affection and not exploited and plundered is close to the modern perspective on Gaia.

The Indian subcontinent's dedication to the old Dharmic wisdom that there are many paths to God (Chandrasekharendra 2008) matches its long history of religious syncretism and its tolerance for popular manifestations of religion as opposed to the imposition of an orthodoxy from above. Southeast Asia similarly demonstrates a similar openness in both the official religions—Buddhism (Theravada and Mahayana), Islam (Sunnism and Shiism), and Christianity (Protestantism and Catholicism)—and a multitude of 'local' or 'indigenous religions' and traditional belief systems (Sofjan 2016). In Buddhism, for example, this includes a wide range of popular rituals, including the veneration of the Buddha, of other buddhas, of bodhisattvas, and of saints. Popular pilgrimages increase Buddhism's ability to incorporate pre-existing local traditions (Khoon San 2002), as also true with New Year's and harvest festivals (Ghosh 2004).

African religious history is marked by colonialism, and the majority of Africans are now adherents of Christianity or Islam, religions imposed from another cultural context. African people often combine traditional practices with Abrahamic elements (Pew Research Center 2010; Quainoo 2003). African traditional religions are polytheistic and tolerant. They are generally oral rather than scriptural, include belief in a supreme creator, belief in spirits, veneration of the dead, and the use of magic and traditional medicine. Ancestors appear more important on a daily basis than the supreme deity. The role of humanity is generally seen as one of harmonising nature with the supernatural (Asante and Mazana 2009).

Large numbers of Africans actively participate in Christianity or Islam yet also believe in witchcraft, evil spirits, sacrifices to ancestors, traditional religious healers, reincarnation, and other elements of traditional African religions (Pew Research Center 2010). "The gulf that exists between the secular and the sacred in the West does not appear in traditional African religion" (Asante and Mazana 2009, p. xxvii).

The Islamic world is not limited to the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East, it includes relevant expressions in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Given that Islam is organized in a very different way from the Christian tradition; that its principles of submission to Allah applies to all dimensions of life; and that religion and politics are very intertwined (Naso 2018), it is difficult to characterize the popular Islamic religions as we do in the cases of Christianity or Buddhism. The importance of Qur'anic, Sunna, and Sharia prescriptions means that the Muslim grassroots do not have the same ritual autonomy as we find in other universal religions. On the other hand, the lack of a theological authority and an official priesthood, plus the ambiguities of the authority of the ulama (Zaman 2009), make schools, doctrines, orders, and movements within the Uma proliferate (Hassan 2007; Possamai 2009).

Popular Islam (or "folk Islam") is an umbrella term used to describe different forms of Islam that incorporate native folk beliefs and practices. Folk Islam has been described as the Islam of the urban poor, country people, and tribes, in contrast to orthodox or "High" Islam (Gellner 1992). Scholars agree that Sufism and Sufi concepts are often integrated into folk Islam.

But Gellner's theses have been criticized, since there is no evidence of a direct oppositional association between the Sufi orders and the Enlightened Islamic reform elites (such as the Salafi) (van Bruinessen 2009). The mistake, in our opinion, depends on the point of view. Looking at the problem through the Popular religion/Official religion typology, we could say that the orders (Tariqa), sheiks and Sufi saints, and Salafist teachers and ideologues are part of an official religion; folk practices and Sufi mysticism are closer to popular sentiment. Usually these popular religious practices involve a degree of syncretism with local or non-Islamic traditions, which is why they are considered heretical by the religious agents who guard the orthodoxies of the Qur'an, the Sunna and the Hadith (Asante and Mazana 2009). The so-called "superstitions" and devotion to the saints are forbidden by official Islam (Muyahid 2012), yet they continue to be practiced.

Popular forms of Islam have contributed to the confrontation with the West. The Arab and Islamic countries perceive globalization as an attempt to implant Western dominance and as a threat to the preservation of their religious and cultural identity. Although there are different views of globalization and of modernization processes, a large percentage of Muslims see them as an imperialistic way of cultural invasion and an attempt to destroy their heritage and religion (Masud et al. 2009). Modernization of the state, the law and the economy are seen as a way to secularise the nation and thus as a way of betraying Islam. This idea nourishes the Salafi elites and the jihadist vanguards, but it must be noted that this idea is deeply rooted among simple believers (van Bruinessen 2009, p. 135).

In short, the popular religions landscape is complex. It varies from region to region, from nation to nation, from continent to continent. Some religious expressions are closer to traditional practices, others constitute highly modern and even post-modern religious styles. In Latin America, the classical folk religion (traditional, peasant, rural, illiterate, and pre-modern) is no longer predominant, although it can be found in many African and Asian countries. Yet it is indisputable that there are many vital popular religions in the heart of the megacity, in the urban core of multiple modernities (Parker 2018).

We have personally found similarities between the popular urban religious landscapes of various megacities: Beijing, Buenos Aires, Tokyo-Yokohama, Bangkok, Cairo, Lima, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro (Barrera 2012), Mexico City (Suárez 2013), and Johannesburg (Wilhelm-Solomon et al. 2016). Van der Veer (2015) has assembled scholars' observations in various cities of Asia: Singapore, Mumbai, Karachi, Seoul, Hanoi, Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Jakarta, Bangkok, and Metro Manila. His conclusions are clear, although modernizing urban elites in these places are trying to promote secular nationalisms, the presence and revival "of some crucial aspects of religion keep its ultimate triumph at bay" (Van der Veer 2015, p. 14).

4. Multiple Modernities and Its Contradictions

Classical modernization theory argued that modernity resulted in the secularization of societies. The theory of multiple modernities allows us to criticize this theory's Eurocentric assumptions and to understand the sociohistorical, ideological and institutional contexts that have given rise to different forms of modernity in different parts of the world. These modernities have different interactions with religious systems and events, only some of which lead to religious decline. Instead, we should expect a diverse process of 'multiple secularizations' (Martin 2005; Smith and Vaidyanathan 2011). This approach argues that secularization must be understood as a complex process and not a lineal one. Globalization leaves footprints and affects its own religious evolution, so societies experiencing differing modernizing processes will have different religious paths (Oro and Steil 1997).

Therefore, secularization is better understood as a more or less radical and systemic transformation of the preceding religious field than as a gradual and inevitable decrease in the relevance and significance of the religious dimension in society. This transformation can lead, in a few cases, to an increase in non-belief or classical atheism. But on other occasions, especially in developing multiple modernities, it leads to the increase of alternative spiritualities not linked to instituted religions.

While Eisenstadt's original theory of multiple modernities has been criticized on several grounds, each of these argued for even more complexity, and thus a less uniform religious development.

Schmidt (2006), for example, argued that Eisenstadt's original theory failed to pay sufficient attention to economics. Kamali (2012) argued that although Eisenstadt considers center-periphery dynamics, he does not delve into colonial and neocolonial conflicts. In addition, we should point out that Eisenstadt does not consider inequalities and negative global flows (Ritzer and Dean 2019), nor currently increasing social conflicts (Touraine 1995, 2006). Indeed, the uneven development of capitalism with its dialectics of north/south and center/periphery, together with the hegemonic globalization, raises the resistance of local or 'glocal' identities (Castells 1998, 2012). All these dynamics affect religious evolution and its expressions in different geo-cultural areas of the contemporary world.

Consequently, and as we look at the evidence provided by Norris and Inglehart (2002, 2011) about the global religious dynamics, including the global north and the global south, we can presume that each religious/civilizational area of the planet has its own specific cultural and religious dynamics.

> These facts make us realize that in reality what happens is that the specific religious evolutions depend much on the regional (or continental) history, culture and religious dynamics. Depending on the type of analysis employed, one can identify at least nine great religious/civilizational or geo-cultural areas in the world today: Western Europe; Eurasia (Central Eastern-Europe and North-Center Asia); North America; Latin America and the Caribbean; Middle East-Arabia; Indo-Asia; South-East and East Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa; Oceania. The hypothesis that these geo-cultural-religious areas of the world correspond to different processes of modernizations can be sustained—mutatis mutandis—in historical, cultural and statistical terms. We can presume that in each religious/civilizatory area we will find specific religious field dynamics driven by the main world religious traditions historically spread through the region for centuries and the peculiar arrangements between religions and society in each case through the modernization processes from the eighteenth century onwards, including colonization and neo-colonization processes and the attempts toward decolonization in the nineteenth and twentieth century. (Parker 2016, p. 42)

Globalization has triggered many processes, including scientific-technological advances, revolutionized communications, and a new world geopolitics. New technologies of information and communication have in their turn shifted the way that people believe and express their faith. Some of these persons and groups wish to be religious outside the control of an organized religious institution. For them, the Internet has become the ideal medium for communicating religious beliefs and practices (Dawson and Cowan 2004; Possamai 2012). In this social context, syncretism, popular tradition, and religion *à la carte* are among the most common forms of religious participation.

The globalized economy produces socioeconomic inequalities (Piketty 2014) and new geopolitics. Violence remains in many peripherical societies and even in the emerging economies that have experienced rapid growth, such as Brazil, South Africa, India, China. There is also the post-Cold War multiplication of conflicts and local wars at the subnational or regional level in different parts of the world, especially in the Middle East and Africa, but also in Asia and Latin America (Cohen-Tanugi 2008). Increased waves of migrations, democratic instability, pollution, and climate change all affect the social and existential conditions of everyday life. These nurture new spiritual and faith searches. New social movements have gained the scene: feminist, sexual diversity, environmentalists, etc. Institutional crises in many churches—not just Roman Catholicism—also fuel religious change. New popular religious themes emerge: healing, gender, body and corporeality, subjectivation, materiality and spirituality, migrations, territoriality, deinstitutionalization, interculturality, cyberspace.

Berger (2014) was one of the most enthusiastic theorists in the effort to connect the revitalization of religion with multiple modernities. Reversing his previous theoretical framework (Berger 1967), which saw the 'sacred canopy' as a force for social integration and its decline as a source of secularization, Berger came to recognize the existence of multiple modernities and even of the difference between central and peripheral modernities. Yet faced with the alternatives of fundamentalism or relativism, he emphasized individual freedom in the choice of faith. This liberal approach exalted the

religious pluralism of the US, which he regarded as more successful than other societies. In contrast, Spickard (2017a) has shown how the religious pluralism in the USA is problematic in the face of increasing economic inequality, a socioeconomic split between the elites and the population, and shifts in the nature of the religious field.

Still, Eisenstadt's and Berger's different approaches to multiple modernities and their consequences for religion open a fruitful path to interpret what happens with popular religions in today's world. If we add to this a greater appreciation of these modernities' structural contradictions than either author provides, we can understand even more deeply the relationship between societies and their religions. In many cases, for example, popular religions can be seen as a counterculture to the modernization processes, but at the same time as a dialectical product of them. In such cases, they are part of the specific transformations and contradictory modernizations taking place in society.

5. Globalization Leaves Footprints and Affects Its Own Religious Evolution, so Societies Experiencing Differing Modernizing Processes Will Have Different Religious Paths

The reflexive turn proposed here aims to counter-balance those classical sociological theory of religious phenomenon that lack a comprehensive perspective. This involves recognizing the biases that Western sociology has brought to its analysis of religions and correcting them by the addition of non-Western approaches. Several authors are already moving in this same direction (McGuire 2008; Possamai 2009; De la Torre 2013; Mallimaci 2017; Spickard 2017b).

Religious diversity is not recent; it has existed for thousands of years, but it has not always been visible. Globalization and the concept of multiple modernities make it possible to see old and new forms of diversity. Therefore, we are not just observing the growth of the empirical and historical diversification of religious alternatives. Instead, we are initiating a new social perception, an epistemological shift in what we understand by diversity and pluralism and their role in contemporary religious transformations.

Each civilization has its own history, which shapes its way of seeing. No single civilization can give us an adequate conceptual framework for understanding the diverse socio-historical-religious experiences of all others. The classic theory of secularization that arose in Europe is as exceptional as that continent's religious history and culture (Davie 2006). It cannot be simply applied to understand what happens in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Arab countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, or other regions.

From this point of view, even the diverse expressions of cults, beliefs, mysticisms and spiritualities within Christian backgrounds around the world cannot simply be reduced to manifestations of 'generic' Christianity—especially as seen from a Euro-Christian-centric epistemology or theology.

Once we treat modernities as multiple, the specificity of each modernity opens up the spectrum of religious alternatives that flourish in every geo-cultural area, including non-religious alternatives. This allows us to explain, for example, that European diversity historically includes, since the emergence of the Modern State, an important segment of non-practicing believers, non-believers, and atheists. This secularizing trend has been diverted in recent decades by the migratory flows that have affected the much greater presence of Muslim believers and to a lesser extent, Asians believers on the continent.

The diverse magico-religious expressions of peoples of the world are complex phenomenon and must not be reduced to secondary forms of religions. They are social constructions that are not built, centrally, on rationalized ways of living, as the case of institutionalized Western Christianity. The rationale of social action that supports popular rituals follows another logic (Parker 1996), different from the rationalistic dominant logic of the Western pattern of modernity. That popular logic is not pre-modern. It is able to interact with modernity and not reject it, though it can sometimes resist certain oppressive or destructive forces coming from outside.

The challenge for critical social theory is to develop a way of observing popular religions that does not simply treat them as deviant forms of European religious life. Such 'orientalism'—as Said (1978) brilliantly exposed—is a colonialist myth. It constitutes a disdainful attitude towards other cultures and generates misunderstanding.

Developing a new comprehensive sociological approach means making a great epistemological effort to overcome the hegemony of an analytical focus that privileges Western-oriented rational action. Understanding religious and spiritual diversity in the context of multiple modernities challenges us to develop a post-rational sociology (Costa 2014). The conceptual procedure has to come from a methodology that highlights empathetic perception and understanding. Only then can we ensure that scholarly interpretations are meaningful for the informants and do not impose an external predefined model of religion upon them (Kapaló 2013).

I propose the relevance of two sociological conceptual tools that can be applied to popular religions in the Global South. For space reasons, I can only sketch this perspective here. These two key concepts are lived religion and symbolic action.

(a) Lived religion and agency

There are new forms of studying religious behavior that goes beyond the classical Western concepts associated with the word religion. An epistemological shift has been taking place since the beginning of this century. Many scholars have been focusing on actually lived religion and the religious experiences of people in their everyday lives (Ammerman 2016). Drawing on extensive, mostly qualitative fieldwork, this research has shown that the many ways in which people express themselves spiritually rarely fit neatly into the conceptual categories that have animated the classical sociological approaches to religion (McGuire 2008). Ammerman, McGuire, and others have argued that the classical concepts fail to see many parts of the religious landscape. If, instead, we look at the ways ordinary people produce and reproduce their symbolic world, we will observe that religion is in very good health—even in supposedly secular contexts.

Most of these scholarly interventions focus on the lived religions of the Global North. They thus focus on religious individualism—or at least on individual manifestations of religions that occur in local congregational contexts (Ammerman 2016). This is not the pattern that lived religion takes in Asia, Latin America and Africa. There, the religions that people produce in my own way or *á la carte* are generated by agents whose cultural and spiritual background is communitarian rather than individualistic. The family devotions, and even personal ones, of the Chinese people, Hindus, Africans, the Muslim people, or Latin American peoples, are generated by cultural patterns that emphasize parental and community relationships: ancestors, lineages, relatives, neighborhoods, and/local communities. These patterns are reproduced as new generations re-invent old traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). These new generations often are already immersed in modern and mercantile economies, and their embedded utilitarian and instrumental logics. Yet these logics coexist with older symbolic logics that shape both people's meanings and their ability to cope with daily life and its constraints. Anguish and problems on the one hand, and claims of meaning and identity on the other, produce lives where mere instrumental reason no longer appear as effective.

(b) Symbolic action and its rationality

In his definition of religion as a cultural system, Clifford Geertz shows that the characteristic of religion and what makes it different from other spheres is not beliefs but religious action (Geertz 1973, p. 112). This action can be practical—it can have technical or political functions—but it can also be symbolic. The latter confers meaning, delivers identity, and stimulates our fabulative, magical, mystical, and contemplative imagination. Though every religious action has a technical or socio-political side, its symbolic side is free from such instrumentality: it simply makes sense. Under many religious expressions—mainly ethnic and/or popular—the symbolic is linked to energy and not to social or political power. Certainly, the symbolic side of religious action grants a cosmic and supernatural rather than a socio-political meaning.

Eurocentric sociology encounters a problem, here, in its distinction between "religion" and "magic". Too often, sociologists use this distinction to separate the symbolic from the practical,

assigning the first to an elite intelligentsia and the second to the non-elite poor. The latter's religion is treated as being infused with superstitious or "magical" thinking. As Mauss (1985) recognizes, the term "magic" has the connotation of a second-order religious action, a deformed ritual action. On the contrary, all religious action has both elements. There is typically a continuum between the "magical" and the "religious dimensions". Weber (1971) himself made this clear in his study of the communal dimensions of religious phenomena: that even in the most official ritual actions of churches there are magical features.

The evolutionary distinctions between magic, religion, and science in Western thought is typical of elites in all ages, whether theologians, philosophers, or scientists. As Tambiah (1991) suggests, a reaction, as a popular counterculture to the Enlightenment, was precisely paganism and folk magic.

Therefore, we suggest moving away from a concept of magic that is loaded with Eurocentric connotations and that only conceives of what is rightly religious according to the rationalizing and intellectualist Judeo-Christianity tradition or its secularized offspring. On the contrary, we find a conception of the magic-religious rite—a continuum—to be more appropriate for understanding the varied expressions of popular religions in non-Western settings. These religions are not elite and do not necessarily favor a Western-style rationality.

6. Popular Religions and Multiple Modernities: Prospects

The religious diversity of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, is part of a process leading towards a specific type of modernity in each case. Each modernity establishes patterns that generate incentives for religious growth or impose limits on the foreseeable increase in religious alternatives. The theory of multiple modernities implies that the modernization processes is not a process of lineal evolution and that even secularization follows different paths. Vigorous popular religions in different parts of the world configure, alongside other factors, different modernizing paths.

In some places popular religion takes the form of the syncretic New Age practices that are more popular than traditional churches, even competing with the neo-Pentecostal and Evangelical options that elsewhere dominate the popular sphere (Possamai 2012). In other places, more traditional popular cults attract millions, especially within the emerging economies of most urban and modern Global South countries. The invigorating of the many and sundry popular expressions of different faiths are part of the multiple modernization processes and not exotic expressions of a backward religiosity.

According to available data (Johnson and Zurlo 2015), Christianity has expanded rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa, though its prospects are much less promising in the Sino-Japanese area. The Muslim dominance of the Middle East and of North of Africa leaves room for the multiplication of schools and traditions within the Umma, but not much space for Christian or Dharmic alternatives (Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism). On the Indian subcontinent, Dharmic religions endure, Islam is probably increasing, but Christian prospects are dim. In Latin America, most popular religions are Christian-based, while Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism are not likely to see growth in the next fifty years.

The popular reconstruction of religions, magic, and spirituality in current Latin American, Asian, African, and Middle East societies no longer necessarily passes through churches, ulemas, monks, priests, and official religious institutions, although it still needs them as positive or negative references. Notwithstanding, the old official religions seek to survive by reaffirming their communal and institutional projects, especially in the Christian and Islamic areas. Sometimes, they affirm their orthodoxies and become fundamentalists; other times, their missionary or reformist vocation is highlighted.

But certainly, lived religions (Ammerman 2016; McGuire 2008) and the multiple expressions of popular religions that we have analyzed, no longer need the irreplaceable mediation of those official institutions (ecclesiastical or not). Still, there are latent short circuits in the attraction/rejection dynamic between the official institutions and their faithful.

In this context, tradition and change evolves in constant tension. The transformation of symbolic codes, in the midst of the accelerated flow of information (Ritzer and Dean 2019), which is powered by new information and communication technologies, generates spaces and forms of socialization never before known. It re-signifies the lives of subjects, but also adds uncertainty to their existence. Different forms of faith and spirituality are swirled into this dynamic milieu.

A new sociology of religion is emerging within the framework of a post-rationalist paradigm (Costa 2014). It seeks to better comprehend popular religions' symbolic and semiological codes rather than merely analyzing the cognitive and linguistic codes of popular religious expressions. Our insistence on advancing in a non-western-centric approach to popular religions worldwide has nothing to do with an anti-Western vision but with the need to contextualize our theoretical frameworks and overcome that false identification between Western theorization and universal theorization.

A more detailed and documented analysis that follows the directions outlined in this article could open unexpected new vistas towards understanding popular religious phenomena that demands much more research that they have received heretofore. We need these new approaches to comprehend the religious and cultural transformations that await us in this century.

Funding: This research received the support of the DICYT Grant N° 031694PG_POSTDOC, from the University of Santiago, Chile.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank Cristián Rozas for his technical support and Jim Spickard for his editorial assistance provided on this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest

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Dharmic religions

Dharmic religions (भारतीय धर्म), also termed as Dharmic faiths, are the religions that originated in the Indian subcontinent; namely Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism that follow the rules of Dharma.[web 1][note 1] These religions are also classified as Eastern religions. Although Indian religions are connected through the history of India, they constitute a wide range of religious communities, and are not confined to the Indian subcontinent.[web 1]

Evidence attesting to prehistoric religion in the Indian subcontinent derives from scattered Mesolithic rock paintings. The Harappan people of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which lasted from 3300 to 1300 BCE (mature period, 2600–1900 BCE), had an early urbanised culture which predates the Vedic religion.[1][*better source needed*]

The documented history of Indian religions begins with the historical Vedic religion, the religious practices of the early Indo-Iranians, which were collected and later redacted into the *Vedas*. The period of the composition, redaction and commentary of these texts is known as the Vedic period, which lasted from roughly 1750 to 500 BCE.[2]

The Reform or Shramanic Period between 800–200 BCE marks a "turning point between the Vedic religion and Hindu religions".[3] The Shramana movement, an ancient Indian religious movement parallel to but separate from Vedic tradition, gave rise to Jainism[4] and Buddhism,[5] and was responsible for the related concepts of Yoga,[6] *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) and *moksha* (liberation from that cycle).[7] This period also saw the writing of the Upanishads and the rise of Vedanta.

The Puranic Period (200 BCE – 500 CE) and Early Medieval period (500–1100 CE) gave rise to new configurations of Hinduism, especially bhakti and Shaivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Smarta and much smaller groups like the conservative Shrauta.

The early Islamic period (1100–1500 CE) also gave rise to new movements. Sikhism was founded in the 15th century on the teachings of Guru Nanak and the nine successive Sikh Gurus in Northern India.[web 2] The vast majority of its adherents originate in the Punjab region.

With the colonial dominance of the British a reinterpretation and synthesis of Hinduism arose, which aided the Indian independence movement.

Contents [hide]

File:Worldwide percentage of Adherents by Religion.png
Major religious groups as a percentage of world population.

History [edit]

See also: Outline of South Asian history, History of India, History of Hinduism, and History of Buddhism

Periodisation [edit]

Main article: Periodisation of Hinduism

James Mill (1773–1836), in his The History of British India (1817), distinguished three phases in the history of India, namely Hindu, Muslim and British civilisations. This periodisation has been criticised, for the misconceptions it has given rise to. Another periodisation is the division into "ancient, classical, medieval and modern periods", although this periodization has also received criticism.[8]

Romila Thapar notes that the division of Hindu-Muslim-British periods of Indian history gives too much weight to "ruling dynasties and foreign invasions,"[9] neglecting the social-economic history which often showed a strong continuity.[9] The division in Ancient-Medieval-Modern overlooks the fact that the Muslim-conquests took place between the eight and the fourteenth century, while the south was never completely conquered.[9] According to Thapar, a periodisation could also be based on "significant social and economic changes," which are not strictly related to a change of ruling powers.[10][note 2]

Smart and Michaels seem to follow Mill's periodisation, while Flood and Muesse follow the "ancient, classical, mediaeval and modern periods" periodisation. An elaborate periodisation may be as follows:[11]

- Pre-history and Indus Valley Civilisation (until c. 1750 BCE);
- Vedic period (c. 1750-500 BCE);
- "Second Urbanisation" (c. 500-200 BCE);
- Classical period (c. 200 BCE-1100 CE):[note 3]
  - Pre-classical period (c. 200 BCE-300 CE);
  - "Golden Age" (Gupta Empire) (c. 320-650 CE);
  - Late-Classical period (c. 650-1100 CE);
- Islamic period (c. 1100-1850 CE) and beginning of western colonialism (c. 1500-1850);
- Modern period (British Raj and independence) (from c. 1850).

Prevedic religions (before c. 1750 BCE) [edit]

Prehistory [edit]

Evidence attesting to prehistoric religion in the Indian subcontinent derives from scattered Mesolithic rock paintings such as at Bhimbetka, depicting dances and rituals. Neolithic agriculturalists inhabiting the Indus River Valley buried their dead in a manner suggestive of spiritual practices that incorporated notions of an afterlife and belief in magic.[16] Other South Asian Stone Age sites, such as the Bhimbetka rock shelters in central Madhya Pradesh and the Kupgal petroglyphs of eastern Karnataka, contain rock art portraying religious rites and evidence of possible ritualised music.[web 3]

Indus Saraswati Civilisation [edit]

Further information: Prehistoric religion

The religion and belief system of the Indus-Saraswati people have received considerable attention, especially from the view of identifying precursors to deities and religious practices of Indian religions that later developed in the area. However, due to the sparsity of evidence, which is open to varying interpretations, and the fact that the Indus script remains undeciphered, the conclusions are partly speculative and largely based on a retrospective view from a much later Hindu perspective.[17][18] An early and influential work in the area that set the trend for Hindu interpretations of archaeological evidence from the Harrapan sites[19] was that of John Marshall, who in 1931 identified the following as prominent features of the Indus religion: a Great Male God and a Mother Goddess; deification or veneration of animals and plants; symbolic representation of the phallus (linga) and vulva (yoni); and, use of baths and water in religious practice. Marshall's interpretations have been much debated, and sometimes disputed over the following decades.[20][21]

One Indus valley seal shows a seated, possibly ithyphallic and tricephalic, figure with a horned headdress, surrounded by animals. Marshall identified the figure as an early form of the Hindu god Shiva (or Rudra), who is associated with asceticism, yoga, and linga; regarded as a lord of animals; and often depicted as having three eyes. The seal has hence come to be known as the Pashupati Seal, after *Pashupati* (lord of all animals), an epithet of Shiva.[20][22] While Marshall's work has earned some support, many critics and even supporters have raised several objections. Doris Srinivasan has argued that the figure does not have three faces, or yogic posture, and that in Vedic literature Rudra was not a protector of wild animals.[23][24] Herbert Sullivan and Alf Hiltebeitel also rejected Marshall's conclusions, with the former claiming that the figure was female, while the latter associated the figure with *Mahisha*, the Buffalo God and the surrounding animals with vahanas (vehicles) of deities for the four cardinal directions.[25][26] Writing in 2002, Gregory L. Possehl concluded that while it would be appropriate to recognise the figure as a deity, its association with the water buffalo, and its posture as one of ritual discipline, regarding it as a proto-Shiva would be going too far.[22] Despite the criticisms of Marshall's association of the seal with a proto-Shiva icon, it has been interpreted as the Tirthankara Rishabha by Jains & Dr. Vilas Sangave[27] or an early Buddha by Buddhists.[19] Historians like Heinrich Zimmer, Thomas McEvilley are of the opinion that there exists some link between first Jain Tirthankara Rishabha & Indus Valley civilisation.[28][29]

Marshall hypothesized the existence of a cult of Mother Goddess worship based upon excavation of several female figurines, and thought that this was a precursor of the Hindu sect of Shaktism. However the function of the female

Outline of South Asian history

Palaeolithic <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css"/>(2,500,000–250,000 BCE)
- Madrasian Culture (2,500,000 BCE)
- Riwatian Culture (1,900,000 BCE)
- Soanian Culture (500,000–250,000 BCE)

Neolithic <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css"/>(10,800–3300 BCE)
- Bhirrana Culture (7570–6200 BCE)
- Mehrgarh Culture (7000–3300 BCE)

Chalcolithic <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css"/>(3500–1500 BCE)
- Jorwe Culture (3500–2000 BCE)
- Ahar-Banas Culture (3000–1500 BCE)
- Pandu Culture (1600–1500 BCE)

Bronze Age <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css"/>(3000–1300 BCE)
- Indus Valley Civilisation (3300–1300 BCE)
- – Early Harappan Culture (3300–2600 BCE)
- – Mature Harappan Culture (2600–1900 BCE)
- – Late Harappan Culture (1900–1300 BCE)
- Vedic Civilisation (2000–500 BCE)
- – Ochre Coloured Pottery culture (2000–1600 BCE)
- – Swat culture (1600–500 BCE)

Iron Age <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css"/>(1300–230 BCE)
- Vedic Civilisation (2000–500 BCE)
- – Janapadas (1500–600 BCE)
- – Black and Red ware culture (1300–1000 BCE)
- – Painted Grey Ware culture (1200–600 BCE)
- – Northern Black Polished Ware (700–200 BCE)
- Pradyota Dynasty (799–684 BCE)
- Haryanka Dynasty (684–424 BCE)
- Three Crowned Kingdoms (c. 600 BCE–1600 CE)
- Maha Janapadas (c. 600–300 BCE)
- Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE)
- Ror Dynasty (450 BCE–489 CE)
- Shishunaga Dynasty (424–345 BCE)
- Nanda Empire (380–321 BCE)
- Macedonian Empire (330–323 BCE)
- Maurya Empire (321–184 BCE)
- Seleucid Empire (312–63 BCE)
- Pandya Empire (c. 300 BCE–1345 CE)
- Chera Kingdom (c. 300 BCE–1102 CE)
- Chola Empire (c. 300 BCE–1279 CE)

figurines in the life of Indus Valley people remains unclear, and Possehl does not regard the evidence for Marshall's hypothesis to be "terribly robust".[30] Some of the baetyls interpreted by Marshall to be sacred phallic representations are now thought to have been used as pestles or game counters instead, while the ring stones that were thought to symbolise *yoni* were determined to be architectural features used to stand pillars, although the possibility of their religious symbolism cannot be eliminated.[31] Many Indus Valley seals show animals, with some depicting them being carried in processions, while others show chimeric creations. One seal from Mohen-jodaro shows a half-human, half-buffalo monster attacking a tiger, which may be a reference to the Sumerian myth of such a monster created by goddess Aruru to fight Gilgamesh.[32]

In contrast to contemporary Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations, Indus valley lacks any monumental palaces, even though excavated cities indicate that the society possessed the requisite engineering knowledge.[33][34] This may suggest that religious ceremonies, if any, may have been largely confined to individual homes, small temples, or the open air. Several sites have been proposed by Marshall and later scholars as possibly devoted to religious purpose, but at present only the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro is widely thought to have been so used, as a place for ritual purification.[30][35] The funerary practices of the Harappan civilisation is marked by its diversity with evidence of supine burial; fractional burial in which the body is reduced to skeletal remains by exposure to the elements before final interment; and even cremation. [36][37]

Dravidian culture [edit]

See also: South India, Dravidian peoples, Native Dravidian religion, and Dravidian languages

The early Dravidian religion constituted of non-Vedic form of Hinduism in that they were either historically or are at present Āgamic. The Agamas are non-vedic in origin[38] and have been dated either as post-vedic texts.[39] or as pre-vedic oral compositions.[40] The *Agamas* are a collection of Tamil and later Sanskrit scriptures chiefly constituting the methods of temple construction and creation of *murti*, worship means of deities, philosophical doctrines, meditative practices, attainment of sixfold desires and four kinds of yoga.[41] The worship of tutelary deity, sacred flora and fauna in Hinduism is also recognized as a survival of the pre-Vedic Dravidian religion.[42]

Ancient Tamil grammatical works Tolkappiyam, the ten anthologies Pattuppāṭṭu, the eight anthologies Eṭṭuttokai also sheds light on early religion of ancient Dravidians. *Seyon* was glorified as, *the red god seated on the blue peacock, who is ever young and resplendent, as the favored god of the Tamils.*[43] Sivan was also seen as the supreme God.[43] Early iconography of Seyyon[44] and Sivan[45][46][47][48][49] and their association with native flora and fauna goes back to Indus Valley Civilization.[45][47][50][51][52][53][54] The Sangam landscape was classified into five categories, *thinais*, based on the mood, the season and the land. Tolkappiyam, mentions that each of these *thinai* had an associated deity such Seyyon in *Kurinji*-the hills, Thirumaal in *Mullai*-the forests, and Kotravai in *Marutham*-the plains, and Wanji-ko in the *Neithal*-the coasts and the seas. Other gods mentioned were Mayyon and Vaali who were all assimilated into Hinduism over time. Dravidian linguistic influence[55] on early Vedic religion is evident, many of these features are already present in the oldest known Indo-Aryan language, the language of the *Rigveda* (c. 1500 BCE),[55] which also includes over a dozen words borrowed from Dravidian.[56] [57] This represents an early religious and cultural fusion[58][note 4] or synthesis[60] between ancient Dravidians and Indo-Aryans, which became more evident over time with sacred iconography, traditions, philosophy, flora and fauna that went on to influence Hinduism, Buddhism, Charvaka, Sramana and Jainism[61][59][62][63]

Throughout Tamilakam, a king was considered to be divine by nature and possessed religious significance.[64] The king was 'the representative of God on earth' and lived in a "koyil", which means the "residence of a god". The Modern Tamil word for temple is koil. Ritual worship was also given to kings.[65][66] Modern words for god like "kō" ("king"), "iṟai" ("emperor") and "āṇṭavar" ("conqueror") now primarily refer to gods. These elements were incorporated later into Hinduism like the legendary marriage of Shiva to Queen Mīnāṭchi who ruled Madurai or Wanji-ko, a god who later merged into Indra.[67] Tolkappiyar refers to the Three Crowned Kings as the "Three Glorified by Heaven".[68] In the Dravidian-speaking South, the concept of divine kingship led to the assumption of major roles by state and temple.[69]

The cult of the mother goddess is treated as an indication of a society which venerated femininity. This mother goddess was conceived as a virgin, one who has given birth to all and one, typically associated with Shaktism.[70] The temples of the Sangam days, mainly of Madurai, seem to have had priestesses to the deity, which also appear predominantly a goddess.[71] In the Sangam literature, there is an elaborate description of the rites performed by the Kurava priestess in the shrine Palamutirchōlai.[72] Among the early Dravidians the practice of erecting memorial stones "Natukal *or* Hero Stone had appeared, and it continued for quite a long time after the Sangam age, down to about 16th century.[73] It was customary for people who sought victory in war to worship these hero stones to bless them with victory.[74]

Vedic period (1750-800 BCE) [edit]

Main articles: Vedic period and Historical Vedic religion
See also: Proto-Indo-European religion and Proto-Indo-Iranian religion

The documented history of Indian religions begins with the historical Vedic religion, the religious practices of the early Indo-Aryans, which were collected and later redacted into the *Samhitas* (usually known as the Vedas), four canonical collections of hymns or mantras composed in archaic Sanskrit. These texts are the central *shruti* (revealed) texts of Hinduism. The period of the composition, redaction and commentary of these texts is known as the Vedic period, which lasted from roughly 1750 to 500 BCE.[2]

The Vedic Period is most significant for the composition of the four Vedas, Brahmanas and the older Upanishads (both presented as discussions on the rituals, mantras and concepts found in the four Vedas), which today are some of the most important canonical texts of Hinduism, and are the codification of much of what developed into the core beliefs of Hinduism.[75]

Some modern Hindu scholars use the "Vedic religion" synonymously with "Hinduism."[76] According to Sundararajan, Hinduism is also known as the Vedic religion.[77] Other authors state that the Vedas contain "the fundamental truths about Hindu Dharma"[78] which is called "the modern version of the ancient Vedic Dharma"[79] The Arya Samajis recognize the Vedic religion as true Hinduism.[80] Nevertheless, according to Jamison and Witzel,

> ... to call this period Vedic Hinduism is a contradiction in terms since Vedic religion is very different from what we generally call Hindu religion – at least as much as Old Hebrew religion is from medieval and modern Christian religion. However, Vedic religion is treatable as a predecessor of Hinduism."[75][note 5]

Early Vedic period – early Vedic compositions (c. 1750–1200 BCE) [edit]

Main articles: Vedas and Samhitas

The rishis, the composers of the hymns of the Rigveda, were considered inspired poets and seers.[note 6]

The mode of worship was the performance of Yajna, sacrifices which involved sacrifice and sublimation of the havana sāmagri (herbal preparations)[citation needed] in the fire, accompanied by the singing of Samans and 'mumbling' of Yajus, the sacrificial mantras. The sublime meaning of the word yajna is derived from the Sanskrit verb yaj, which has a three-fold meaning of worship of deities (devapujana), unity (saŏgatikaraña) and charity (dāna).[82] An essential element was the sacrificial fire – the divine Agni – into which oblations were poured, as everything offered into the fire was believed to reach God.

Central concepts in the Vedas are Satya and Rta. *Satya* is derived from Sat, the present participle of the verbal root as, "to be, to exist, to live".[83] *Sat* means "that which really exists [...] the really existent truth; the Good",[83] and *Sat-ya* means "is-ness".[84] *Rta*, "that which is properly joined; order, rule; truth", is the principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it.[85] "Satya (truth as being) and rita (truth as law) are the primary principles of Reality and its manifestation is the background of the canons of dharma, or a life of righteousness."[86] "Satya is the principle of integration rooted in the Absolute, rita is its application and function as the rule and order operating in the universe."[87] Conformity with Rta would enable progress whereas its violation would lead to punishment. Panikkar remarks:

> *Rta* is the ultimate foundation of everything; it is "the supreme", although this is not to be understood in a static sense. [...] It is the expression of the primordial dynamism that is inherent in everything...."[88]

The term rta is inherited from the Proto-Indo-Iranian religion, the religion of the Indo-Iranian peoples prior to the earliest Vedic (Indo-Aryan) and Zoroastrian (Iranian) scriptures. "Asha" is the Avestan language term (corresponding to Vedic language ṛta) for a concept of cardinal importance[89] to Zoroastrian theology and doctrine. The term "dharma" was already used in Brahmanical thought, where it was conceived as an aspect of Rta.[90]

Major philosophers of this era were Rishis Narayana, Kanva, Rishaba, Vamadeva, and Angiras.[91]

Middle Vedic period (c. 1200–850 BCE) [edit]

See also: Painted Grey Ware culture

During the Middle Vedic period Rgveda X, the mantras of the Yajurveda and the older Brahmana texts were composed.[92] The Brahmans became powerful intermediairies.[93]

Historical roots of Jainism in India is traced back to 9th-century BC with the rise of Parshvanatha and his non-violent philosophy.[94][95]

Late Vedic period (from 850 BCE) [edit]

The Vedic religion evolved into Hinduism and Vedanta, a religious path considering itself the 'essence' of the Vedas, interpreting the Vedic pantheon as a unitary view of the universe with 'God' (Brahman) seen as immanent and transcendent in the forms of Ishvara and Brahman. This post-Vedic systems of thought, along with the Upanishads and later texts like epics (namely Gita of Mahabharat), is a major component of modern Hinduism. The ritualistic traditions of Vedic religion are preserved in the conservative Śrauta tradition.

Sanskritization [edit]

Main article: Sanskritization

Since Vedic times, "people from many strata of society throughout the subcontinent tended to adapt their religious and social life to Brahmanic norms", a process sometimes called Sanskritization.[96] It is reflected in the tendency to identify local deities with the gods of the Sanskrit texts.[96]

Shramanic period (c. 800–200 BCE) [edit]

During the time of the shramanic reform movements "many elements of the Vedic religion were lost".[3] According to Michaels, "it is justified to see a turning point between the Vedic religion and Hindu religions".[3]

Late Vedic period – Brahmanas and Upanishads – Vedanta (850–500 BCE) [edit]

Main articles: Brahmanas, Upanishads, and Vedanta

The late Vedic period (9th to 6th centuries BCE) marks the beginning of the Upanisadic or Vedantic period.[web 4][note 7][97][note 8] This period heralded the beginning of much of what became classical Hinduism, with the composition of the Upanishads,[98]:183 later the Sanskrit epics, still later followed by the Puranas.

Upanishads form the speculative-philosophical basis of classical Hinduism and are known as Vedanta (conclusion of the Vedas).[99] The older Upanishads launched attacks of increasing intensity on the ritual. Anyone who worships a divinity other than the Self is called a domestic animal of the gods in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The Mundaka launches the most scathing attack on the ritual by comparing those who value sacrifice with an unsafe boat that is endlessly overtaken by old age and death.[100]

Scholars believe that Parsva, the 23rd Jain *tirthankara* lived during this period in the 9th century BCE.[101]

Rise of Shramanic tradition (7th to 5th centuries BCE) [edit]

See also: Shramana and Magadha

Jainism and Buddhism belong to the sramana tradition. These religions rose into prominence in 700–500 BCE [4][5][6] in the Magadha kingdom., reflecting "the cosmology and anthropology of a much older, pre-Aryan upper class of northeastern India",[102] and were responsible for the related concepts of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) and *moksha* (liberation from that cycle).[7][note 9]

The shramana movements challenged the orthodoxy of the rituals.[103] The shramanas were wandering ascetics distinct from Vedism.[104][105][note 10][106][note 11][107][note 12] Mahavira, proponent of Jainism, and Buddha (c. 563-483), founder of Buddhism were the most prominent icons of this movement.

Shramana gave rise to the concept of the cycle of birth and death, the concept of samsara, and the concept of liberation.[108][note 13][109][note 14][110][note 15][note 16] The influence of Upanishads on Buddhism has been a subject of debate among scholars. While Radhakrishnan, Oldenberg and Neumann were convinced of Upanishadic influence on the Buddhist canon, Eliot and Thomas highlighted the points where Buddhism was opposed to Upanishads.[112] Buddhism may have been influenced by some Upanishadic ideas, it however discarded their orthodox tendencies.[113] In Buddhist texts Buddha is presented as rejecting avenues of salvation as "pernicious views".[114]

Jainism [edit]

Main articles: Mahavira, Jainism, Timeline of Jainism, and Jain community

Jainism was established by a lineage of 24 enlightened beings culminating with Parsva (9th century BCE) and Mahavira (6th century BCE).[115][note 17]

The 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, Mahavira, stressed five vows, including *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing) and *aparigraha* (non-attachment). Jain orthodoxy believes the teachings of the Tirthankaras predates all known time and scholars believe Parshva, accorded status as the 23rd Tirthankara, was a historical figure. The Vedas are believed to have documented a few Tirthankaras and an ascetic order similar to the shramana movement.[116][note 18]

Buddhism [edit]

Main articles: Gautama Buddha, Buddhism, Early Buddhism, Pre-sectarian Buddhism, History of Buddhism, and History of Buddhism in India

Buddhism was historically founded by Siddhartha Gautama, a Kshatriya prince-turned-ascetic, and was spread beyond India through missionaries. It later experienced a decline in India, but survived in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and remains more widespread in Southeast and East Asia.

Gautama Buddha, who was called an "awakened one" (Buddha), was born into the Shakya clan living at Kapilavastu and Lumbini in what is now southern Nepal. The Buddha was born at Lumbini, as emperor Ashoka's Lumbini pillar records, just before the kingdom of Magadha (which traditionally is said to have lasted from c. 546–324 BCE) rose to power. The Shakyas claimed Angirasa and Gautama Maharishi lineage,[117] via descent from the royal lineage of Ayodhya.

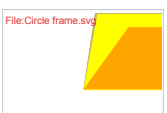
Buddhism emphasises enlightenment (nibbana, nirvana) and liberation from the rounds of rebirth. This objective is pursued through two schools, Theravada, the Way of the Elders (practised in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, SE Asia, etc.) and Mahayana, the Greater Way (practised in Tibet, China, Japan etc.). There may be some differences in the practice between the two schools in reaching the objective. In the Theravada practice this is pursued in seven stages of purification (visuddhi); viz. physical purification by taking precepts (sila visiddhi), mental purification by insight meditation (citta visuddhi), followed by purification of views and concepts (ditthi visuddhi), purification by overcoming of doubts (kinkha vitarana vishuddhi), purification by acquiring knowledge and wisdom of the right path (maggarmagga-nanadasana visuddhi), attaining knowledge and wisdom through the course of practice (patipada-nanadasana visuddhi), and purification by attaining knowledge and insight wisdom (nanadasana visuddhi) (ref: The Progress of Insight Visuddhinana katha. Ven Mahasi sayadaw, translated by Nyanaponika Thera. 1994. ISBN 955-24-0090-2)

Spread of Jainism and Buddhism (500–200 BCE) [edit]

Main articles: Maurya Empire and Silk Road transmission of Buddhism

Both Jainism and Buddhism spread throughout India during the period of the Magadha empire.

Buddhism in India spread during the reign of Ashoka of the Maurya Empire, who patronised Buddhist teachings and unified the Indian subcontinent in the 3rd century BCE. He sent missionaries abroad, allowing Buddhism to spread across Asia.[118] Jainism began its golden period during the reign of Emperor Kharavela of Kalinga in the 2nd century BCE.



Indian religions as a percentage of world population

Pallava Empire (c. 250 BCE–800 CE)
Maha-Megha-Vahana Empire (c. 250 BCE–c. 500 CE)
Parthian Empire (247 BCE–224 CE)

Classical Period <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css" />(230 BCE–1206 CE)

Satavahana Empire (230 BCE–220 CE)
Kuninda Kingdom (200 BCE–300 CE)
Indo-Scythian Kingdom (200 BCE–400 CE)
Mitra Dynasty (c. 150 BCE–c. 50 BCE)
Shunga Empire (185–73 BCE)
Indo-Greek Kingdom (180 BCE–10 CE)
Kanva Empire (75–26 BCE)
Indo-Parthian Kingdom (21–c. 130 CE)
Western Satrap Empire (35–405 CE)
Kushan Empire (60–240 CE)
Bharshiva Dynasty (170–350 CE)
Nagas of Padmavati (210–340 CE)
Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE)
Indo-Sassanid Kingdom (230–360 CE)
Vakataka Empire (c. 250–c. 500 CE)
Kalabhras Empire (c. 250–c. 600 CE)
Gupta Empire (280–550 CE)
Kadamba Empire (345–525 CE)
Western Ganga Kingdom (350–1000 CE)
Kamarupa Kingdom (350–1100 CE)
Vishnukundina Empire (420–624 CE)
Maitraka Empire (475–767 CE)
Huna Kingdom (475–576 CE)
Rai Kingdom (489–632 CE)
Kabul Shahi Empire (c. 500–1026 CE)
Chalukya Empire (543–753 CE)
Maukhari Empire (c. 550–c. 700 CE)
Harsha Empire (606–647 CE)
Tibetan Empire (618–841 CE)
Eastern Chalukya Kingdom (624–1075 CE)
Rashidun Caliphate (632–661 CE)
Gurjara-Pratihara Empire (650–1036 CE)
Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE)
Pala Empire (750–1174 CE)
Rashtrakuta Empire (753–982 CE)
Paramara Kingdom (800–1327 CE)
Yadava Empire (850–1334 CE)
Chaulukya Kingdom (942–1244 CE)
Western Chalukya Empire (973–1189 CE)
Lohara Kingdom (1003–1320 CE)
Hoysala Empire (1040–1346 CE)
Sena Empire (1070–1230 CE)
Eastern Ganga Empire (1078–1434 CE)
Kakatiya Kingdom (1083–1323 CE)
Karnatas of Mithila (1097-1325 CE)
Zamorin Kingdom (1102–1766 CE)
Kalachuris of Tripuri (675-1210 CE)
Kalachuris of Kalyani (1156–1184 CE)
Sutiya Kingdom (1187-1673 CE)
Deva Kingdom (c. 1200–c. 1300 CE)

Medieval and Early Modern Periods <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css" /> (1206–1858 CE)

Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526 CE)
– Mamluk Sultanate (1206–1290 CE)
– Khilji Sultanate (1290–1320 CE)
– Tughlaq Sultanate (1320–1414 CE)
– Sayyid Sultanate (1414–1451 CE)
– Lodi Sultanate (1451–1526 CE)
Ahom Kingdom (1228–1826 CE)
Chitradurga Kingdom (1300–1779 CE)
Oinwar dynasty (1323-1526 CE)
Reddy Kingdom (1325–1448 CE)
Vijayanagara Empire (1336–1646 CE)
Garhwal Kingdom (1358–1803 CE)
Mysore Kingdom (1399–1947 CE)
Gajapati Kingdom (1434–1541 CE)
Deccan Sultanates (1490–1596 CE)
– Ahmadnagar Sultanate (1490–1636 CE)
– Berar Sultanate (1490–1574 CE)
– Bidar Sultanate (1492–1619 CE)
– Bijapur Sultanate (1492–1686 CE)
– Golkonda Sultanate (1518–1687 CE)
Keladi Kingdom (1499–1763 CE)
Koch Kingdom (1515–1947 CE)
Mughal Empire (1526–1858 CE)
Sur Empire (1540–1556 CE)
Madurai Kingdom (1559–1736 CE)
Thanjavur Kingdom (1572–1918 CE)
Marava Kingdom (1600–1750 CE)
Thondaiman Kingdom (1650–1948 CE)
Maratha Empire (1674–1818 CE)
Sikh Confederacy (1707–1799 CE)
Travancore Kingdom (1729–1947 CE)
Sikh Empire (1799–1849 CE)

Colonial Period <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css" />(1510–1961 CE)

Portuguese India (1510–1961 CE)
Dutch India (1605–1825 CE)
Danish India (1620–1869 CE)
French India (1759–1954 CE)
Company Raj (1757–1858 CE)
British Raj (1858–1947 CE)

Kingdoms and Colonies of Sri Lanka <templatestyles src="Nobold/styles.css" /> (544 BCE–1948 CE)

Kingdom of Tambapanni (543–505 BCE)
Kingdom of Upatissa Nuwara (505–377 BCE)
Anuradhapura Kingdom (377 BCE–1017 CE)
Kingdom of Ruhuna (200 CE)
Kingdom of Polonnaruwa (300–1310 CE)
Jaffna Kingdom (1215–1624 CE)
Kingdom of Dambadeniya (1220–1272 CE)
Kingdom of Yapahuwa (1272–1293 CE)
Kingdom of Kurunegala (1293–1341 CE)
Kingdom of Gampola (1341–1347 CE)
Kingdom of Raigama (1347–1415 CE)
Kingdom of Kotte (1412–1597 CE)
Kingdom of Sitawaka (1521–1594 CE)
Kingdom of Kandy (1469–1815 CE)
Portuguese Ceylon (1505–1658 CE)
Dutch Ceylon (1656–1796 CE)
British Ceylon (1815–1948 CE)

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v · t · e

Epic and Early Puranic Period (200 BCE – 500 CE) [edit]

Main articles: Pala Empire and Gupta Empire

Flood and Muesse take the period between 200 BCE and 500 BCE as a separate period,[120][121] in which the epics and the first puranas were being written.[121] Michaels takes a greater timespan, namely the period between 200 BCE and 1100 CE,[3] which saw the rise of so-called "Classical Hinduism",[3] with its "golden age"[122] during the Gupta Empire.[122]

According to Alf Hiltebeitel, a period of consolidation in the development of Hinduism took place between the time of the late Vedic Upanishad (c. 500 BCE) and the period of the rise of the Guptas (c. 320–467 CE), which he calls the "Hindus synthesis", "Brahmanic synthesis", or "orthodox synthesis".[123] It develops in interaction with other religions and peoples:

> The emerging self-definitions of Hinduism were forged in the context of continuous interaction with heterodox religions (Buddhists, Jains, Ajivikas) throughout this whole period, and with foreign people (Yavanas, or Greeks; Sakas, or Scythians; Pahlavas, or Parthians; and Kusanas, or Kushans) from the third phase on [between the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Guptas].[124]

The end of the Vedantic period around the 2nd century CE spawned a number of branches that furthered Vedantic philosophy, and which ended up being seminaries in their own right. Prominent amongst these developers were Yoga, Dvaita, Advaita and the medieval Bhakti movement.

Smriti [edit]

The *smriti* texts of the period between 200 BCE-100 CE proclaim the authority of the Vedas, and "nonrejection of the Vedas comes to be one of the most important touchstones for defining Hinduism over and against the heterodoxies, which rejected the Vedas."[125] Of the six Hindu darsanas, the Mimamsa and the Vedanta "are rooted primarily in the Vedic *sruti* tradition and are sometimes called *smarta* schools in the sense that they develop *smarta* orthodox current of thoughts that are based, like *smriti*, directly on *sruti*."[126] According to Hiltebeitel, "the consolidation of Hinduism takes place under the sign of *bhakti*."[127] It is the *Bhagavadgita* that seals this achievement. The result is a universal achievement that may be called *smarta*. It views Shiva and Vishnu as "complementary in their functions but ontologically identical".[127]

Vedanta – Brahma sutras (200 BCE) [edit]

Main article: Vedanta

In earlier writings, Sanskrit 'Vedānta' simply referred to the Upanishads, the most speculative and philosophical of the Vedic texts. However, in the medieval period of Hinduism, the word Vedānta came to mean the school of philosophy that interpreted the Upanishads. Traditional Vedānta considers scriptural evidence, or shabda pramāna, as the most authentic means of knowledge, while perception, or pratyaksa, and logical inference, or anumana, are considered to be subordinate (but valid).[128][129]

The systematisation of Vedantic ideas into one coherent treatise was undertaken by Badarāyana in the Brahma Sutras which was composed around 200 BCE.[130] The cryptic aphorisms of the Brahma Sutras are open to a variety of interpretations. This resulted in the formation of numerous Vedanta schools, each interpreting the texts in its own way and producing its own sub-commentaries.

Indian philosophy [edit]

Main article: Indian philosophy

After 200 CE several schools of thought were formally codified in Indian philosophy, including Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimāṃsā and Advaita Vedanta.[131] Hinduism, otherwise a highly polytheistic, pantheistic or monotheistic religion, also tolerated atheistic schools. The thoroughly materialistic and anti-religious philosophical Cārvāka school that originated around the 6th century BCE is the most explicitly atheistic school of Indian philosophy. Cārvāka is classified as a *nāstika* ("heterodox") system; it is not included among the six schools of Hinduism generally regarded as orthodox. It is noteworthy as evidence of a materialistic movement within Hinduism.[132] Our understanding of Cārvāka philosophy is fragmentary, based largely on criticism of the ideas by other schools, and it is no longer a living tradition.[133] Other Indian philosophies generally regarded as atheistic include Samkhya and Mimāṃsā.

Hindu literature [edit]

Main articles: Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Puranas

Two of Hinduism's most revered *epics*, the Mahabharata and Ramayana were compositions of this period. Devotion to particular deities was reflected from the composition of texts composed to their worship. For example, the *Ganapati Purana* was written for devotion to Ganapati (or Ganesh). Popular deities of this era were Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Surya, Skanda, and Ganesh (including the forms/incarnations of these deities.)

In the latter Vedantic period, several texts were also composed as summaries/attachments to the Upanishads. These texts collectively called as Puranas allowed for a divine and mythical interpretation of the world, not unlike the ancient Hellenic or Roman religions. Legends and epics with a multitude of gods and goddesses with human-like characteristics were composed.

Jainism and Buddhism [edit]

Main article: Decline of Buddhism in India

The Gupta period marked a watershed of Indian culture: the Guptas performed Vedic sacrifices to legitimize their rule, but they also patronized Buddhism, which continued to provide an alternative to Brahmanical orthodoxy. Buddhism continued to have a significant presence in some regions of India until the 12th century.

There were several Buddhistic kings who worshiped Vishnu, such as the Gupta Empire, Pala Empire, Malla Empire, Somavanshi, and Sattvahana.[134] Buddhism survived followed by Hindus. *National Geographic*[135][note 19]

Tantra [edit]

Main article: Tantra

Tantrism originated in the early centuries CE and developed into a fully articulated tradition by the end of the Gupta period. According to Michaels this was the "Golden Age of Hinduism"[136] (c. 320–650 CE[136]), which flourished during the Gupta Empire[122] (320 to 550 CE) until the fall of the Harsha Empire[122] (606 to 647 CE). During this period, power was centralised, along with a growth of far distance trade, standardization of legal procedures, and general spread of literacy.[122] Mahayana Buddhism flourished, but the orthodox Brahmana culture began to be rejuvenated by the patronage of the Gupta Dynasty.[137] The position of the Brahmans was reinforced,[122] and the first Hindu temples emerged during the late Gupta age.[122]

Medieval and Late Puranic Period (500–1500 CE) [edit]

Late-Classical Period (c. 650–1100 CE) [edit]

See also Late-Classical Age and Hinduism Middle Ages

After the end of the Gupta Empire and the collapse of the Harsha Empire, power became decentralised in India. Several larger kingdoms emerged, with "countless vasal states".[138][note 20] The kingdoms were ruled via a feudal system. Smaller kingdoms were dependent on the protection of the larger kingdoms. "The great king was remote, was exalted and deified",[139] as reflected in the Tantric Mandala, which could also depict the king as the centre of the mandala.[140]

The disintegration of central power also lead to regionalisation of religiosity, and religious rivalry.[141][note 21] Local cults and languages were enhanced, and the influence of "Brahmanic ritualistic Hinduism"[141] was diminished.[141] Rural and devotional movements arose, along with Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Bhakti and Tantra,[141] though "sectarian groupings were only at the beginning of their development".[141] Religious movements had to compete for recognition by the local lords.[141] Buddhism lost its position, and began to disappear in India.[141]

Vedanta [edit]

See also: Advaita Vedanta and Ajativada

In the same period Vedanta changed, incorporating Buddhist thought and its emphasis on consciousness and the working of the mind.[143] Buddhism, which was supported by the ancient Indian urban civilisation lost influence to the traditional religions, which were rooted in the countryside.[144] In Bengal, Buddhism was even prosecuted. But at the same time, Buddhism was incorporated into Hinduism, when Gaudapada used Buddhist philosophy to reinterpret the Upanishads.[143] This also marked a shift from Atman and Brahman as a "living substance"[145] to "maya-vada"[note 22], where Atman and Brahman are seen as "pure knowledge-consciousness".[146] According to Scheepers, it is this "maya-vada" view which has come to dominate Indian thought.[144]

Buddhism [edit]

Main article: Decline of Buddhism in India

Between 400 and 1000 CE Hinduism expanded as the decline of Buddhism in India continued.[147] Buddhism subsequently became effectively extinct in India but survived in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Bhakti [edit]

Main articles: Bhakti movement, Alwars, and Nayanars

The Bhakti movement began with the emphasis on the worship of God, regardless of one's status – whether priestly or laypeople, men or women, higher social status or lower social status. The movements were mainly centered on the forms of Vishnu (Rama and Krishna) and Shiva. There were however popular devotees of this era of Durga.[*citation needed*] The best-known devotees are the Nayanars from southern India. The most popular Shaiva teacher of the south was Basava, while of the north it was Gorakhnath.[*citation needed*] Female saints include figures like Akkamadevi, Lalleshvari and Molla.

The "alwar" or "azhwars" (Tamil: ஆழ்வார்கள், *āzvārkaḷ* [aːɻʋaːr], those immersed in god) were Tamil poet-saints of south India who lived between the 6th and 9th centuries CE and espoused "emotional devotion" or bhakti to Visnu-Krishna in their songs of longing, ecstasy and service.[148] The most popular Vaishnava teacher of the south was Ramanuja, while of the north it was Ramananda.

Several important icons were women. For example, within the Mahanubhava sect, the women outnumbered the men,[149] and administration was many times composed mainly of women.[150] Mirabai is the most popular female saint in India.

Sri Vallabha Acharya (1479–1531) is a very important figure from this era. He founded the Shuddha Advaita (*Pure Non-dualism*) school of Vedanta thought.

According to *The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training*,

> Vaishanava bhakti literature was an all-India phenomenon, which started in the 6th–7th century A.D. in the Tamil-speaking region of South India, with twelve Alvar (one immersed in God) saint-poets, who wrote devotional songs. The religion of Alvar poets, which included a woman poet, Andal, was devotion to God through love (bhakti), and in the ecstasy of such devotions they sang hundreds of songs which embodied both depth of feeling and felicity of expressions [web 8]

Early Islamic rule (c. 1100–1500 CE) [edit]

Main articles: Muslim conquest of India, Islamic Empires in India, Bahmani Sultanate, Deccan Sultanates, Delhi Sultanate, and Sufism in India

In the 12th and 13th centuries, Turks and Afghans invaded parts of northern India and established the Delhi Sultanate in the former Rajput holdings.[151] The subsequent Slave dynasty of Delhi managed to conquer large areas of northern India, approximately equal in extent to the ancient Gupta Empire, while the Khilji dynasty conquered most of central India but were ultimately unsuccessful in conquering and uniting the subcontinent. The Sultanate ushered in a period of Indian cultural renaissance. The resulting "Indo-Muslim" fusion of cultures left lasting syncretic monuments in architecture, music, literature, religion, and clothing.

Bhakti movement [edit]

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During the 14th to 17th centuries, a great *Bhakti* movement swept through central and northern India, initiated by a loosely associated group of teachers or *sants*. Ramananda, Ravidas, Srimanta Sankardeva, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Meera Bai, Kabir, Tulsidas, Namdev, Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram and other mystics spearheaded the Bhakti movement in the North while Annamacharya, Bhadrachala Ramadas, Tyagaraja among others propagated Bhakti in the South. They taught that people could cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste, and the subtle complexities of philosophy, and simply express their overwhelming love for God. This period was also characterized by a spate of devotional literature in vernacular prose and poetry in the ethnic languages of the various Indian states or provinces.

Lingayathism [edit]

Main article: Lingayatism

Lingayatism is a distinct Shaivite tradition in India, established in the 12th century by the philosopher and social reformer Basavanna. The adherents of this tradition are known as Lingayats. The term is derived from Lingavantha in Kannada, meaning 'one who wears *Ishtalinga* on their body' (*Ishtalinga* is the representation of the God). In Lingayat theology, *Ishtalinga* is an oval-shaped emblem symbolising Parasiva, the absolute reality. Contemporary Lingayatism follows a progressive reform–based theology propounded, which has great influence in South India, especially in the state of Karnataka.[152]

Unifying Hinduism [edit]

Main article: Unifying Hinduism

According to Nicholson, already between the 12th and 16th century,

> ... certain thinkers began to treat as a single whole the diverse philosophival teachings of the Upanishads, epics, Puranas, and the schools known retrospectively as the "six systems" (*saddarsana*) of mainstream Hindu philosophy.[153]

The tendency of "a blurring of philosophical distinctions" has also been noted by Burley.[154] Lorenzen locates the origins of a distinct Hindu identity in the interaction between Muslims and Hindus,[155] and a process of "mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim other",[156] which started well before 1800.[157] Both the Indian and the European thinkers who developed the term "Hinduism" in the 19th century were influenced by these philosophers.[158]

Sikhism (15th century) [edit]

Main article: Sikhism

See also: History of Sikhism, Sikhism and Jainism, Sikhism and Hinduism, and Sikhism in India

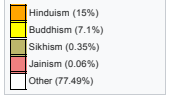
Sikhism originated in 15th-century Punjab, Delhi Sultanate (present day India and Pakistan) with the teachings of Nanak and nine successive gurus. The principal belief in Sikhism is faith in *Vāhigurū*— represented by the sacred symbol of ੴ *ōaṅkār* [meaning one god]. Sikhism's traditions and teachings are distinctly associated with the history, society and culture of the Punjab. Adherents of Sikhism are known as Sikhs (*students* or *disciples*) and number over 27 million across the world.

Modern period (1500 – present) [edit]

Early modern period [edit]

Main articles: Mughal period and Maratha Empire

According to Gavin Flood, the modern period in India begins with the first contacts with western nations around 1500.[120][121] The period of Mughal rule in India[159] saw the rise of new forms of religiosity.[160]




File:Mohenjo-daro Priesterkönig.jpeg
"Priest King" of Indus Valley Civilisation

The so-called *Pashupati seal*, showing a seated and possibly ithyphallic figure, surrounded by animals.

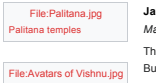

File:01AnnamalaiyarTemple&Thi
Typical layout of Dravidian architecture which evolved from *koyil* as kings residence.


File:WLA lacma 12th century Maharishi Agastya.jpg
Saga Agastya, father of Tamil literature.


File:Mahavir.jpg
A statue of Mahavira.

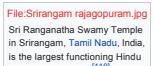
File:Standing Bodhisattva Gandhara Musee Guimet.jpg
Statue of a standing Bodhisattva.


File:HinduSwastika.sv
Hindu Swastika


File:Palitana.jpg
Palitana temples


File:Avatars of Vishnu.jpg
A Statue of Lord Krishna.


Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, Bihar.


File:Srirangam rajagopuram.jpg
Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple in Srirangam, Tamil Nadu, India, is the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world.[119]


File:New Delhi Temple.jpg
Akshardham


File:TirumalTemple.jpg
Tirumala Venkateswara Temple the most visited and richest Hindu temple in the world.


File:Sripuram Temple Full View.jpg
The Golden Temple of Mahalakshmi at Vellore.

File:Golden Temple India.jpg
Harmandir Sahib or ***The Golden Temple*** of the Sikhs.

Modern India (after 1800) [edit]

Hinduism [edit]

Main articles: Hindu reform movements, Neo-Vedanta, Hindutva, and Communalism (South Asia)

In the 19th century, under influence of the colonial forces, a synthetic vision of Hinduism was formulated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi.[163] These thinkers have tended to take an inclusive view of India's religious history, emphasising the similarities between the various Indian religions.[163]

The modern era has given rise to dozens of Hindu saints with international influence.[11] For example, Brahma Baba established the Brahma Kumaris, one of the largest new Hindu religious movements which teaches the discipline of Raja Yoga to millions.[*citation needed*] Representing traditional Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Prabhupada founded the Hare Krishna movement, another organisation with a global reach. In late 18th-century India, Swaminarayan founded the Swaminarayan Sampraday. Anandamurti, founder of the Ananda Marga, has also influenced many worldwide. Through the international influence of all of these new Hindu denominations, many Hindu practices such as yoga, meditation, mantra, divination, and vegetarianism have been adopted by new converts.

File:Mahamaham Festival in Kumbakonam.jpg

Mahamagam Festival is a holy festival celebrated once in twelve years in Tamil Nadu. Mahamagam Festival, which is held at Kumbakonam. This festival is also called as **Kumbamela of South**.[161][162]

Jainism [edit]

Jainism continues to be an influential religion and Jain communities live in Indian states Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Jains authored several classical books in different Indian languages for a considerable period of time.

File:Kumbh Mela 2001.jpg

The largest religious gathering ever held on Earth, the 2001 Maha Kumbh Mela held in Prayag attracted around 70 million Hindus from around the world.

Buddhism [edit]

Main article: Dalit Buddhist movement

The Dalit Buddhist movement (dubbed as Navayana by certain Ambedkerites)[164] is a 19th- and 20th-century Buddhist revival movement in India. It received its most substantial impetus from B. R. Ambedkar's call for the conversion of Dalits to Buddhism, to escape a caste-based society that considered them to be the lowest in the hierarchy.[165]

Similarities and differences [edit]

According to Tilak, the religions of India can be interpreted "differentially" or "integrally",[166] that is by either highlighting the differences or the similarities.[166] According to Sherma and Sarma, western Indologists have tended to emphasise the differences, while Indian Indologists have tended to emphasise the similarities.[167]

File:Abraham Dharma.png

Map showing the prevalence of Abrahamic (pink) and Indian religions (yellow) in each country.

Similarities [edit]

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism share certain key concepts, which are interpreted differently by different groups and individuals.[167] Until the 19th century, adherents of those various religions did not tend to label themselves as in opposition to each other, but "perceived themselves as belonging to the same extended cultural family."[168]

Soteriology [edit]

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism share the concept of moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth.[169] They differ however on the exact nature of this liberation.[169]

Ritual [edit]

Common traits can also be observed in ritual. The head-anointing ritual of *abhiseka* is of importance in three of these distinct traditions, excluding Sikhism (in Buddhism it is found within Vajrayana).[*citation needed*] Other noteworthy rituals are the cremation of the dead, the wearing of vermilion on the head by married women, and various marital rituals.[*citation needed*] In literature, many classical narratives and purana have Hindu, Buddhist or Jain versions.[web 9] All four traditions have notions of *karma*, *dharma*, *samsara*, *moksha* and various *forms of Yoga*.

Mythology [edit]

Rama is a heroic figure in all of these religions. In Hinduism he is the God-incarnate in the form of a princely king; in Buddhism, he is a Bodhisattva-incarnate; in Jainism, he is the perfect human being. Among the Buddhist Ramayanas are: *Vessantarajataka*,[170] Reamker, Ramakien, Phra Lak Phra Lam, Hikayat Seri Rama etc. There also exists the *Khamti Ramayana* among the Khamti tribe of Asom wherein Rama is an Avatar of a Bodhisattva who incarnates to punish the demon king Ravana (B.Datta 1993). The *Tai Ramayana* is another book retelling the divine story in Asom.

Differences [edit]

Critics point out that there exist vast differences between and even within the various Indian religions.[171][172] All major religions are composed of innumerable sects and subsects.[173]

Dharma [edit]

For a Hindu, *dharma* is his duty. For a Jain, *dharma* is righteousness, his conduct. For a Buddhist, *dharma* is usually taken to be the Buddha's teachings.

Mythology [edit]

Indian mythology also reflects the competition between the various Indian religions. A popular story tells how Vajrapani kills Mahesvara, a manifestation of Shiva depicted as an evil being.[174][175] The story occurs in several scriptures, most notably the *Sarvatathagatatattvasamgraha* and the *Vajrapany-abhiseka-mahatantra*.[176][note 23] According to Kalupahana, the story "echoes" the story of the conversion of Ambattha.[175] It is to be understood in the context of the competition between Buddhist institutions and Shaivism.[180]

Āstika and *nāstika* categorisation [edit]

Main articles: Āstika and nāstika, Hindu philosophy, and Buddhism and Hinduism
See also: Adi Shankara and Charvaka

Āstika and *nāstika* are variously defined terms sometimes used to categorise Indian religions. The traditional definition, followed by Adi Shankara, classifies religions and persons as *āstika* and *nāstika* according to whether they accept the authority of the main Hindu texts, the Vedas, as supreme revealed scriptures, or not. By this definition, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vedanta are classified as *āstika* schools, while Charvaka is classified as a *nāstika* school. Buddhism and Jainism are also thus classified as *nāstika* religions since they do not accept the authority of the Vedas.

Another set of definitions—notably distinct from the usage of Hindu philosophy—loosely characterise *āstika* as "theist" and *nāstika* as "atheist". By these definitions, *Sāṃkhya* can be considered a *nāstika* philosophy, though it is traditionally classed among the Vedic *āstika* schools. From this point of view, Buddhism and Jainism remain *nāstika* religions.

Buddhists and Jains have disagreed that they are nastika and have redefined the phrases āstika and nāstika in their own view. Jains assign the term nastika to one who is ignorant of the meaning of the religious texts,[181] or those who deny the existence of the soul was well known to the Jainas.[182]

"Dharmic religions" [edit]

See also: Saffronization

Frawley and Malhotra use the term "Dharmic traditions" to highlight the similarities between the various Indian religions.[183][184][note 24] According to Frawley, "all religions in India have been called the Dharma",[183] and can be

> ...put under the greater umbrella of "Dharmic traditions" which we can see as Hinduism or the spiritual traditions of India in the broadest sense.[183]

According to Paul Hacker, as described by Halbfass, the term "dharma"

> ...assumed a fundamentally new meaning and function in modern Indian thought, beginning with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the nineteenth century. This process, in which *dharma* was presented as an equivalent of, but also a response to, the western notion of "religion", reflects a fundamental change in the Hindu sense of identity and in the attitude toward other religious and cultural traditions. The foreign tools of "religion" and "nation" became tools of self-definition, and a new and precarious sense of the "unity of Hinduism" and of national as well as religious identity took root.[186]

The emphasis on the similarities and integral unity of the dharmic faiths has been criticised for neglecting the vast differences between and even within the various Indian religions and traditions.[171][172] According to Richard E. King it is typical of the "inclusivist appropriation of other traditions"[163] of Neo-Vedanta:

> The inclusivist appropriation of other traditions, so characteristic of neo-Vedanta ideology, appears on three basic levels. First, it is apparent in the suggestion that the (Advaita) Vedanta philosophy of Sankara (c. eighth century CE) constitutes the central philosophy of Hinduism. Second, in an Indian context, neo-Vedanta philosophy subsumes Buddhist philosophies in terms of its own Vedantic ideology. The Buddha becomes a member of the Vedanta tradition, merely attempting to reform it from within. Finally, at a global level, neo-Vedanta colonizes the religious traditions of the world by arguing for the centrality of a non-dualistic position as the *philosophia perennis* underlying all cultural differences.[163]

Status of non-Hindus in the Republic of India [edit]

Main article: Religion in India
See also: Legal Status of Jainism as a Distinct Religion

The inclusion of Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs within Hinduism is part of the Indian legal system. The 1955 Hindu Marriage Act "[defines] as Hindus all Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and anyone who is not a Christian, Muslim, Parsee or Jew".[187] And the Indian Constitution says that "reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion".[187]

In a judicial reminder, the Indian Supreme Court observed Sikhism and Jainism to be sub-sects or *special* faiths within the larger Hindu fold,[web 10][note 25] and that Jainism is a denomination within the Hindu fold.[web 10][note 26] Although the government of British India counted Jains in India as a major religious community right from the first Census conducted in 1873, after independence in 1947 Sikhs and Jains were not treated as national minorities.[web 10][note 27] In 2005 the Supreme Court of India declined to issue a writ of Mandamus granting Jains the status of a religious minority throughout India. The Court however left it to the respective states to decide on the minority status of Jain religion.[188][web 10][note 28]

However, some individual states have over the past few decades differed on whether Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs are religious minorities or not, by either pronouncing judgments or passing legislation. One example is the judgment passed by the Supreme Court in 2006, in a case pertaining to the state of Uttar Pradesh, which declared Jainism to be indisputably distinct from Hinduism, but mentioned that, "The question as to whether the Jains are part of the Hindu religion is open to debate.[189] However, the Supreme Court also noted various court cases that have held Jainism to be a distinct religion.

Another example is the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill, that is an amendment to a legislation that sought to define Jains and Buddhists as denominations within Hinduism.[web 11] Ultimately on 31 July 2007, finding it not in conformity with the concept of freedom of religion as embodied in Article 25 (1) of the Constitution, Governor Naval Kishore Sharma returned the Gujarat Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2006 citing the widespread protests by the Jains[web 12] as well as Supreme Court's extrajudicial observation that Jainism is a "special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion by the Supreme Court"[web 13]

See also [edit]

- Demographics of India
- Religion in India
- Indian philosophy
- Indology
- Jainism and Hinduism
- Hinduism in India
- Jainism in India
- Sikhism in India
- Islam in India
- Christianity in India
- Ayyavazhi and Hinduism
- Buddhism and Jainism

Notes [edit]

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- ↑ Adams: "Indian religions, including early Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and sometimes also Theravāda Buddhism and the Hindu- and Buddhist-inspired religions of South and Southeast Asia".
- ↑ See also Tanvir Anjum, *Temporal Divides: A Critical Review of the Major Schemes of Periodization in Indian History*[9].
- ↑ Deussen: "these treatises are not the work of a single genius, but the total philosophical product of an entire epoch which extends [from] approximately 1000 or 800 BC, to c.500 BCE, but which is prolonged in its offshoots far beyond this last limit of time."[97] p. 51
- ↑ Gavin Flood and Patrick Olivelle: "The second half of the first millennium BCE was the period that created many of the ideological karmas and reincarnation entered the mainstream brahaminical thought from the sramana or the renouncer traditions."[109] Page 86.
- ↑ Padmanabh: "Yajnavalkya's reluctance and manner in expounding the doctrine of karma in the assembly of Janaka (a reluctance not shown on any other occasion) can perhaps be explained by the assumption that it was, like that of the transmigration of soul, of non-
Samantabhadra into Vajrapani by Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha, receiving a vajra and the name "Vajrapani".[177] Vairocana then requests Vajrapani to generate his adamantine family, to establish a mandala. Vajrapani refuses, because Mahesvara (Shiva) "is deluding beings with his deceitfull religious doctrines and engaging in all kinds of violent criminal conduct".[178] Mahesvara and his entourage are

- ↑ Different periods are designated as "classical Hinduism":
  - Smart calls the period between 1000 BCE and 100 CE "pre-classical". It's the formative period for the Upanishads and Brahmanism[lower-alpha 1] Jainism and Buddhism. For Smart, the "classical period" lasts from 100 to 1000 CE, and coincides with the flowering of "classical Hinduism" and the flowering and deterioration of Mahayana-buddhism in India.[13]
  - For Michaels, the period between 500 BCE and 200 BCE is a time of "Ascetic reformism",[14] whereas the period between 200 BCE and 1100 CE is the time of "classical Hinduism", since there is "a turning point between the Vedic religion and Hindu religions".[3]
  - Muesse discerns a longer period of change, namely between 800 BCE and 200 BCE, which he calls the "Classical Period". According to Muesse, some of the fundamental concepts of Hinduism, namely karma, reincarnation and "personal enlightenment and transformation", which did not exist in the Vedic religion, developed in this time.[15]
- ↑ Lockard: "The encounters that resulted from Aryan migration brought together several very different peoples and cultures, reconfiguring Indian society. Over many centuries a fusion of Aryan and Dravidian occurred, a complex process that historians have labeled the Indo-Aryan synthesis."[58] Lockard: "Hinduism can be seen historically as a synthesis of Aryan beliefs with Harappan and other Dravidian traditions that developed over many centuries."[59]
- ↑ Richard E. King notes: "Consequently, it remains an anachronism to project the notion of "Hinduism" as it is commonly understood into pre-colonial history."[81]
- ↑ In post-Vedic times understood as "hearers" of an eternally existing Veda, *Śrauta* means "what is heard"
- ↑ "Upanishads came to be composed already in the ninth and eighth century B.C.E. and continued to be composed well into the first centuries of the Common Era. The Brahmanas and Aranyakas are somewhat older, reaching back to the eleventh and even twelfth century BCE."[web 4]

and institutional elements that characterize later Indian religions. The renouncer tradition played a central role during this formative period of Indian religious history....Some of the fundamental values and beliefs that we generally associate with Indian religions in general and Hinduism in particular were in part the creation of the renouncer tradition. These include the two pillars of Indian theologies: samsara – the belief that life in this world is one of suffering and subject to repeated deaths and births (rebirth); moksa/nirvana – the goal of human existence....."[7]

- ↑ Cromwell Crwaford: "Alongside Brahmanism was the non-Aryan Shramanic (self reliant) culture with its roots going back to prehistoric times."[105]
- ↑ Masih: "There is no evidence to show that Jainism and Buddhism ever subscribed to vedic sacrifices, vedic deities or caste. They are parallel or native religions of India and have contributed to much to the growth of even classical Hinduism of the present times."[106]
- ↑ Jaini: "Jainas themselves have no memory of a time when they fell within the Vedic fold. Any theory that attempts to link the two traditions, moreover fails to appreciate rather distinctive and very non-vedic character of Jaina cosmology, soul theory, karmic doctrine and atheism".[107]
- ↑ Flood: "The second half of the first millennium BCE was the period that created many of the ideological and institutional elements that characterise later Indian religions. The renouncer tradition played a central role during this formative period of Indian religious history....Some of the fundamental values and beliefs that we generally associate with Indian religions in general and Hinduism in particular were in part the creation of the renouncer tradition. These include the two pillars of Indian theologies: samsara – the belief that life in this world is one of suffering and subject to repeated deaths and births (rebirth); moksa/nirvana – the goal of human existence....."[108]
- ↑ Flood: "The origin and doctrine of Karma and Samsara are obscure. These concepts were certainly circulating amongst sramanas, and Jainism and Buddhism developed specific and sophisticated ideas about the process of transmigration. It is very possible that the brahmanical origin. In view of the fact that this doctrine is emblazoned on almost every page of sramana scriptures, it is highly probable that it was derived from them."[110] Page 51.
- ↑ Jeffrey Brodd and Gregory Sobolewski: "Jainism shares many of the basic doctrines of Hinduism and Buddhism."[111]
- ↑ Oldmeadow: "Over time, apparent misunderstandings have arisen over the origins of Jainism and relationship with its sister religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. There has been an ongoing debate between Jainism and Vedic Hinduism as to which revelation preceded the other. What is historically known is that there was a tradition along with Vedic Hinduism known as Sramana Dharma. Essentially, the sramana tradition included it its fold, the Jain and Buddhist traditions, which disagreed with the eternality of the Vedas, the needs for ritual sacrifices and the supremacy of the Brahmins."[115] Page 141
- ↑ Fisher: "The extreme antiquity of Jainism as a non-vedic, indigenous Indian religion is well documented. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures refer to Jainism as an existing tradition which began long before Mahavira."[116] Page 115
- ↑ edition reads, "The flow between faiths was such that for hundreds of years, almost all Buddhist temples, including the ones at Ajanta, were built under the rule and patronage of Hindu kings."
- ↑ In the east the Pala Empire[138] (770–1125 CE[138]), in the west and north the Gurjara-Pratihara[138] (7th–10th century[138]), in the southwest the Rashtrakuta Dynasty[138] (752–973[138]), in the Dekkhan the Chalukya dynasty[138] (7th–8th century[138]), and in the south the Pallava dynasty[138] (7th–9th century[138]) and the Chola dynasty[138] (9th century[138]).
- ↑ This resembles the development of Chinese Chán during the An Lu-shan rebellion and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907–960/979), during which power became decentralised end new Chán-schools emerged.[142]
- ↑ The term "maya-vada" is primarily being used by non-Advaitins. See [web 5][web 6][web 7]
- ↑ The story begins with the transformation of the Bodhisattva dragged to Mount Sumeru, and all but Mahesvara submit. Vajrapani and Mahesvara engage in a magical combat, which is won by Vajrapani. Mahesvara's retinue become part of Vairocana's mandala, except for Mahesvara, who is killed, and his life transferred to another realm where he becomes a buddha named Bhasmesvara-nirghosa, the "Soundless Lord of Ashes".[179]
- ↑ Occasionally the term is also being used by other authors. David Westerlund: "...may provide some possibilities for co-operation with Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, who like Hindus are regarded as adherents of 'dharmic' religions."[185]
- ↑ In various codified customary laws like Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act and other laws of pre and post-Constitution period, the definition of 'Hindu' included all sects and sub-sects of Hindu religions including Sikhs and Jains[web 10]
- ↑ The Supreme Court observed in a judgment pertaining to case of Bal Patil vs. Union of India: "Thus, 'Hinduism' can be called a general religion and common faith of India whereas 'Jainism' is a special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion. Jainism places greater emphasis on non-violence ('Ahimsa') and compassion ('Karuna'). Their only difference from Hindus is that Jains do not believe in any creator like God but worship only the perfect human-being whom they called Tirathankar."[web 10]
- ↑ The so-called minority communities like Sikhs and Jains were not treated as national minorities at the time of framing the Constitution.[web 10]
- ↑ In an extra-judicial observation not forming part of the judgment the court observed :"Thus, 'Hinduism' can be called a general religion and common faith of India whereas 'Jainism' is a special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion. Jainism places greater emphasis on non-violence ('Ahimsa') and compassion ('Karuna'). Their only difference from Hindus is that Jains do not believe in any creator like God but worship only the perfect human-being whom they called Tirathankar."[web 10]

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- ↑ Smart distinguishes "Brahmanism" from the Vedic religion, connecting "Brahmanism" with the Upanishads.[12]

Quotes [edit]

- Likewise, there is much truth in Voltaire's enthusiastic Orientalist assumption that unlike Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Indian and Chinese "religions" were not based on prophetic "revelations" but on a purely human contemplation of reality. (Elst 2001, Decolonizing the Hindu Mind, p. 44)
- "In view of deliberate attempts in recent decades to project Buddhism and Jainism as separate religions, distinct from Hinduism, it would be in order to deal with them in passing. the attempts have clearly been motivated by the design to separate their followers from the parent body called Hinduism just as Sikhs have been to an extent. Though not to the same extent as in the case of Sikhs, the attempts have succeeded in as much as neo-Buddhists and at least some Jains have come to regard themselves as non-Hindus.

In reality, however, Buddhisms and Jainism have been no more than movements within the larger body of Hinduism, not significantly different from Lingayats, Saktas or Bhaktas of more recent times." page 24-25, Girilal Jain: The Hindu Phenomenon, <templatestyles src="Module:Citation/CS1/styles.css" />ISBN 81-86112-32-4.

- The endless variety of Indian philosophy and religion seems to the European mind interminable, bewildering, wearisome, useless; it is unable to see the forest because of the richness and luxuriance of its vegetation; it misses the common spiritual life in the multitude of its forms. But this infinite variety is itself, as Vivekananda pertinently pointed out, a sign of a superior religious culture. The Indian mind has always realised that the Supreme is the Infinite; it has perceived, right from its Vedic beginnings, that to the soul in Nature the Infinite must always present itself in an endless variety of aspects. The mentality of the West has long cherished the aggressive and quite illogical idea of a single religion for all mankind, a religion universal by the very force of its narrowness, one set of dogmas, one cult, one system of ceremonies, one array of prohibitions and injunctions, one ecclesiastical ordinance.
  - Sri Aurobindo, quoted in Indra's Net by Rajiv Malhotra
- In view of deliberate attempts in recent decades to project Buddhism and Jainism as separate religions, distinct from Hinduism, it would be in order to deal with them in passing. the attempts have clearly been motivated by the design to separate their followers from the parent body called Hinduism just as Sikhs have been to an extent. Though not to the same extent as in the case of Sikhs, the attempts have succeeded in as much as neo-Buddhists and at least some Jains have come to regard themselves as non-Hindus. In reality, however, Buddhisms and Jainism have been no more than movements within the larger body of Hinduism, not significantly different from Lingayats, Saktas or Bhaktas of more recent times.
  - page 24-25, Girilal Jain: The Hindu Phenomenon, <templatestyles src="Module:Citation/CS1/styles.css" />ISBN 81-86112-32-4.
- A number of Indians have tried to define secularism as sarva dharma samabhava (equal respect for all religions). I cannot say whether they have been naive or clever in doing so. But the fact remains that secularism cannot admit of such an interpretation. In fact, orthodox Muslims are quite justified in regarding it as irreligious. Moreover, dharma cannot be defined as religion which is a Semitic concept and applies only to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is not a religion in that sense; nor are Jainism and Buddhism, or for that matter, Taoism and Confucianism.
  - Girilal Jain, "Limits of the Hindu Rashtra", in : Elst, Koenraad: Ayodhya and after, Appendix I
- Likewise, there is much truth in Voltaire's enthusiastic Orientalist assumption that unlike Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Indian and Chinese "religions" were not based on prophetic "revelations" but on a purely human contemplation of reality.
  - K. Elst: 2001, Decolonizing the Hindu Mind, p. 44
- As part of their entrenched power position, the British colonisers and later their Nehruvian successors have always tried to control the discourse on religion. Among other concerns, they have seen to it that the term "Hindu" got divorced from its historical meaning, which quite inclusively encompassed all Indian Pagans, in order to fragment Hindu society. In parallel with their effort to pit caste against caste, they have tried to pit sect against sect, offering nurture to the egos of sect leaders by telling them that in fact they were popes in their own right of full-fledged religions, equal in status but morally superior to Hinduism. Hindu Revivalists have countered this effort by reaffirming the basic Hindu character of tribal Animism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and more recent reformist sects. In some cases, the separation of sects from the Hindu commonwealth was entirely contrived and artificial, in others it had a partial doctrinal justification, though even there the proper distinction was never between them and "Hinduism" as historically conceived, but between them and the Vedic-Puranic "Great Tradition" of Hinduism.
  - Elst, K. (2002). Who is a Hindu?: Hindu revivalist views of Animism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and other offshoots of Hinduism.
- Yet, at the sociological level, the Jain community is entirely part of Hindu society... Historically, Jainism has always enjoyed a place under the umbrella of Hindu pluralism, suffering clashes with southern Shaivism only a few times when its own sectarianism had provoked the conflict. Deciding the question whether Jainism is a sect of Hinduism requires a proper definition of Hinduism... On the other hand, if Hinduism means the actually observed variety of religious expressions among non-Muslims and non-Christians in India, then there is nothing in Jainism that would make it so radically different as to fall outside this spectrum. If Hinduism means all traditions native to India (as per Savarkar and the original Muslim usage), then obviously Jainism is a Hindu tradition.
  - Elst, Koenraad (2002). Who is a Hindu?: Hindu revivalist views of Animism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and other offshoots of Hinduism. ISBN 978-8185990743
- Jains are the best Hindus of all.
  - BJP President Murli Manohar Joshi, Quoted from Elst, Koenraad (2002). Who is a Hindu?: Hindu revivalist views of Animism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and other offshoots of Hinduism. ISBN 978-8185990743

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Wikipedia bias and censorship [edit]

The article is protected which is done to discourage new editors to balance or counter the obvious bias and fake news in "their" wikipedia article.

Due to wikipedia pov pushers, like Joshua Jonathan and others, the fact that Sanathana Dharma, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism are related, is taboo [5]

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v·t·e **Hinduism topics**

v·t·e **Buddhism topics**

v·t·e **Sikh Topics**

Gurus	Guru Nanak · Guru Angad · Guru Amar Das · Guru Ram Das · Guru Arjan · Guru Hargobind · Guru Har Rai · Guru Har Krishan · Guru Tegh Bahadur · Guru Gobind Singh · Guru Granth Sahib
Philosophy	Beliefs and principles · Guru Maneyo Granth · Sikh Rehat Maryada · Prohibitions (Cannabis and Sikhism) · Diet in Sikhism
Practices	Khalsa · Ardās · Kirtan · Langar · Naam Karan · Anand Karaj · Amrit Sanchar · Amrit Velā · Antam Sanskar · Three Pillars · Kirat Karo · Naam Japo · Vand Chhako · Sikh practices · The Five Ks · Simran · Sewa · Charhdi Kala · Dasvand · Jhatka
Scripture	Guru Granth Sahib · Adi Granth · Dasam Granth · Gurbani · Mul Mantar · Japji Sahib · Chaupai · Jaap Sahib · Rehras · Sukhmani Sahib · Tav-Prasad Savaiye
By country	Australia · Afghanistan · Belgium · Canada (Vancouver) · Fiji · France · Germany · India · Indonesia · Iraq · Italy · Malaysia · Nepal · Netherlands · New Zealand · Pakistan · Singapore · Switzerland · Thailand · United Arab Emirates · United Kingdom · United States
Other topics	History · Gurmukhi alphabet · Ik Onkar · Waheguru · Khanda · Gurdwara (Harmandir Sahib) · Panj Pyare · Literature · Music · Names · Places · Politics · Nanakshahi calendar · Ramananda · Farīduddīn Ganjshakar · Kabir · History of the Punjab · Sardar · Dastar · Islam · Jainism · Hinduism · Sikh Empire · Mela Maghi · Maghi · Vaisakhi · Hola Mohalla · 3HO · Sikhs · Women in Sikhism · Sikhism and sexual orientation · Idolatry in Sikhism · Criticism · Punjab region · Punjabi people · Punjabi language
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Sikhism portal

v·t·e **Jainism topics**

Gods	Tirthankara · Ganadhara · Arihant	
Philosophy	Ethics (Ahimsa) · Epistemology (Kevala Jñāna) · Jaina logic (Anekāntavāda) · Jain cosmology (Siddhashila · Naraka · Heavenly beings) · Karma (Types · Causes) · Gunasthana · Dravya (Jīva · Ajīva (Pudgala · Dharma)) · Tattva (Asrava · Bandha · Samvara · Nirjara · Mokṣa) · Death · Saṃsāra · Ratnatraya · Kashaya	
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	Śvētāmbara	Murtipujaka (Gaccha (Kharatara · Tapa · Tristutik)) · Sthānakavāsī · Terapanth
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Literature	Agama (Satkhandagama · Kasayapahuda) · Mantra (Namokar Mantra · Bhaktamara Stotra) · Tattvartha Sutra · Samayasara · Aptamimamsa · Kalpa Sūtra	

Symbols	Jain flag · Siddhachakra · Ashtamangala (Srivatsa · Nandavarta) · Auspicious dreams · Swastika
Ascetics	Digambara monk · Aryika · Kshullak · Pattavali · Acharya
Scholars	Nalini Balbir · Colette Caillat · Chandabai · John E. Cort · Paul Dundas · Virchand Gandhi · Hermann Jacobi · Champat Rai Jain · Padmanabh Jaini · Jeffery D. Long · Hampa Nagarajaiah · Claudia Pastorino · Bal Patil · Jinendra Varni · Robert J. Zydenbos
Community	Śrāvaka · Sarak · Tamil · Organisations (Digambar Jain Mahasabha · Vishwa Jain Sangathan · JAINA)
Jainism in	India: Bundelkhand · Delhi · Goa · Gujarat · Haryana · Karnataka (North) · Kerala · Maharashtra (Mumbai) · Rajasthan · Uttar Pradesh Overseas: Canada · Europe · United States · Japan · Singapore · Hong Kong · Pakistan · Belgium · Africa · Southeast Asia · Australia
Jainism and	Buddhism · Hinduism · Islam · Sikhism · Non-creationism
Dynasties and empires	Ikshvaku · Maurya · Kalinga · Kadamba · Ganga · Chalukya · Rashtrakuta · Hoysala · Pandayan
Related	History (Timeline) · Pañca-Parameṣṭhi · Pratima · Śalākāpuruṣa · Tirtha · Samavasarana · Jain calendar (Samvatsari) · Panch Kalyanaka · Statue of Ahimsa · Temple · Sculpture · Art · Law · Nigoda · Jain terms and concepts · Sexual differences
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v · t · e

Religion

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Religion in Asia

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States with limited recognition	Abkhazia · Nagorno-Karabakh · Northern Cyprus · Palestine · South Ossetia · Taiwan
Dependencies and other territories	British Indian Ocean Territory · Christmas Island · Cocos (Keeling) Islands · Hong Kong · Macau

File:Taj Mahal pr.jpg Indian religions portal File:P religion world.svg Religion portal Jainism portal Buddhism portal Hinduism portal Sikhism portal India portal

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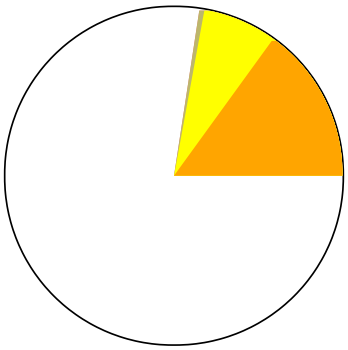
Indian religions

Indian religions, sometimes also termed **Dharmic religions** or **Indic religions**, are the religions that originated in the Indian subcontinent. These religions, which include Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism,[web 1][note 1] are also classified as Eastern religions. Although Indian religions are connected through the history of India, they constitute a wide range of religious communities, and are not confined to the Indian subcontinent.[web 1]



Indian religions as a percentage of world population

- Hinduism (15%)
- Buddhism (7.1%)
- Sikhism (0.35%)
- Jainism (0.06%)
- Other (77.49%)

Evidence attesting to prehistoric religion in the Indian subcontinent derives from scattered Mesolithic rock paintings. The Harappan people of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which lasted from 3300 to 1300 BCE (mature period 2600–1900 BCE), had an early urbanized culture which predates the Vedic religion.[5]

The documented history of Indian religions begins with the historical Vedic religion, the religious practices of the early Indo-Iranians, which were collected and later redacted into the *Vedas*. The period of the composition, redaction, and commentary of these texts is known as the Vedic period, which lasted from roughly 1750 to 500 BCE.[6] The philosophical portions of the Vedas were summarized in Upanishads, which are commonly referred to as *Vedānta*, variously interpreted to mean either the "last chapters, parts of the Veda" or "the object, the highest purpose of the Veda".[7] The early Upanishads all predate the Common Era, five[note 2] of the eleven principal Upanishads were composed in all likelihood before 6th century BCE,[8][9] and contain the earliest mentions of *Yoga* and Moksha.[10]

The Shramanic Period between 800 and 200 BCE marks a "turning point between the Vedic Hinduism and Puranic Hinduism".[11] The Shramana movement, an ancient Indian religious movement parallel to but separate from Vedic tradition, often defied many of the Vedic and Upanishadic concepts of soul (Atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman). In 6th century BCE, the Shramnic movement matured into Jainism[12] and Buddhism[13] and was responsible for the schism of Indian religions into two main philosophical branches of astika, which venerates Veda (e.g., six orthodox schools of Hinduism) and nastika (e.g., Buddhism, Jainism, Charvaka, etc.). However, both branches shared the related concepts of Yoga, *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) and *moksha* (liberation from that cycle).[note 3][note 4][note 5]

Indian religions by number of followers (2020 survey)[1][2][3][4]

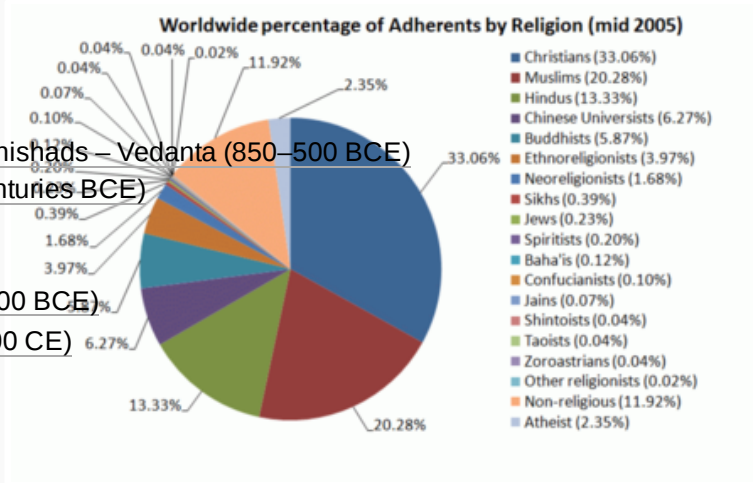
Religion	Population
Hindus (ॐ)	1.2 billion
Buddhists (☸)	520 million
Sikhs (☬)	30 million
Jains (卐)	6 million
Others	4 million
Total	**1.76 billion**

The Puranic Period (200 BCE – 500 CE) and Early Medieval period (500–1100 CE) gave rise to new configurations of Hinduism, especially bhakti and Shaivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Smarta, and smaller groups like the conservative Shrauta.

The early Islamic period (1100–1500 CE) also gave rise to new movements. Sikhism was founded in the 15th century on the teachings of Guru Nanak and the nine successive Sikh Gurus in Northern India.[web 2] The vast majority of its adherents originate in the Punjab region.

During the period of British rule in India, a reinterpretation and synthesis of Hinduism arose, which aided the Indian independence movement.

Contents



Major religious groups as a percentage of world population

History

Periodisation

Scottish historian James Mill, in his seminal work *The History of British India* (1817), distinguished three phases in the history of India, namely the Hindu, Muslim, and British periods. This periodisation has been criticised, for the misconceptions it has given rise to. Another periodisation is the division into "ancient, classical, medieval, and modern periods", although this periodization has also received criticism.[16]

Romila Thapar notes that the division of Hindu-Muslim-British periods of Indian history gives too much weight to "ruling dynasties and foreign invasions",[17] neglecting the social-economic history which often showed a strong continuity.[17] The division in Ancient-Medieval-Modern overlooks the fact that the Muslim-conquests took place between the eight and the fourteenth century, while the south was never completely conquered.[17] According to Thapar, a periodisation could also be based on "significant social and economic changes", which are not strictly related to a change of ruling powers.[18][note 6]

Smart and Michaels seem to follow Mill's periodisation, while Flood and Muesse follow the "ancient, classical, mediaeval and modern periods" periodisation. An elaborate periodisation may be as follows:[19]

- Indian pre-history including Indus Valley Civilisation (until c. 1750 BCE);
- Iron Age including Vedic period (c. 1750–600 BCE);
- "Second Urbanisation" (c. 600–200 BCE);
- Classical period (c. 200 BCE-1200 CE);[note 7]
    - Pre-Classical period (c. 200 BCE-320 CE);
    - "Golden Age" (Gupta Empire) (c. 320–650 CE);
    - Late-Classical period (c. 650–1200 CE);
- Medieval period (c. 1200–1500 CE);
- Early Modern (c. 1500–1850);
- Modern period (British Raj and independence) (from c. 1850).

Prevedic religions (before c. 1750 BCE)

Prehistory

Evidence attesting to prehistoric religion in the Indian subcontinent derives from scattered Mesolithic rock paintings such as at Bhimbetka, depicting dances and rituals. Neolithic agriculturalists inhabiting the Indus River Valley buried their dead in a manner suggestive of spiritual practices that incorporated notions of an afterlife and belief in magic.[24] Other South Asian Stone Age sites, such as the Bhimbetka rock shelters in central Madhya Pradesh and the Kupgal petroglyphs of eastern Karnataka, contain rock art portraying religious rites and evidence of possible ritualised music.[web 3]

"Priest King" of Indus Valley Civilisation

Indus Valley civilisation

The religion and belief system of the Indus valley people have received considerable attention, especially from the view of identifying precursors to deities and religious practices of Indian religions that later developed in the area. However, due to the sparsity of evidence, which is open to varying interpretations, and the fact that the Indus script remains undeciphered, the conclusions are partly speculative and largely based on a retrospective view from a much later Hindu perspective.[25] An early and influential work in the area that set the trend for Hindu interpretations of archaeological evidence from the Harrapan sites[26] was that of John Marshall, who in 1931 identified the following as prominent features of the Indus religion: a Great Male God and a Mother Goddess; deification or veneration of animals and plants; symbolic representation of the phallus (linga) and vulva (yoni); and, use of baths and water in religious practice. Marshall's interpretations have been much debated, and sometimes disputed over the following decades.[27][28]

One Indus valley seal shows a seated, possibly ithyphallic and tricephalic, figure with a horned headdress, surrounded by animals. Marshall identified the figure as an early form of the Hindu god Shiva (or Rudra), who is associated with asceticism, yoga, and linga; regarded as a lord of animals; and often depicted as having three eyes. The seal has hence come to be known as the Pashupati Seal, after *Pashupati* (lord of all animals), an epithet of Shiva.[27][29] While Marshall's work has earned some support, many critics and even supporters have raised several objections. Doris Srinivasan has argued that the figure does not have three faces, or yogic posture, and that in Vedic literature Rudra was not a protector of wild animals.[30][31] Herbert Sullivan and Alf Hiltebeitel also rejected Marshall's conclusions, with the former claiming that the figure was female, while the latter associated the figure with *Mahisha*, the Buffalo God and the surrounding animals with vahanas (vehicles) of deities for the four cardinal directions.[32][33] Writing in 2002, Gregory L. Possehl concluded that while it would be appropriate to recognise the figure as a deity, its association with the water buffalo, and its posture as one of ritual discipline, regarding it as a proto-Shiva would be going too far.[29] Despite the criticisms of Marshall's association of the seal with a proto-Shiva icon, it has been interpreted as the Tirthankara Rishabha by Jains and Dr. Vilas Sangave[34] or an early Buddha by Buddhists.[26] Historians like Heinrich Zimmer, Thomas McEvilley are of the opinion that there exists some link between first Jain Tirthankara Rishabha and Indus Valley civilisation.[35][36]

The so-called *Pashupati seal*, showing a seated and possibly ithyphallic figure, surrounded by animals.

Marshall hypothesized the existence of a cult of Mother Goddess worship based upon excavation of several female figurines, and thought that this was a precursor of the Hindu sect of Shaktism. However the function of the female figurines in the life of Indus Valley people remains unclear, and Possehl does not regard the evidence for Marshall's hypothesis to be "terribly robust".[37] Some of the baetyls interpreted by Marshall to be sacred phallic representations are now thought to have been used as pestles or game counters instead, while the ring stones that were thought to symbolise *yoni* were determined to be architectural features used to stand pillars, although the possibility of their religious symbolism cannot be eliminated.[38] Many Indus Valley seals show animals, with some depicting them being carried in processions, while others show chimeric creations. One seal from Mohen-jodaro shows a half-human, half-buffalo monster attacking a tiger, which may be a reference to the Sumerian myth of such a monster created by goddess Aruru to fight Gilgamesh.[39]

In contrast to contemporary Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations, Indus valley lacks any monumental palaces, even though excavated cities indicate that the society possessed the requisite engineering knowledge.[40][41] This may suggest that religious ceremonies, if any, may have been largely confined to individual homes, small temples, or the open air. Several sites have been proposed by Marshall and later scholars as possibly devoted to religious purpose, but at present only the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro is widely thought to have been so used, as a place for ritual purification.[37][42] The funerary practices of the Harappan civilisation is marked by its diversity with evidence of supine burial; fractional burial in which the body is reduced to skeletal remains by exposure to the elements before final interment; and even cremation. [43][44]

Dravidian culture

The early Dravidian religion constituted of non-Vedic form of Hinduism in that they were either historically or are at present Āgamic. The Agamas are non-vedic in origin[45] and have been dated either as post-vedic texts.[46] or as pre-vedic oral compositions.[47] The *Agamas* are a collection of Tamil and later Sanskrit scriptures chiefly constituting the methods of temple construction and creation of *murti*, worship means of deities, philosophical doctrines, meditative practices, attainment of sixfold desires and four kinds of yoga.[48] The worship of tutelary deity, sacred flora and fauna in Hinduism is also recognized as a survival of the pre-Vedic Dravidian religion.[49]

Ancient Tamil grammatical works Tolkappiyam, the ten anthologies Pattuppāṭṭu, the eight anthologies Eṭṭuttokai also sheds light on early religion of ancient Dravidians. *Seyon* was glorified as *the red god seated on the blue peacock, who is ever young and resplendent*, as *the favored god of the Tamils*.[50] Sivan was also seen as the supreme God.[50] Early iconography of Seyyon[51] and Sivan[52][53][54][55][56] and their association with native flora and fauna goes back to Indus Valley Civilization.[52][54][57][58][59][53][60] The Sangam landscape was classified into five categories, *thinais*, based on the mood, the season and the land. Tolkappiyam, mentions that each of these *thinai* had an associated deity such Seyyon in *Kurinji*-the hills, Thirumaal in *Mullai*-the forests, and Kotravai in *Marutham*-the plains, and Wanji-ko in the *Neithal*-the coasts and the seas. Other gods mentioned were Mayyon and Vaali who were all assimilated into Hinduism over time. Dravidian linguistic influence[61] on early Vedic religion is evident, many of these features are already present in the oldest known Indo-Aryan language, the language of the *Rigveda* (c. 1500 BCE),[61] which also includes over a dozen words borrowed from Dravidian.[62] [63] This represents an early religious and cultural fusion[64][note 8] or synthesis[66] between ancient Dravidians and Indo-Aryans, which became more evident over time with sacred iconography, traditions, philosophy, flora, and fauna that went on to influence Hinduism, Buddhism, Charvaka, Sramana, and Jainism.[67][65][68][69]

Typical layout of Dravidian architecture which evolved from *koyil* as king's residence.

Throughout Tamilakam, a king was considered to be divine by nature and possessed religious significance.[70] The king was 'the representative of God on earth' and lived in a "koyil", which means the "residence of a god". The Modern Tamil word for temple is koil. Titual worship was also given to kings.[71][72] Modern words for god like "kō" ("king"), "iṟai" ("emperor"), and "āṇḍavar" ("conqueror") now primarily refer to gods. These elements were incorporated later into Hinduism like the legendary marriage of Shiva to Queen Mīnātchi who ruled Madurai or Wanji-ko, a god who later merged into Indra.[73] Tolkappiyar refers to the Three Crowned Kings as the "Three Glorified by Heaven".[74] In the Dravidian-speaking South, the concept of divine kingship led to the assumption of major roles by state and temple.[75]

Saga Agastya, father of Tamil literature

The cult of the mother goddess is treated as an indication of a society which venerated femininity. This mother goddess was conceived as a virgin, one who has given birth to all and one, typically associated with Shaktism.[76] The temples of the Sangam days, mainly of Madurai, seem to have had priestesses to the deity, which also appear predominantly a goddess.[77] In the Sangam literature, there is an elaborate description of the rites performed by the Kurava priestess in the shrine Palamutircholai.[78] Among the early Dravidians the practice of erecting memorial stones *Natukal* or *Hero Stone* had appeared, and it continued for quite a long time after the Sangam age, down to about 16th century.[79] It was customary for people who sought victory in war to worship these hero stones to bless them with victory.[80]

Vedic period (1750–800 BCE)

The documented history of Indian religions begins with the historical Vedic religion, the religious practices of the early Indo-Aryans, which were collected and later redacted into the *Samhitas* (usually known as the Vedas), four canonical collections of hymns or mantras composed in archaic Sanskrit. These texts are the central *shruti* (revealed) texts of Hinduism. The period of the composition, redaction, and commentary of these texts is known as the Vedic period, which lasted from roughly 1750 to 500 BCE.[6]

The Vedic Period is most significant for the composition of the four Vedas, Brahmanas and the older Upanishads (both presented as discussions on the rituals, mantras and concepts found in the four Vedas), which today are some of the most important canonical texts of Hinduism, and are the codification of much of what developed into the core beliefs of Hinduism.[81]

Some modern Hindu scholars use the "Vedic religion" synonymously with "Hinduism."[82] According to Sundararajan, Hinduism is also known as the Vedic religion.[83] Other authors state that the Vedas contain "the fundamental truths about Hindu Dharma"[note 9] which is called "the modern version of the ancient Vedic Dharma"[85] The Arya Samaj is recognize the Vedic religion as true Hinduism.[86] Nevertheless, according to Jamison and Witzel,

> ... to call this period Vedic Hinduism is a contradiction in terms since Vedic religion is very different from what we generally call Hindu religion – at least as much as Old Hebrew religion is from medieval and modern Christian religion. However, Vedic religion is treatable as a predecessor of Hinduism."[81][note 10]

Early Vedic period – early Vedic compositions (c. 1750–1200 BCE)

The rishis, the composers of the hymns of the Rigveda, were considered inspired poets and seers.[note 11]

The mode of worship was the performance of Yajna, sacrifices which involved sacrifice and sublimation of the havana sámagri (herbal preparations) in the fire, accompanied by the singing of Samans and 'mumbling' of Yajus, the sacrificial mantras. The sublime meaning of the word yajna is derived from the Sanskrit verb yaj, which has a three-fold meaning of worship of deities (devapujana), unity (saògatikaraña), and charity (dána).[88] An essential element was the sacrificial fire – the divine Agni – into which oblations were poured, as everything offered into the fire was believed to reach God.

Central concepts in the Vedas are Satya and Rta. *Satya* is derived from Sat, the present participle of the verbal root *as*, "to be, to exist, to live".[89] *Sat* means "that which really exists [...] the really existent truth; the Good",[89] and *Sat-ya* means "is-ness".[90] *Rta*, "that which is properly joined; order, rule; truth", is the principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it.[91] "Satya (truth as being) and rita (truth as law) are the primary principles of

Reality and its manifestation is the background of the canons of dharma, or a life of righteousness."[92] "Satya is the principle of integration rooted in the Absolute, rita is its application and function as the rule and order operating in the universe."[93] Conformity with Ṛta would enable progress whereas its violation would lead to punishment. Panikkar remarks:

> *Ṛta* is the ultimate foundation of everything; it is "the supreme", although this is not to be understood in a static sense. [...] It is the expression of the primordial dynamism that is inherent in everything...."[94]

The term rta is inherited from the Proto-Indo-Iranian religion, the religion of the Indo-Iranian peoples prior to the earliest Vedic (Indo-Aryan) and Zoroastrian (Iranian) scriptures. "Asha" is the Avestan language term (corresponding to Vedic language ṛta) for a concept of cardinal importance[95] to Zoroastrian theology and doctrine. The term "dharma" was already used in Brahmanical thought, where it was conceived as an aspect of Rta.[96]

Major philosophers of this era were Rishis Narayana, Kanva, Rishaba, Vamadeva, and Angiras.[97]

Middle Vedic period (c. 1200–850 BCE)

During the Middle Vedic period Rgveda X, the mantras of the Yajurveda and the older Brahmana texts were composed.[98] The Brahmans became powerful intermediairies.[99]

Historical roots of Jainism in India is traced back to 9th-century BC with the rise of Parshvanatha and his non-violent philosophy.[100][101]

Late Vedic period (from 850 BCE)

The Vedic religion evolved into Hinduism and Vedanta, a religious path considering itself the 'essence' of the Vedas, interpreting the Vedic pantheon as a unitary view of the universe with 'God' (Brahman) seen as immanent and transcendent in the forms of Ishvara and Brahman. This post-Vedic systems of thought, along with the Upanishads and later texts like epics (namely Gita of Mahabharat), is a major component of modern Hinduism. The ritualistic traditions of Vedic religion are preserved in the conservative Śrauta tradition.

Sanskritization

Since Vedic times, "people from many strata of society throughout the subcontinent tended to adapt their religious and social life to Brahmanic norms", a process sometimes called Sanskritization.[102] It is reflected in the tendency to identify local deities with the gods of the Sanskrit texts.[102]

Shramanic period (c. 800–200 BCE)

During the time of the shramanic reform movements "many elements of the Vedic religion were lost".[11] According to Michaels, "it is justified to see a turning point between the Vedic religion and Hindu religions".[11]

A statue of Gautama Buddha from Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India, 4th century CE.

The idol of Mahavira, the 24th and last Tirthankara of Jainism.

Late Vedic period – Brahmanas and Upanishads – Vedanta (850–500 BCE)

Hindu Swastika

The late Vedic period (9th to 6th centuries BCE) marks the beginning of the Upanisadic or Vedantic period.[web 4][note 12][103] {{refn|group=note|Deussen: "these treatises are not the work of a single genius, but the total philosophical product of an entire epoch which extends [from] approximately 1000 or 800 BC, to c.500 BCE, but which is prolonged in its offshoots far beyond this last limit of time."[104] This period heralded the beginning of much of what became classical Hinduism, with the composition of the Upanishads,[105] later the Sanskrit epics, still later followed by the Puranas.

Upanishads form the speculative-philosophical basis of classical Hinduism and are known as Vedanta (conclusion of the Vedas).[106] The older Upanishads launched attacks of increasing intensity on the ritual. Anyone who worships a divinity other than the Self is called a domestic animal of the gods in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The Mundaka launches the most scathing attack on the ritual by comparing those who value sacrifice with an unsafe boat that is endlessly overtaken by old age and death.[107]

Scholars believe that Parsva, the 23rd Jain *tirthankara* lived during this period in the 9th century BCE.[108]

Rise of Shramanic tradition (7th to 5th centuries BCE)


Buddha statue at Darjeeling

Jainism and Buddhism belong to the sramana tradition. These religions rose into prominence in 700–500 BCE [12][13][109] in the Magadha kingdom., reflecting "the cosmology and anthropology of a much older, pre-Aryan upper class of northeastern India",[110] and were responsible for the related concepts of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and death) and *moksha* (liberation from that cycle).[111][note 13]

The shramana movements challenged the orthodoxy of the rituals.[112] The shramanas were wandering ascetics distinct from Vedism.[113][114][note 14][115][note 15][116][note 16] Mahavira, proponent of Jainism, and Buddha (c. 563-483), founder of Buddhism were the most prominent icons of this movement.

Shramana gave rise to the concept of the cycle of birth and death, the concept of samsara, and the concept of liberation.[111][note 17][117][note 18][119][note 19][note 20] The influence of Upanishads on Buddhism has been a subject of debate among scholars. While Radhakrishnan, Oldenberg and Neumann were convinced of Upanishadic influence on the Buddhist canon, Eliot and Thomas highlighted the points where Buddhism was opposed to Upanishads.[122] Buddhism may have been influenced by some Upanishadic ideas, it however discarded their orthodox tendencies.[123] In Buddhist texts Buddha is presented as rejecting avenues of salvation as "pernicious views".[124]

Jainism

Jainism was established by a lineage of 24 enlightened beings culminating with Parshvanatha (9th century BCE) and Mahavira (6th century BCE).[125][note 21]

The 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, Mahavira, stressed five vows, including *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), and *aparigraha* (non-attachment). Jain orthodoxy believes the teachings of the Tirthankaras predates all known time and scholars believe Parshva, accorded status as the 23rd Tirthankara, was a historical figure. The Vedas are believed to have documented a few Tirthankaras and an ascetic order similar to the shramana movement.[126][note 22]

Buddhism


Buddhist Monks performing traditional Sand mandala made from coloured sand

Buddhism was historically founded by Siddhartha Gautama, a Kshatriya prince-turned-ascetic, and was spread beyond India through missionaries. It later experienced a decline in India, but survived in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and remains more widespread in Southeast and East Asia.

Gautama Buddha, who was called an "awakened one" (Buddha), was born into the Shakya clan living at Kapilavastu and Lumbini in what is now southern Nepal. The Buddha was born at Lumbini, as emperor Ashoka's Lumbini pillar records, just before the kingdom of Magadha (which traditionally is said to have lasted from c. 546–324 BCE) rose to power. The Shakyas claimed Angirasa and Gautama Maharishi lineage,[127] via descent from the royal lineage of Ayodhya.

Buddhism emphasises enlightenment (nibbana, nirvana) and liberation from the rounds of rebirth. This objective is pursued through two schools, Theravada, the Way of the Elders (practised in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, SE Asia, etc.) and Mahayana, the Greater Way (practised in Tibet, China, Japan, etc.). There may be some differences in the practice between the two schools in reaching the objective. In the Theravada practice this is pursued in seven stages of purification (visuddhi); viz. physical purification by taking precepts (sila visiddhi), mental purification by insight meditation (citta visuddhi), followed by purification of views and concepts (ditthi visuddhi),

purification by overcoming of doubts (kinkha vitarana vishuddhi), purification by acquiring knowledge and wisdom of the right path (maggarmagga-nanadasana visuddhi), attaining knowledge and wisdom through the course of practice (patipada-nanadasana visuddhi), and purification by attaining knowledge and insight wisdom (nanadasana visuddhi).[128]

Spread of Jainism and Buddhism (500–200 BCE)

Both Jainism and Buddhism spread throughout India during the period of the Magadha empire.

Buddhism in India spread during the reign of Ashoka of the Maurya Empire, who patronised Buddhist teachings and unified the Indian subcontinent in the 3rd century BCE. He sent missionaries abroad, allowing Buddhism to spread across Asia.[129] Jainism began its golden period during the reign of Emperor Kharavela of Kalinga in the 2nd century BCE.

Buddhist Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, Bihar

Jain Palitana temples, Shatrunjaya hill, Gujarat

Epic and Early Puranic Period (200 BCE – 500 CE)

Krishna fighting the horse demon Keshi, 5th century, Gupta period.

Flood and Muesse take the period between 200 BCE and 500 BCE as a separate period,[130][131] in which the epics and the first puranas were being written.[131] Michaels takes a greater timespan, namely the period between 200 BCE and 1100 CE,[11] which saw the rise of so-called "Classical Hinduism",[11] with its "golden age"[132] during the Gupta Empire.[132]

According to Alf Hiltebeitel, a period of consolidation in the development of Hinduism took place between the time of the late Vedic Upanishad (c. 500 BCE) and the period of the rise of the Guptas (c. 320–467 CE), which he calls the "Hindus synthesis", "Brahmanic synthesis", or "orthodox synthesis".[133] It develops in interaction with other religions and peoples:

> The emerging self-definitions of Hinduism were forged in the context of continuous interaction with heterodox religions (Buddhists, Jains, Ajivikas) throughout this whole period, and with foreign people (Yavanas, or Greeks; Sakas, or Scythians; Pahlavas, or Parthians; and Kusanas, or Kushans) from the third phase on [between the Mauryan empire and the rise of the Guptas].[134]

A basalt statue of Lalita flanked by Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya, Pala era.

The end of the Vedantic period around the 2nd century CE spawned a number of branches that furthered Vedantic philosophy, and which ended up being seminaries in their own right. Prominent among these developers were Yoga, Dvaita, Advaita, and the medieval Bhakti movement.

Smriti

The *smriti* texts of the period between 200 BCE-100 CE proclaim the authority of the Vedas, and "nonrejection of the Vedas comes to be one of the most important touchstones for defining Hinduism over and against the heterodoxies, which rejected the Vedas."[135] Of the six Hindu darsanas, the Mimamsa and the Vedanta "are rooted primarily in the Vedic *sruti* tradition and are sometimes called *smarta* schools in the sense that they develop *smarta* orthodox current of thoughts that are based, like *smriti*, directly on *sruti*."[136] According to Hiltebeitel, "the consolidation of Hinduism takes place under the sign of *bhakti*."[137] It is the *Bhagavadgita* that seals this achievement. The result is a universal achievement that may be called *smarta*. It views Shiva and Vishnu as "complementary in their functions but ontologically identical".[137]

Vedanta – Brahma sutras (200 BCE)

In earlier writings, Sanskrit 'Vedānta' simply referred to the Upanishads, the most speculative and philosophical of the Vedic texts. However, in the medieval period of Hinduism, the word Vedānta came to mean the school of philosophy that interpreted the Upanishads. Traditional Vedānta considers shabda pramāṇa (scriptural evidence) as the most authentic means of knowledge, while pratyakṣa (perception) and anumāna (logical inference) are considered to be subordinate (but valid).[138][139]

The systematisation of Vedantic ideas into one coherent treatise was undertaken by Badarāyana in the Brahma Sutras which was composed around 200 BCE.[140] The cryptic aphorisms of the Brahma Sutras are open to a variety of interpretations. This resulted in the formation of numerous Vedanta schools, each interpreting the texts in its own way and producing its own sub-commentaries.

Indian philosophy

After 200 CE several schools of thought were formally codified in Indian philosophy, including Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimāṃsā and Advaita Vedanta.[141] Hinduism, otherwise a highly polytheistic, pantheistic or monotheistic religion, also tolerated atheistic schools. The thoroughly materialistic and anti-religious philosophical Cārvāka school that originated around the 6th century BCE is the most explicitly atheistic school of Indian philosophy. Cārvāka is classified as a *nāstika* ("heterodox") system; it is not included among the six schools of Hinduism generally regarded as orthodox. It is noteworthy as evidence of a materialistic movement within Hinduism.[142] Our understanding of Cārvāka philosophy is fragmentary, based largely on criticism of the ideas by other schools, and it is no longer a living tradition.[143] Other Indian philosophies generally regarded as atheistic include Samkhya and Mimāṃsā.

Hindu literature

Two of Hinduism's most revered *epics*, the Mahabharata and Ramayana were compositions of this period. Devotion to particular deities was reflected from the composition of texts composed to their worship. For example, the *Ganapati Purana* was written for devotion to Ganapati (or Ganesh). Popular deities of this era were Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Surya, Skanda, and Ganesh (including the forms/incarnations of these deities).


The Golden Temple of Mahalakshmi at Vellore.

In the latter Vedantic period, several texts were also composed as summaries/attachments to the Upanishads. These texts collectively called as Puranas allowed for a divine and mythical interpretation of the world, not unlike the ancient Hellenic or Roman religions. Legends and epics with a multitude of gods and goddesses with human-like characteristics were composed.

Jainism and Buddhism

The Gupta period marked a watershed of Indian culture: the Guptas performed Vedic sacrifices to legitimize their rule, but they also patronized Buddhism, which continued to provide an alternative to Brahmanical orthodoxy. Buddhism continued to have a significant presence in some regions of India until the 12th century.

There were several Buddhistic kings who worshiped Vishnu, such as the Gupta Empire, Pala Empire, Malla Empire, Somavanshi, and Satavahana.[144] Buddhism survived followed by Hindus.[145]

Tantra

Tantrism originated in the early centuries CE and developed into a fully articulated tradition by the end of the Gupta period. According to Michaels this was the "Golden Age of Hinduism"[146] (c. 320–650 CE[146]), which flourished during the Gupta Empire[132] (320 to 550 CE) until the fall of the Harsha Empire[132] (606 to 647 CE). During this period, power was centralised, along with a growth of far distance trade, standardizarion of legal procedures, and general spread of literacy.[132] Mahayana Buddhism flourished, but the orthodox Brahmana culture began to be rejuvenated by the patronage of the Gupta Dynasty.[147] The position of the Brahmans was reinforced,[132] and the first Hindu temples emerged during the late Gupta age.[132]

Medieval and Late Puranic Period (500–1500 CE)

Late-Classical Period (c. 650–1100 CE)

See also Late-Classical Age and Hinduism Middle Ages

After the end of the Gupta Empire and the collapse of the Harsha Empire, power became decentralised in India. Several larger kingdoms emerged, with "countless vasal states".[148][note 23] The kingdoms were ruled via a feudal system. Smaller kingdoms were dependent on the protection of the larger kingdoms. "The great king was remote, was exalted and deified",[148] as reflected in the Tantric Mandala, which could also depict the king as the centre of the mandala.[149]

The disintegration of central power also lead to regionalisation of religiosity, and religious rivalry.[150][note 24] Local cults and languages were enhanced, and the influence of "Brahmanic ritualistic Hinduism"[150] was diminished.[150] Rural and devotional movements arose, along with Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Bhakti, and Tantra,[150] though "sectarian groupings were only at the beginning of their development".[150] Religious movements had to compete for recognition by the local lords.[150] Buddhism lost its position, and began to disappear in India.[150]

Vedanta

In the same period Vedanta changed, incorporating Buddhist thought and its emphasis on consciousness and the working of the mind.[152] Buddhism, which was supported by the ancient Indian urban civilisation lost influence to the traditional religions, which were rooted in the countryside.[153] In Bengal, Buddhism was even prosecuted. But at the same time, Buddhism was incorporated into Hinduism, when Gaudapada used Buddhist philosophy to reinterpret the Upanishads.[152] This also marked a shift from Atman and Brahman as a "living substance"[154] to "maya-vada"[note 25], where Atman and Brahman are seen as "pure knowledge-consciousness".[155] According to Scheepers, it is this "maya-vada" view which has come to dominate Indian thought.[153]

Buddhism

Between 400 and 1000 CE Hinduism expanded as the decline of Buddhism in India continued.[156] Buddhism subsequently became effectively extinct in India but survived in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Bhakti

The Bhakti movement began with the emphasis on the worship of God, regardless of one's status – whether priestly or laypeople, men or women, higher social status or lower social status. The movements were mainly centered on the forms of Vishnu (Rama and Krishna) and Shiva. There were however popular devotees of this era of Durga. The best-known devotees are the Nayanars from southern India. The most popular Shaiva teacher of the south was Basava, while of the north it was Gorakhnath. Female saints include figures like Akkamadevi, Lalleshvari and Molla.

The "alwar" or "azhwars" (Tamil: ஆழ்வார்கள், *āzvārka*/ [aːɻʋaːr], those immersed in god) were Tamil poet-saints of south India who lived between the 6th and 9th centuries CE and espoused "emotional devotion" or bhakti to Visnu-Krishna in their songs of longing, ecstasy and service.[157] The most popular Vaishnava teacher of the south was Ramanuja, while of the north it was Ramananda.

Several important icons were women. For example, within the Mahanubhava sect, the women outnumbered the men,[158] and administration was many times composed mainly of women.[159] Mirabai is the most popular female saint in India.

Sri Vallabha Acharya (1479–1531) is a very important figure from this era. He founded the Shuddha Advaita (*Pure Non-dualism*) school of Vedanta thought.

According to *The Centre for Cultural Resources and Training*,

> Vaishanava bhakti literature was an all-India phenomenon, which started in the 6th–7th century A.D. in the Tamil-speaking region of South India, with twelve Alvar (one immersed in God) saint-poets, who wrote devotional songs. The religion of Alvar poets, which included a woman poet, Andal, was devotion to God through love (bhakti), and in the ecstasy of such devotions they sang hundreds of songs which embodied both depth of feeling and felicity of expressions [web 8]

Early Islamic rule (c. 1100–1500 CE)

In the 12th and 13th centuries, Turks and Afghans invaded parts of northern India and established the Delhi Sultanate in the former Rajput holdings.[160] The subsequent Slave dynasty of Delhi managed to conquer large areas of northern India, approximately equal in extent to the ancient Gupta Empire, while the Khalji dynasty conquered most of central India but were ultimately unsuccessful in conquering and uniting the subcontinent. The Sultanate ushered in a period of Indian cultural renaissance. The resulting "Indo-Muslim" fusion of cultures left lasting syncretic monuments in architecture, music, literature, religion, and clothing.

Bhakti movement

During the 14th to 17th centuries, a great *Bhakti* movement swept through central and northern India, initiated by a loosely associated group of teachers or *Sants*. Ramananda, Ravidas, Srimanta Sankardeva, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabha Acharya, Sur, Meera, Kabir, Tulsidas, Namdev, Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, and other mystics spearheaded the Bhakti movement in the North while Annamacharya, Bhadrachala Ramadas, Tyagaraja, and others propagated Bhakti in the South. They taught that people could cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste, and the subtle complexities of philosophy, and simply express their overwhelming love for God. This period was also characterized by a spate of devotional literature in vernacular prose and poetry in the ethnic languages of the various Indian states or provinces.

Lingayatism

Lingayatism is a distinct Shaivite tradition in India, established in the 12th century by the philosopher and social reformer Basavanna. The adherents of this tradition are known as Lingayats. The term is derived from Lingavantha in Kannada, meaning "one who wears *Ishtalinga* on their body" (*Ishtalinga* is the representation of the God). In Lingayat theology, *Ishtalinga* is an oval-shaped emblem symbolising Parasiva, the absolute reality. Contemporary Lingayatism follows a progressive reform–based theology propounded, which has great influence in South India, especially in the state of Karnataka.[161]

Unifying Hinduism

An aerial view of the Meenakshi Temple from the top of the southern gopuram, looking north. The temple was rebuilt by the Vijayanagar Empire.

According to Nicholson, already between the 12th and 16th century,

> ... certain thinkers began to treat as a single whole the diverse philosophival teachings of the Upanishads, epics, Puranas, and the schools known retrospectively as the "six systems" (*saddarsana*) of mainstream Hindu philosophy.[162]

The tendency of "a blurring of philosophical distinctions" has also been noted by Burley.[163] Lorenzen locates the origins of a distinct Hindu identity in the interaction between Muslims and Hindus,[164] and a process of "mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim other",[165] which started well before 1800.[166] Both the Indian and the European thinkers who developed the term "Hinduism" in the 19th century were influenced by these philosophers.[162]

Sikhism (15th century)

Sikhism originated in 15th-century Punjab, Delhi Sultanate (present-day India and Pakistan) with the teachings of Nanak and nine successive gurus. The principal belief in Sikhism is faith in *Vāhigurū*— represented by the sacred symbol of *ēk ōaṅkār* [meaning one god]. Sikhism's traditions and teachings are distinctly associated with the history, society and culture of the Punjab. Adherents of Sikhism are known as Sikhs (*students* or *disciples*) and number over 27 million across the world.

Harmandir Sahib (*The Golden Temple*) is culturally the most significant place of worship for the Sikhs.

Modern period (1500–present)

Early modern period

According to Gavin Flood, the modern period in India begins with the first contacts with western nations around 1500.[130][131] The period of Mughal rule in India[167] saw the rise of new forms of religiosity.[168]

Modern India (after 1800)

Mahamagam Festival is a holy festival celebrated once in twelve years in Tamil Nadu. Mahamagam Festival, which is held at Kumbakonam. This festival is also called as Kumbamela of South.[169][170]

Hinduism

In the 19th century, under influence of the colonial forces, a synthetic vision of Hinduism was formulated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi.[171] These thinkers have tended to take an inclusive view of India's religious history, emphasising the similarities between the various Indian religions.[171]

The modern era has given rise to dozens of Hindu saints with international influence.[172] For example, Brahma Baba established the Brahma Kumaris, one of the largest new Hindu religious movements which teaches the discipline of Raja Yoga to millions. Representing traditional Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Prabhupada founded the Hare Krishna movement, another organisation with a global reach. In late 18th-century India, Swaminarayan founded the Swaminarayan Sampraday. Anandamurti, founder of the Ananda Marga, has also influenced many worldwide. Through the international influence of all of these new Hindu denominations, many Hindu practices such as yoga, meditation, mantra, divination, and vegetarianism have been adopted by new converts.

The largest religious gathering ever held on Earth, the 2001 Maha Kumbh Mela held in Prayag attracted around 70 million Hindus from around the world.

Jainism

Jainism continues to be an influential religion and Jain communities live in Indian states Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Jains authored several classical books in different Indian languages for a considerable period of time.

Buddhism

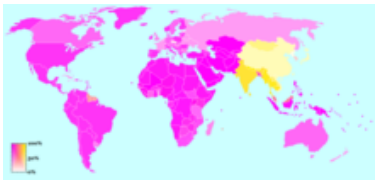
The Dalit Buddhist movement also referred to as Navayana[173] is a 19th- and 20th-century Buddhist revival movement in India. It received its most substantial impetus from B. R. Ambedkar's call for the conversion of Dalits to Buddhism in 1956 and the opportunity to escape the caste-based society that considered them to be the lowest in the hierarchy.[174]

Similarities and differences

According to Tilak, the religions of India can be interpreted "differentially" or "integrally",[175] that is by either highlighting the differences or the similarities.[175] According to Sherma and Sarma, western Indologists have tended to emphasise the differences, while Indian Indologists have tended to emphasise the similarities.[175]

Similarities

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism share certain key concepts, which are interpreted differently by different groups and individuals.[175] Until the 19th century, adherents of those various religions did not tend to label themselves as in opposition to each other, but "perceived themselves as belonging to the same extended cultural family."[176]



Map showing the prevalence of Abrahamic (pink) and Indian religions (yellow) in each country

Dharma

The spectrum of these religions are called Dharmic religions because of their overlap over the core concept of Dharma. It has various meanings depending on the context. For example it could mean duty, righteousness, spiritual teachings, conduct, etc.

A devotee facing the Ganga, reading a stack of holy books ("Chalisa" of various god) at the Kumbh Mela

Soteriology

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism share the concept of moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth.[177] They differ however on the exact nature of this liberation.[177]

Ritual

Common traits can also be observed in ritual. The head-anointing ritual of *abhiseka* is of importance in three of these distinct traditions, excluding Sikhism (in Buddhism it is found within Vajrayana). Other noteworthy rituals are the cremation of the dead, the wearing of vermilion on the head by married women, and various marital rituals. In literature, many classical narratives and purana have Hindu, Buddhist or Jain versions.[web 9] All four traditions have notions of *karma*, *dharma*, *samsara*, *moksha* and various *forms of Yoga*.

Mythology

Rama is a heroic figure in all of these religions. In Hinduism he is the God-incarnate in the form of a princely king; in Buddhism, he is a Bodhisattva-incarnate; in Jainism, he is the perfect human being. Among the Buddhist Ramayanas are: *Vessantarajataka*,[178] Reamker, Ramakien, Phra Lak Phra Lam, Hikayat Seri Rama, etc. There also exists the *Khamti Ramayana* among the Khamti tribe of Asom wherein Rama is an Avatar of a Bodhisattva who incarnates to punish the demon king Ravana (B.Datta 1993). The *Tai Ramayana* is another book retelling the divine story in Asom.

Differences

Critics point out that there exist vast differences between and even within the various Indian religions.[179][180] All major religions are composed of innumerable sects and subsects.[181]

Mythology

Indian mythology also reflects the competition between the various Indian religions. A popular story tells how Vajrapani kills Mahesvara, a manifestation of Shiva depicted as an evil being.[182][183] The story occurs in several scriptures, most notably the *Sarvatathagatatattvasamgraha* and the *Vajrapany-abhiseka-mahatantra*.[184][note 26] According to Kalupahana, the story "echoes" the story of the conversion of Ambattha.[183] It is to be understood in the context of the competition between Buddhist institutions and Shaivism.[188]

Āstika and *nāstika* categorisation

Āstika and *nāstika* are variously defined terms sometimes used to categorise Indian religions. The traditional definition, followed by Adi Shankara, classifies religions and persons as *āstika* and *nāstika* according to whether they accept the authority of the main Hindu texts, the Vedas, as supreme revealed scriptures, or not. By this definition, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Vedanta are classified as *āstika* schools, while Charvaka is classified as a *nāstika* school. Buddhism and Jainism are also thus classified as *nāstika* religions since they do not accept the authority of the Vedas.

Another set of definitions—notably distinct from the usage of Hindu philosophy—loosely characterise *āstika* as "theist" and *nāstika* as "atheist". By these definitions, *Sāṃkhya* can be considered a *nāstika* philosophy, though it is traditionally classed among the Vedic *āstika* schools. From this point of view, Buddhism and Jainism remain *nāstika* religions.

Buddhists and Jains have disagreed that they are nastika and have redefined the phrases āstika and nāstika in their own view. Jains assign the term nastika to one who is ignorant of the meaning of the religious texts,[189] or those who deny the existence of the soul was well known to the Jainas.[190]

Use of term "Dharmic religions"

Frawley and Malhotra use the term "Dharmic traditions" to highlight the similarities between the various Indian religions.[191][192][note 27] According to Frawley, "all religions in India have been called the Dharma",[191] and can be

> ... put under the greater umbrella of "Dharmic traditions" which we can see as Hinduism or the spiritual traditions of India in the broadest sense.[191]

A holy place for all religion - "Mazar of Pir Mubarak Gazi"

According to Paul Hacker, as described by Halbfass, the term "dharma"

> ... assumed a fundamentally new meaning and function in modern Indian thought, beginning with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the nineteenth century. This process, in which *dharma* was presented as an equivalent of, but also a response to, the western notion of "religion", reflects a fundamental change in the Hindu sense of identity and in the attitude toward other religious and cultural traditions. The foreign tools of "religion" and "nation" became tools of self-definition, and a new and precarious sense of the "unity of Hinduism" and of national as well as religious identity took root.[194]

The emphasis on the similarities and integral unity of the dharmic faiths has been criticised for neglecting the vast differences between and even within the various Indian religions and traditions.[179][180] According to Richard E. King it is typical of the "inclusivist appropriation of other traditions"[171] of Neo-Vedanta:

> The inclusivist appropriation of other traditions, so characteristic of neo-Vedanta ideology, appears on three basic levels. First, it is apparent in the suggestion that the (Advaita) Vedanta philosophy of Sankara (c. eighth century CE) constitutes the central philosophy of Hinduism. Second, in an Indian context, neo-Vedanta philosophy subsumes Buddhist philosophies in terms of its own Vedantic ideology. The Buddha becomes a member of the Vedanta tradition, merely attempting to reform it from within. Finally, at a global level, neo-Vedanta colonizes the religious traditions of the world by arguing for the centrality of a non-dualistic position as the *philosophia perennis* underlying all cultural differences.[171]

The "Council of Dharmic Faiths" (UK) regards Zoroastrianism, while not originating in the Indian subcontinent, also as a Dharmic religion.[195]

Status of non-Hindus in the Republic of India

The inclusion of Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs within Hinduism is part of the Indian legal system. The 1955 Hindu Marriage Act " [defines] as Hindus all Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and anyone who is not a Christian, Muslim, Parsee (Zoroastrian) or Jew".[196] And the Indian Constitution says that "reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion".[196]

In a judicial reminder, the Indian Supreme Court observed Sikhism and Jainism to be sub-sects or *special* faiths within the larger Hindu fold,[web 10][note 28] and that Jainism is a denomination within the Hindu fold.[web 10][note 29] Although the government of British India counted Jains in India as a major religious community right from the first Census conducted in 1873, after independence in 1947 Sikhs and Jains were not treated as national minorities.[web 10][note 30] In 2005 the Supreme Court of India declined to issue a writ of Mandamus granting Jains the status of a religious minority throughout India. The Court however left it to the respective states to decide on the minority status of Jain religion.[197][web 10][note 31]

However, some individual states have over the past few decades differed on whether Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs are religious minorities or not, by either pronouncing judgments or passing legislation. One example is the judgment passed by the Supreme Court in 2006, in a case pertaining to the state of Uttar Pradesh, which declared Jainism to be indisputably distinct from Hinduism, but mentioned that, "The question as to whether the Jains are part of the Hindu religion is open to debate.[198] However, the Supreme Court also noted various court cases that have held Jainism to be a distinct religion.

Another example is the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill, that is an amendment to a legislation that sought to define Jains and Buddhists as denominations within Hinduism.[web 11] Ultimately on 31 July 2007, finding it not in conformity with the concept of freedom of religion as embodied in Article 25 (1) of the Constitution, Governor Naval Kishore Sharma returned the Gujarat Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2006 citing the widespread protests by the Jains[web 12] as well as Supreme Court's extrajudicial observation that Jainism is a "special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion by the Supreme Court".[web 13]

See also

- Abrahamic religions, a similar term used to refer Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Ayyavazhi and Hinduism
- Buddhism in India
- Christianity in India
- Demographics of India
- Hinduism in India
- Indology
- Iranian religions
- Islam in India
- Jainism in India
- Kalasha (religion)
- Proto-Indo-European mythology
- Proto-Indo-Iranian religion
- Sikhism in India
- Tribal religions in India
- Zoroastrianism in India

Notes

1. Adams: "Indian religions, including early Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and sometimes also Theravāda Buddhism and the Hindu- and Buddhist-inspired religions of South and Southeast Asia".
2. The pre-Buddhist Upanishads are: Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Kaushitaki, Aitareya, and Taittiriya Upanishads.[8]
3. The shared concepts include rebirth, samsara, karma, meditation, renunciation and moksha.[14]
4. The Upanishadic, Buddhist and Jain renunciation traditions form parallel traditions, which share some common concepts and interests. While Kuru-Panchala, at the central Ganges Plain, formed the center of the early Upanishadic tradition, Kosala-Magadha at the central Ganges Plain formed the center of the other shramanic traditions.[15]
5. Buddhism and Hinduism Similarities
6. See also Tanvir Anjum, *Temporal Divides: A Critical Review of the Major Schemes of Periodization in Indian History (https://www.academia.edu/6647852/Temporal_Divides_A_Critical_Review_of_the_Major_Schemes_of_Periodization_in_Indian_History)*.
7. Different periods are designated as "classical Hinduism":
   - Smart calls the period between 1000 BCE and 100 CE "pre-classical". It is the formative period for the Upanishads and Brahmanism[subnote 1] Jainism and Buddhism. For Smart, the "classical period" lasts from 100 to 1000 CE, and coincides with the flowering of "classical Hinduism" and the flowering and deterioration of Mahayana-buddhism in India.[21]
   - For Michaels, the period between 500 BCE and 200 BCE is a time of "Ascetic reformism",[22] whereas the period between 200 BCE and 1100 CE is the time of "classical Hinduism", since there is "a turning point between the Vedic religion and Hindu religions".[11]
   - Muesse discerns a longer period of change, namely between 800 BCE and 200 BCE, which he calls the "Classical Period". According to Muesse, some of the fundamental concepts of Hinduism, namely karma, reincarnation and "personal enlightenment and transformation", which did not exist in the Vedic religion, developed in this time.[23]
8. Lockard: "The encounters that resulted from Aryan migration brought together several very different peoples and cultures, reconfiguring Indian society. Over many centuries a fusion of Aryan and Dravidian occurred, a complex process that historians have labeled the Indo-Aryan synthesis."[64] Lockard: "Hinduism can be seen historically as a synthesis of Aryan beliefs with Harappan and other Dravidian traditions that developed over many centuries."[65]
9. Ashim Kumar Bhattacharyya declares that Vedas contain the fundamental truths about Hindu Dharma.[84]

10. Richard E. King notes: "Consequently, it remains an anachronism to project the notion of "Hinduism" as it is commonly understood into pre-colonial history."[87]
11. In post-Vedic times understood as "hearers" of an eternally existing Veda, *Śrauta* means "what is heard"
12. "Upanishads came to be composed already in the ninth and eighth century B.C.E. and continued to be composed well into the first centuries of the Common Era. The Brahmanas and Aranyakas are somewhat older, reaching back to the eleventh and even twelfth century BCE."[web 4]
13. Gavin Flood and Patrick Olivelle: "The second half of the first millennium BCE was the period that created many of the ideological and institutional elements that characterize later Indian religions. The renouncer tradition played a central role during this formative period of Indian religious history.... Some of the fundamental values and beliefs that we generally associate with Indian religions in general and Hinduism in particular were in part the creation of the renouncer tradition. These include the two pillars of Indian theologies: samsara – the belief that life in this world is one of suffering and subject to repeated deaths and births (rebirth); moksa/nirvana – the goal of human existence...."[111]
14. Cromwell Crwaford: "Alongside Brahmanism was the non-Aryan Shramanic (self reliant) culture with its roots going back to prehistoric times."[114]
15. Masih: "There is no evidence to show that Jainism and Buddhism ever subscribed to vedic sacrifices, vedic deities or caste. They are parallel or native religions of India and have contributed to much to [sic] the growth of even classical Hinduism of the present times."[115]
16. Padmanabh S. Jaini: "Jainas themselves have no memory of a time when they fell within the Vedic fold. Any theory that attempts to link the two traditions, moreover fails to appreciate rather distinctive and very non-vedic character of Jaina cosmology, soul theory, karmic doctrine and atheism".[116]
17. Flood: "The second half of the first millennium BCE was the period that created many of the ideological and institutional elements that characterise later Indian religions. The renouncer tradition played a central role during this formative period of Indian religious history.... Some of the fundamental values and beliefs that we generally associate with Indian religions in general and Hinduism in particular were in part the creation of the renouncer tradition. These include the two pillars of Indian theologies: samsara – the belief that life in this world is one of suffering and subject to repeated deaths and births (rebirth); moksa/nirvana – the goal of human existence...."[111]
18. Flood: "The origin and doctrine of Karma and Samsara are obscure. These concepts were certainly circulating among sramanas, and Jainism and Buddhism developed specific and sophisticated ideas about the process of transmigration. It is very possible that the karmas and reincarnation entered the mainstream brahaminical thought from the sramana or the renouncer traditions."[118]
19. Padmanabh S. Jaini: "Yajnavalkya's reluctance and manner in expounding the doctrine of karma in the assembly of Janaka (a reluctance not shown on any other occasion) can perhaps be explained by the assumption that it was, like that of the transmigration of soul, of non-brahmanical origin. In view of the fact that this doctrine is emblazoned on almost every page of sramana scriptures, it is highly probable that it was derived from them."[120]
20. Jeffrey Brodd and Gregory Sobolewski: "Jainism shares many of the basic doctrines of Hinduism and Buddhism."[121]
21. Oldmeadow: "Over time, apparent misunderstandings have arisen over the origins of Jainism and relationship with its sister religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. There has been an ongoing debate between Jainism and Vedic Hinduism as to which revelation preceded the other. What is historically known is that there was a tradition along with Vedic Hinduism known as Sramana Dharma. Essentially, the sramana tradition included it its fold, the Jain and Buddhist traditions, which disagreed with the eternality of the Vedas, the needs for ritual sacrifices and the supremacy of the Brahmins."[125] Page 141
22. Fisher: "The extreme antiquity of Jainism as a non-vedic, indigenous Indian religion is well documented. Ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures refer to Jainism as an existing tradition which began long before Mahavira."[126] Page 115
23. In the east the Pala Empire[148] (770–1125 CE[148]), in the west and north the Gurjara-Pratihara[148] (7th–10th century[148]), in the southwest the Rashtrakuta Dynasty[148] (752–973[148]), in the Dekkhan the Chalukya dynasty[148] (7th–8th century[148]), and in the south the Pallava dynasty[148] (7th–9th century[148]) and the Chola dynasty[148] (9th century[148]).
24. This resembles the development of Chinese Chán during the An Lu-shan rebellion and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907–960/979), during which power became decentralised end new Chán-schools emerged.[151]
25. The term "maya-vada" is primarily being used by non-Advaitins. See [web 5][web 6][web 7]

26. The story begins with the transformation of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra into Vajrapani by Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha, receiving a vajra and the name "Vajrapani".[185] Vairocana then requests Vajrapani to generate his adamantine family, to establish a mandala. Vajrapani refuses, because Mahesvara (Shiva) "is deluding beings with his deceitfull religious doctrines and engaging in all kinds of violent criminal conduct".[186] Mahesvara and his entourage are dragged to Mount Sumeru, and all but Mahesvara submit. Vajrapani and Mahesvara engage in a magical combat, which is won by Vajrapani. Mahesvara's retinue become part of Vairocana's mandala, except for Mahesvara, who is killed, and his life transferred to another realm where he becomes a buddha named Bhasmesvara-nirghosa, the "Soundless Lord of Ashes".[187]
27. Occasionally the term is also being used by other authors. David Westerlund: "... may provide some possibilities for co-operation with Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, who like Hindus are regarded as adherents of 'dharmic' religions."[193]
28. In various codified customary laws like Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act and other laws of pre and post-Constitution period, the definition of 'Hindu' included all sects and sub-sects of Hindu religions including Sikhs and Jains[web 10]
29. The Supreme Court observed in a judgment pertaining to case of Bal Patil vs. Union of India: "Thus, 'Hinduism' can be called a general religion and common faith of India whereas 'Jainism' is a special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion. Jainism places greater emphasis on non-violence ('Ahimsa') and compassion ('Karuna'). Their only difference from Hindus is that Jains do not believe in any creator like God but worship only the perfect human-being whom they called Tirathankar."[web 10]
30. The so-called minority communities like Sikhs and Jains were not treated as national minorities at the time of framing the Constitution.[web 10]
31. In an extra-judicial observation not forming part of the judgment the court observed :"Thus, 'Hinduism' can be called a general religion and common faith of India whereas 'Jainism' is a special religion formed on the basis of quintessence of Hindu religion. Jainism places greater emphasis on non-violence ('Ahimsa') and compassion ('Karuna'). Their only difference from Hindus is that Jains do not believe in any creator like God but worship only the perfect human-being whom they called Tirathankar."[web 10]

1. Smart distinguishes "Brahmanism" from the Vedic religion, connecting "Brahmanism" with the Upanishads.[20]

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