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Indian Culture-9: Religion, Sects and Philosophy Basics

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Model Questions

Prelims MCQs

Please check Prelims Model Questions at the end of this module.

Religion has been an important part of India's culture throughout its history. Religious diversity and religious tolerance are both established in the country by law and custom. A vast majority of Indians (over 93%) associate themselves with a religion. Four of the world's major religious traditions; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are originated at India. These religions are also called as 'Eastern Religions'.

Hinduism

Hinduism has been defined as a religion or a set of religious beliefs and practices or a religious tradition or a way of life. This term applies to the form of religion which succeeded to Vedic religion.

Hindu Philosophy

Hindu philosophy is traditionally divided into six āstika schools viz. Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa (or Purva Mimamsa) and Vedanta (or Uttara Mimamsa), which accept the Vedas as supreme revealed scriptures. Further, there are Nāstika schools such as Cārvāka, Ājīvika etc. which don't accept the Vedas as supreme scriptures.

Astika Schools

Samkhya School

Samkhya is the oldest of the Aastika or Orthodox philosophical systems in Hinduism. Samkhya means Enumeration. The founder of the Sankhya school of Philosophy was **Maharishi Kapil**.

Basic Philosophy

The Samkhya School believes in Dualism and says that there are only two realities viz. **Purusha** and **Prakriti**. While Purusha is eternal, pure consciousness, Prakriti is substance or realm of matter. Prakriti consists of varying levels of three dispositions or categories of qualities viz. Activity (rajas), Inactivity (tamas) and Harmony (sattva). An imbalance in the intertwined relationship of these three dispositions causes the world to evolve from Prakriti. This evolution from Prakriti causes the creation of 23 constituents, including intellect (buddhi), ego (ahamkara) and mind (manas).

As per this school, life or Jiva is a state in which **puruṣa is bonded to prakriti through the glue of desire**, and the end of this bondage is **moksha**. Thus, the Samkhya school does not believe in existence of God but only two realities Purush and Prakriti. However, it does not describe what happens after moksha and does not mention anything about God, because after liberation there is no essential distinction of individual and universal puruṣa. Thus, what happens after Moksha is



irrelevant thing for this school. However, despite not believing in God, the Samkhya school believed in Doctrine of Karma and transmigration of souls. It also believes in existence of many living souls (Jeevatmas) who possess consciousness. It says that Puruṣa, the eternal pure consciousness, due to ignorance, identifies itself with products of Prakriti such as intellect (buddhi) and ego (ahamkara). This results in endless transmigration and suffering. However, once the realization arises that Puruṣa is distinct from Prakriti, the Self is no longer subject to transmigration and absolute freedom arises.

Difference between Dualism of Samkhya and Dualism of West

In Samkhya School of philosophy, the dualism consists of fundamental difference between consciousness and matter. It is different from the dualism in west, because in that the dualism differentiates between mind and body.

The Sankhya system of philosophy lost ground in the Gupta period because its theism was absorbed by the epics and its categories of Prakriti, Purusa and Gunas were taken over by Vedanta.

Yoga School

Yuj means “control” and Yoga also mean to “add”. This philosophy is very close to Samkhya and can be easily distinguished as

Yoga= Samkhya + Divinity.

Thus, yoga school accepts the samkhya psychology and metaphysics, but is more theistic than the samkhya, because it also includes **the divine entity** to the samkhya’s elements of reality.

- Patanjali is widely regarded as the compiler of the formal yoga philosophy. The yoga philosophy of Patanjali is also known as **Raja Yoga**. The other branches include **Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Hatha Yoga**.

Raja Yoga is a system for control of the mind. As per Patanjali Yoga is defined as योगः चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः, which means that Yoga is the **inhibition of the modifications of the mind**. Swami Vivekananda translated the sutra as “Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff from taking various forms”.

Hindu philosophy distinguishes seven major branches of Yoga:

- **Rāja Yoga** (Classical Yoga), a system of yoga codified by Patañjali and classified as one of the six āstika (“orthodox”) schools of Hindu philosophy.
- **Jnana yoga**, (buddhi-yoga) centred on the faculty of discernment and ‘virtually identical with the spiritual path of Vedānta’.
- **Karma-yoga**, in which the world of everyday work becomes the tool by which self is transcended.
- **Bhakti-Yoga** the path of devoted service to God.
- **Tantra-yoga** focused on the techniques and psycho-physical teachings contained within a body of texts called tantras.



- **Mantra-yoga**, one of the most ancient forms of yoga in which the psycho-acoustical properties of the spoken word are used to concentrate the mind.
- **Hatha yoga**, a system of physical purification designed to reintegrate and re-balance the mind and body in preparation for Raja-yoga (first described by Yogi Swatmarama).

Ashtanga Yoga

The Yogasutras of Patanjali later became the basis of **Ashtanga Yoga**. This eight-limbed concept derived from Patanjali's Yogasutra is a core characteristic of practically every **Raja yoga** variation that is practiced today. These eight limbs are as follows:

- **Five Yama:** Yama refers to the five “abstentions”. These abstentions are
 - Ahimsa (non-violence)
 - Satya (Truth, non-lying)
 - Asteya (non-covetousness)
 - Brahmacharya (non-sensuality, celibacy)
 - Aparigraha (non-possessiveness).
- **Five Niyama:** The Niyama refers to five “observances”. These are
 - Shaucha (purity) | rajawat.rs.surajsingh@gmail.com | www.gktoday.in/module/ias-general-studies
 - Santosha (contentment)
 - Tapas (austerity)
 - Svadhyaya (study of the Vedic scriptures to know about God and the soul), and
 - Ishvara-Pranidhana (surrender to God).
- **Asana:** Asana means to be seated. Patanjali's Sutras refers to the seated position used for meditation.
- **Pranayama** (“Suspending Breath”): Prāna, breath, “āyāma”, to restrain or stop. Also interpreted as control of the life force.
- **Pratyahara** (“Abstraction”): Withdrawal of the mind or senses from an object or event.
- **Dharana** (“Concentration”): Fixing the attention on a single object.
- **Dhyana** (“Meditation”): Intense contemplation of the nature of the object of meditation.
- **Samadhi** (“Liberation”): merging consciousness with the object of meditation.

Hathayoga Versus Rajayoga

The Yogasutras of Patanjali which mainly postulate the Raj Yoga, date back to Mauryan Period while Hathayoga was introduced by Yogi Swatmarama. *The major difference between Raj Yoga and Hathayoga is that Raja Yoga aims at controlling all thought-waves or mental modifications, while a Hatha Yogi starts his Sadhana, or spiritual practice, with Asanas (postures) and Pranayama. So Raj Yoga starts from Mind and Hathayoga starts from Body.*



Nyaya School

Literally means recursion. It is based on texts known as the Nyaya Sutras, which were written by **Aksapada Gautama** from around the 2nd century AD. The basic theme of this darshana is acquiring the **Valid Knowledge**. The system is based upon Logic. On this basis, the **knowledge can be valid or invalid**.

- There are **four means of obtaining valid knowledge** viz.
 - perception (pratyakṣa),
 - inference (anumāna),
 - comparison (upamāna) and
 - verbal testimony (śabda).
- Invalid knowledge includes
 - memory (smṛti),
 - doubt (saṁśaya),
 - error (viparyaya) and
 - hypothetical reasoning (tarka).

The followers of Nyaya believed that obtaining valid knowledge was the only way to obtain release from suffering. They therefore took great pains to identify valid sources of knowledge and to distinguish these from mere false opinions. The most important contribution made by this school is its methodology. This methodology is based on a [system of logic](#) that has subsequently been adopted by the majority of the Indian schools.

Vaisheshika School

Vaisheshika is a kind of Atomism. It was proposed by **Maharishi Kanaad**. It postulates that all objects in the physical universe are reducible to a finite number of atoms. The school deals in detail with “Padarth” or Matter. Vaisheshika system developed independently from the Nyaya, but the two eventually merged because of their closely related theories. In its classical form, however, the Vaisheshika school differed from the Nyaya in one crucial respect: where Nyaya accepted four sources of valid knowledge, the **Vaisheshika accepted only perception and inference**.

Vaisheshika is also different from the Modern Atomic Theory because Vaisheshika says that the behaviour of the atoms is guided by the Supreme being.

The Vaisheshika School classified the matter or **padartha** into six categories:

- **Dravya (substance):** There are nine substances viz. pṛthvī (earth), ap (water), tejas (fire), vāyu (air), ākāśa (ether), kāla (time), dik (space), ātman (self) and manas (mind). **The first five are called bhūtas** (**Panchabhutas**) the substances having some specific qualities so that they could be perceived



by one or the other external senses.

- **Guṇa (quality):** There are 17 Gunas or qualities of matter. *The Gunas are different from Dravya. While a Dravya is capable of existing independently by itself, a guṇa (quality) cannot exist so.* The 17 Gunas are rūpa (colour), rasa (taste), gandha (smell), sparśa (touch), saṁkhyā (number), parimāṇa (size/dimension/quantity), prthaktva (individuality), saṁyoga (conjunction/accompaniments), vibhāga (disjunction), paratva (priority), aparatva (posteriority), buddhi (knowledge), sukha (pleasure), duḥkha (pain), icchā (desire), dveṣa (aversion) and prayatna (effort). To these Praśastapāda added another Gunas such as gurutva (gravity), dravatva (fluidity), sneha (viscosity), dharma (merit), adharma (demerit), śabda (sound) and saṁkāśra (faculty).
- **Karma (activity):** Activity is a feature of some of the Dravyas. Ākāśa (ether), kāla (time), dik (space) and ātman (self), though substances, are devoid of karma (activity)
- **Sāmānya (generality):** When a property is found common to many substances, it is called sāmānya.
- **Viśeṣa (particularity):** By means of viśeṣa, we are able to perceive substances as different from one another. As the ultimate atoms are innumerable so are the viśeṣas
- **Samavāya (inherence):** Samavāya is basically cause and the effect by two substances. According to Praśastapāda, it is the relationship existing between the substances that are inseparable, standing to one another in the relation of the container and the contained

One more category was later added called abhāva (non-existence). Here, the first three categories are defined as **artha (which can perceive) and they have real objective existence**. The last three categories are defined as *budhyapekṣam (product of intellectual discrimination) and they are logical categories*.

Difference between Vaisheshika and Nyaya

“In the Indian Philosophy, the Vaisheshika system is closely allied to the Nyaya system of philosophy.” Enumerate the similarities and differences between the two. Vaisheshika is allied to the nyaya system of philosophy. Both systems accept the liberation of the individual self as the end goal; both view ignorance as the root cause of all pain and misery; and both believe that liberation is attained only through right knowledge of reality. There are, however, two major differences between Nyaya and Vaisheshika.

- **First**, nyaya philosophy accepts four independent sources of knowledge — perception, inference, comparison, and testimony — but vaisheshika accepts only two — perception and inference.
- **Second**, nyaya maintains that all of reality is comprehended by sixteen categories



(padarthas), whereas vaishesika recognizes only seven categories of reality. These are: dravya (substance), guna (quality), karma (action), samanya (generality), visesa (uniqueness), samavaya (inherence), and abhava (nonexistence). The term padartha means “the object denoted by a word,” and according to vaishesika philosophy all objects denoted by words can be broadly divided into two main classes

— that which exists, and that which does not exist. Six of the seven padarthas are in the first class, that which exists. In the second class, that which does not exist, there is only one padartha, abhava, which stands for all negative facts such as the nonexistence of things.

Mimamsa (Purva Mimamsa)

Mimamsa means **investigation or enquiry**. The primary enquiry is into the nature of **dharma** based on close theology of the Vedas. It has two divisions, Purva Mimamsa and Uttar Mimamsa. Poorva Mimamsa is ancient.

Dharma, Karma and Rta

The Mimamsa philosophy says that the *dharma* is not accessible to reason or observation, instead, it **must be inferred from the authority of the Vedas**, which are considered eternal, authorless, and infallible. This implies that rather than paying attention to God exists not, this philosophy focuses on the character of the **Dharma**.

The Pūrva Mīmāṃsā explains the Dharma as a “virtue”, “morality” or “duty”. The duty is to follow the prescriptions of the Saṃhitās and their Brāhmaṇa commentaries relating the correct performance of Vedic rituals. This implies that Dharma is the essentially ritualism, and there is a great significance of the Karma or action in attaining Dharma.

*In this way, Dharma is also fundamentally different from the Rig-Vedic **Rta or Rita** which is a principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. While Dharma and Karma are related to each other, **Rta** is described as that which is ultimately responsible for the proper functioning of the natural, moral and sacrificial orders.*

The Purva Mimamsa was postulated by Jamini. The ideology of Poorva Mimamsa was to counteract the challenge by Buddhism and vedanta which marginalized the Vedic supremacy and sacrifices. This school got momentum in Gupta period and reached its climax in 7-8th century. Sabara and Kumaril Bhatta were two main interpretators. It was one of the major forces to decline Buddhism in India, but later itself was eclipsed by **Vedanta**.

Uttar Mimamsa / Vedanta School

Vedanta means Veda end or the purpose or goal of the Vedas. It was given by Badarayana or Maharishi Vyasa, who is one of the 7 chiranjivis and wrote “Mahabhartā”.

Advaita

Its proponent was Adi Sahnakara and **his Guru Gaudapada**. The essence of this Vedanta is that



“Brahman is the only reality, and the world, as it appears, is illusory.”

Vishishtadvaita

Its proponent was Rāmānuja. The basic theory is that “jīvātman is a part of Brahman, and hence is similar, but not identical. Brahman, matter and the individual souls are distinct but mutually inseparable entities”. Vishishtadvaita advocates Bhakti to attain God.

Dvaita

The proponent of the Dvaita was Madhwāchārya. This theory is also known as Tatvavādā – The Philosophy of Reality. It identifies God in the Brahman (Universe) and its incarnations such as Vishnu and Krishna. It says that all individual souls (jīvātman) and matter as eternal are mutually separate entities.

Dvaitādvaita

The theory of Dvaitādvaita was given by Nimbarka. It is based upon the early school of Bhedābheda of Bhaskara. It says that jīvātman is at once the same as yet different from Brahman. The jiva relation may be regarded as dvaita from one point of view and advaita from another. This school identifies God in Krishna.

Shuddhādvaita

The proponent of Shuddhādvaita was Vallabha. It says that World is Leela of God that is Krishna and he is **Sat-Chid-Ananda**. It identifies Bhakti as the only means of liberation. Vallabha was also a famous saint of Pushti Marg. He won the famous debate of Brahmadva over Shankars.

Achintya Bhedābheda

The proponent of Achintya Bhedābheda was Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a follower of the Dvaita vedanta of Sri Madhwacharya. The doctrine of Achintya Bhedābheda or inconceivable and simultaneous one-ness and difference states that the soul or energy of God is both distinct and non-distinct from God and he can be experienced through a process of long devotion. It identified God in Krishna. This Philosophy is followed by ISKCON.

Purnādvaita or Integral Advaita

The proponent of Purnādvaita was Shri Arubindo. He propounded this doctrine in his “The Life Divine”. synthesized all the exant schools of Vedanta and gave a comprehensive resolution integrating cues from the Western metaphysics and modern science. Sri Arubindo is known to be one, who restored the umbilical cord of the Vedantic exegesis with the Vedas.

Modern Vedānta

The proponent of Modern Vedānta was Swami Vivekananda. His philosophy says that the conditions of abject poverty should be removed; only then will people be able to turn their minds toward God.



School Name	Propounders
Advaita	Adi Sahnakar and his Guru Gaudapada
Vishishtadvaita	Rāmānuja
Dvaita	Madhwāchārya
Dvaitādvaita	Nimbarka
Shuddhādvaita	Vallabha
Achintya Bhedābheda	Chaitanya Mahaprabhu
Purnādvaita or Integral Advaita	Shri Arubindo
Modern Vedānta	Swami Vivekananda

Analysis: Mimansa and Dharma, Karma and Rta

Mimansa means **investigation or enquiry**. The primary enquiry is into the nature of **dharma** based on close theology of the Vedas. It has two divisions, Purva Mimansa and Uttar Mimansa. Poorva Mimansa is ancient.

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Bhatta were two main interpretators. It was one of the major forces to decline Buddhism in India, but later itself was eclipsed by **Vedanta**.

Nastika Schools

The nāstika (heterodox) schools don't draw upon the Vedas as the sole primary authoritative text, but may emphasize other traditions of thought. The main nāstika schools are Cārvāka (pronounced Charvaka) and Ajivika.

Charvaka School

This system was originally called *Lokayat or Brahmaspatya*. This school may be called one of the oldest school of Indian materialism. It rejects Vedas, rejects ritualism of Vedas and does not believe in god or any other super natural power. Ajita Kesakambali is thought to be the first Caravaka while Brihaspati is called its founder. Most of its literature is now lost and it is also not a living tradition as of now.

Ajivika

Ajivikas are followers of the doctrine of immutability or pre-determined belonging to the religious order or sect founded by Gosala Mankhaliputta, a senior contemporary of buddha and mahavira. The basic theme of ajivikism is the doctrine of niyati or destiny. The main source of information on ajivikism is Bhagwati Sutra.

Major Sects in Hinduism

Academics categorize contemporary Hinduism into four major denominations: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Smartism and Shaktism. The denominations differ primarily in the god worshipped as the Supreme One and in the traditions that accompany worship of that god.

Vaishnavas worship Vishnu as the supreme God; Shaivites worship Shiva as the supreme; Shaktas worship Shakti (power) personified through a female divinity or Mother Goddess, Devi; while Smartas believe in the essential oneness of five (panchadeva) or six (Shanmata, as Tamil Hindus add Skanda) deities as personifications of the Supreme.

Vaishnavism

- It is focused on worshiping of Vishnu. Vaishnavites lead a way of life promoting differentiated monotheism, which gives importance to Lord Vishnu and His ten incarnations.
- Its beliefs and practices, especially the concepts of Bhakti and Bhakti Yoga, are based largely on the Upanishads, and associated with the Vedas and Puranic texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, and the Padma, Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas.
- Awareness, recognition, and growth of the belief have significantly increased outside of India in recent years. The Gaudiya Vaishnava branch of the tradition has significantly increased the awareness of Vaishnavism internationally, since the mid-1900s, largely through the activities



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and geographical expansion of the Hare Krishna movement founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in New York City in 1966.

Shaivism

- Shaivism reveres the god Shiva as the Supreme Being. Shaivas believe that Shiva is All and in all, the creator, preserver, destroyer, revealer and concealer of all that is.
- Devotees of Shiva wear Sacred ash as a sectarian mark on their foreheads and other parts of their bodies with reverence. The Sanskrit words bhasma and vibhuti can both be translated as “sacred ash”.
- Shaivism has a vast literature that includes texts representing multiple philosophical schools, including non-dualist (abheda), dualist (bheda), and non-dual-with-dualism (bhedābheda) perspectives.

Shaktism

- Shaktism focuses worship upon Shakti or Devi – the Hindu Divine Mother – as the absolute, ultimate Godhead. Shaktism regards Devī as the Supreme Brahman itself, with all other forms of divinity, female or male, considered being merely her diverse manifestations.
- In the details of its philosophy and practice, Shaktism resembles Shaivism. However, Shaktas focus most or all worship on Shakti, as the dynamic feminine aspect of the Supreme Divine.
- Shaktism is practiced throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond, in numerous forms, both Tantric and non-Tantric; however, its two largest and most visible schools are the Srikula (lit., family of Sri), strongest in South India, and the Kalikula (family of Kali), which prevails in northern and eastern India.

Smartism

- Smartism is a liberal or nonsectarian denomination of the Vedic Hindu religion which accepts all the major Hindu deities as forms of the one Brahman.
- The term Smarta refers to adherents who follow the Vedas and Shastras. Only a section of south Indian brahmins call themselves Smartas now.
- Smartas are followers and propagators of Smṛiti or religious texts derived from Vedic scriptures. Smarta religion was practiced by people who believed in the authority of the Vedas as well as the basic premise of puranas. As a consequence usually only a brahmin preferred to use this term to refer to his family tradition.
- It is most essential for Smarta Brahmins to specialize in the Karma Kanda of the Vedas and associated rituals diligently, and to teach the subsequent generations.

Varnashrama System in Hinduism

Hindu society has been categorized into four classes, called varnas. They are:



- Brahmins: Vedic teachers and priests;
- Kshatriyas: warriors, nobles, and kings;
- Vaishyas: farmers, merchants, and businessmen; and
- Shudras: servants and labourers

Bhagavad Gita, the sacred text of Hindus, links the varna to an individual's duty (svadharma), inborn nature (svabhāva), and natural tendencies (guṇa).

Ashram System

Traditionally the life of a Hindu is divided into four Ashramas (phases or stages).

- The first part of one's life, ***Brahmacharya***, the stage as a student, is spent in celibate, controlled, sober and pure contemplation under the guidance of a Guru, building up the mind for spiritual knowledge.
- ***Grihastha*** is the householder's stage, in which one marries and satisfies kāma and artha in one's married and professional life respectively.
- ***Vānaprastha***, the retirement stage, is gradual detachment from the material world. This may involve giving over duties to one's children, spending more time in religious practices and embarking on holy pilgrimages. prajasingh@gmail.com | www.gktoday.in/module/ias-general-studies
- Finally, in ***Sannyāsa***, the stage of asceticism, one renounces all worldly attachments to secludedly find the Divine through detachment from worldly life and peacefully shed the body for Moksha.

Shramana Traditions

The Shramana movement was a Non-Vedic movement parallel to Vedic Hinduism in ancient India. The Shramana tradition gave rise to Jainism, Buddhism, and Yoga, and was responsible for the related concepts of saṃsāra (the cycle of birth and death) and moksha (liberation from that cycle).

Sramanism, emphasizing thought, hard work and discipline, was one of the three strands of Hindu philosophy. The other two included Brahmanism, which drew its philosophical essence from Mimamsa. The third and most popular strand of Indian philosophical thought revolves around the concept of Bhakti or Theism, based on the idea of God, as understood in most parts of the world.

Philosophy

Śramaṇas held a view of saṃsara as full of suffering (Dukka). They practiced Ahimsa and rigorous ascetism. They believed in Karma and Moksa and viewed rebirth as undesirable. Vedics, on the contrary believe in the efficacy of rituals and sacrifices, performed by a privileged group of people, who could improve their life by pleasing certain Gods. Beliefs and concepts of Śramaṇa philosophies:

- Denial of creator and omnipotent Gods
- Rejection of the Vedas as revealed texts



- Affirmation of Karma and rebirth, Samsara and transmigration of Soul.
- Affirmation of the attainment of moksha through Ahimsa, renunciation and austerities
- Denial of the efficacy of sacrifices and rituals for purification.
- Rejection of the caste system

Jainism and Buddhism are the two main schools philosophies that have continued in India since ancient times.

Jainism

The distinguishing features of Jain philosophy are its belief on independent existence of soul and matter, absence of a supreme divine creator, potency of karma, eternal and uncreated universe, a strong emphasis on non-violence, morality and ethics based on liberation of soul.

Jainism is the sixth largest religion in India and is followed throughout the India. Lakshadweep is the only Union Territory/state without Jains. Maharashtra has the highest number of Jain Population. Like most ancient Indian religions, Jainism has its roots from the Indus Valley Civilization, reflecting native spirituality prior to the Indo-Aryan migration into India.

Principles of Jainism

Jainism encourages spiritual development through cultivation of one's own personal wisdom and reliance on self-control through vows or Mahavratas. Ascetics of this religion undertake five major vows:

- **Ahimsa** (Non-violence): The first major vow taken by ascetics is to cause no harm to living beings. It involves minimizing intentional as well as unintentional harm to other living creatures.
- **Satya** (Truth): The vow is to always speak of truth. Given that non-violence has priority, other principles yield to it whenever there is a conflict. In a situation where speaking truth could lead to violence, silence is to be observed.
- **Asteya**: Asteya, is to not take into possession, anything that is not willingly offered. Attempt to squeeze material wealth from others or exploit the weak is considered theft.
- **Brahmacharya**: The vow of brahmacharya requires one to exercise control over senses from indulgence in sexual activity.
- **Aparigraha**: Aparigraha is to observe detachment from people, places and material things. Ascetics live a life of complete renunciation of property and human relations.

Jain metaphysics is based on seven or nine fundamentals which are known as Tattva. These are an attempt to explain the nature and solution to the human predicament. These are:

- **Jiva**: The living entities are called Jiva. It is a substance which is different from the body that houses it. Consciousness, knowledge and perception are the fundamental attributes of the



Jiva.

- **Ajiva:** The non-living entities which consists of matter, space and time falls into the category of Ajiva.
- **Asrava:** Due to the interaction between the two substances, jiva and ajiva, there is influx of a special ajiva called karma into the soul. This karma then sticks to the soul.
- **Bandha:** The karma masks the jiva and restricts it from having its true potential of perfect knowledge and perception.
- **Saṁvara:** Through right conduct, it is possible to stop the influx of additional karma.
- **Nirjarā:** By performing asceticism, it is possible to shred or burn up the existing karma.
- **Moksha:** The jiva which has removed its karma is said to be liberated and have its pure, intrinsic quality of perfect knowledge in its true form.

Authors sometimes add two additional categories: the meritorious and demeritorious acts related to karma. These are called puṇya and pāpa respectively.

Tirtankara in Jainism

Jainism has been preached by a succession of twenty-four propagators of faith known as **Tirthankara**. Tirtankara is a human being who helps in achieving liberation and enlightenment as an “Arihant” by destroying all of their soul constraining (ghati) karmas, became a role-model and leader for those seeking spiritual guidance. There are 24 Tirthankaras and each of them revitalized the Jain Order.

Tirthankara is also said to mean “full moon,” a metaphorical reference to Kevala Jnana. Keval Gnan is a state of permanent, perpetual, absolute knowledge of the Soul; it is the precursor to moksha, final liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth and death.

Jaina tradition identifies Rishabha (Adinath) as the first tirthankara. The last two tirthankara, Parshva and Mahavira are historical figures whose existence is recorded.

A **Chakravarti** is an emperor of the world and lord of the material realm. Though he possesses worldly power, he often finds his ambitions dwarfed by the enormity of the cosmos. Jaina purana give a list of twelve Chakravarti. One of the greatest Chakravarti mentioned in Jaina scriptures is Bharata. Tradition says that India came to be known as Bharata-varsha in the memory of this Bharata.

There are nine sets of **baladeva, vāsudeva and prativāsudeva**. Baladeva are non-violent heroes. Vasudeva are violent heroes and prativāsudeva can be termed as villains. Vasudeva ultimately kills prativasudeva. Baladeva goes to heaven. On the other hand, vasudeva go to hell on account of their violent exploits, even if they were to uphold righteousness.



Jain sects

In the 4th century CE, Jainism developed two major divisions **Digambara** (sky clad ascetics) and **Svetambara** (white robed ascetics). Both Digambara and Svetambara communities have continued to develop, almost independently of each other. With the passage of time, both had further sub-sects. Except for some minor differences in rituals and way of life, their belief and practices for the spiritual progress are the same. The four main sects with a sizable population are Digambara, Svetambara Murtipujaka, Sthanakavasi and Terapanthi.

The Digambaras, like Mahavira, practice total nudity to avoid all attachments. The Shvetambaras reject nudity as an exterior symbol having no significance on their inner spiritual development. They also accepted women into the monastic community early on, unlike the Digambaras.

Jaina Literature

The fourteen **Purvas** was a body of Jain scriptures preached by tirthankara of Jainism. These teachings were memorized and passed on through ages, but became fairly vulnerable and died off within one thousand years after Lord Mahavira's nirvana (liberation).

Agamas are canonical texts of Jainism based on Mahavira's teachings. Mahavira's preachings were orally compiled by his disciples into various **Sutras** (texts) which were collectively called Jain canonical or Agamic literature. These Agamas are composed of forty-six texts: twelve angās, twelve upanga āgamas, six chedasūtras, four mūlasūtras, ten prakīrnaka sūtras and two cūlikasūtras.

Svetambaras accept thirty-two to forty-five aagamas, final redaction of which took place at the Council of Valabhi (453 – 466 BCE). Digambaras accept two canonical texts Satkhandaagama and Kasaayapahuda composed in 2nd century CE.

Jains had a major influence in developing a system of philosophy and ethics that had a great impact on Indian culture. They have contributed to the culture and language of the Indian states Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Jain Rituals

Navkar Mantra is the fundamental prayer of Jainism. In this prayer there is no mention of names, including that of the tirthankara. It does not ask for favors or material benefits, it simply serves as a gesture of deep respect towards beings they believe are more spiritually advanced and to remind followers of the Jainism of their ultimate goal of nirvana.

Jains follow six obligatory duties known as **Avashyakas** includes samyika (practising serenity), chaturvimshati (praising tirthankara), vandan (respecting teachers and monks), Pratikramana, Kayotsarga, pratyakhyana (renunciation).

Paryushana is one of the most important festivals for the Jains. Normally Svetambara Jains refer it as Paryushana, while Digambara Jains refer it as Das Lakshana. It is believed that the deva do



ashtprakari puja of tirthankara and it takes them eight days to do this ashtprakari puja. This is called Ashtanhika Mahotsav, so at the very same time Jains celebrate it as Paryushan. Paryushana lasts eight days for Svetambara Jains and ten days for Digambaras Jains.

Mahavira Jayanti, the birthday of Mahavira, is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the fortnight of the waxing moon, in the month of Chaitra.

A unique ritual in this religion involves a holy fasting until death called **Sallekhana**. Through this one achieves a death with dignity and dispassion as well as a reduction of negative karma to a great extent. This form of dying is also called **Santhara**.

Paryushan and Das Lakshana in Jainism

Paryushan is most important Jain festival which is celebrated in the months of August-September. It is also known as *Pajjosavana*. It means “abiding, coming together”. The followers take vows and observe fasts with intensity at par with monasticism.

The date for the festival is assigned to be the Bhadra shukla chaturthi. It must be initiated by the fifth day (panchami) of the shukla paksha phase of Bhadra. The festival comes to a close on Samvatsari which is short for Pratikramana. Basically it comes at a time when the wondering monks stopover for shelter during monsoon season for four months (chaturmasa).

The two sects of Jains refer to it by different names:

- Svetambaras call it Paryushana. They observe it for 8 days. Recite Kalpa sutra on fifth day (this is recitation describing the birth of Lord Mahavira).
- Digambaras call it Das Lakshana. They observe it for 10 days. Recite Tattvartha sutra on fifth day (this is compendium of Jain principles).

Rituals and Observances

- Fasting:
 - It is observed during the festival of Paryushana
 - It can last from a duration of 1-30 days
 - Digambar sravakas or laymen take food and water only once a day
 - Svetambaras only take boiled water between sunrise and sunset.
 - Fasting is not encouraged among diabetics, pregnant women and other people suffering from any ailments.
- Pratikramana Samayika :Meditation
 - Pratikramana stands for turning back in which the devotee reflects on his spiritual journey and thus reinforces his faith.
 - During festival, the day is begun at 5:45 am with Jain meditation
 - This is then followed by prayers for universal peace and brotherhood.



- It is a regular meditation for both the sects. The period can be either morning or evening, after every lunar month or can be after every four months.
- The annual pratikramana is known as Samvatsari Pratikramana which overlaps with the end of Paryushana.
- There are six essential elements of the meditation:
 - Samayika: Union with self
 - Chauvisantho: Praying to Five Supremes, 2 jinas, 4 mangalas
 - Vandana: Prayer to the Master
 - Pratikramana: Reflections on past
 - Kayotsarga: Detachment from body
 - Pratyakhya: Resolutions and vows
- Asking for Forgiveness
- On the end of festival Jains ask for forgiveness from each-other for any offences committed in the past year.
- It is asked by telling Micchami Dukkadam or Uttam Kshama to each other which means “if I have hurt you knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed, then I seek your forgiveness”.
- It is usually done on Paryusha Day for Svetambaras and on Pratipada Day for Ashwin Krashna for Digambaras.

Dashlakshana or the ten righteous virtues which find mention in Jain texts are :

1. *Uttam Kshama*(forbearance):
2. *Uttam Mardava*(supreme modesty)
3. *Uttam Aarjava*(straightforwardness)
4. *Uttam Satya*(truth)
5. *Uttam Shauch*(purity)
6. *Uttam Sanyam*(supreme restraint)
7. *Uttam Tap*(austerity)
8. *Uttam Tyaga*(renunciation)
9. *Uttam Aakinchanya*(non-attachment) and
10. *Uttam Brahmcharya*(supreme celibacy)

These are usually observed as a 10-day vrata every year during Shukla Panchami to Chaturdashi of Bhadrapada. The word Uttam signifies that all the virtues are strictly practiced by the Jain monks while the commoners only practice subtle versions of the same for ten days-each day for one virtue.



Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion indigenous to the Indian subcontinent that encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices largely based on teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, who is commonly known as the Buddha.

Buddha is recognized by Buddhists as an awakened or enlightened teacher who shared his insights to help sentient beings end suffering (dukkha) through eliminating ignorance (avidyā) by way of understanding and seeing dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) and eliminating craving (taṇhā), and thus attain the highest happiness, nirvāṇa.

Buddhism reached its peak under the Mauryan Empire (322-185 AD). Ashoka gave royal patronage to Buddhism and made it a pan-Asian religion. He sponsored Buddhist missions to various areas within his empire and also to the Greek-ruled areas of the Northwest, Sri Lanka in the south as well as the Central Asia. After the death of Ashoka, Buddhism did not get a direct royal patronage. Soon Buddhism declined and was almost wiped out from India but instead spread to the South East Asian countries and to Sri Lanka.

Gautama Buddha

Siddhārtha Gautama was born in Lumbini in modern-day Nepal, around the year 563 BCE, and raised in Kapilavastu. Young prince Gautama was kept away from seeing the sufferings of normal people since an astrologer prophesied that he would renounce the material world if he sees the miseries of Life. In a series of encounters, known in Buddhist literature as the **four sights**, he learned of the suffering of ordinary people, encountering an old man, a sick man, a corpse and, finally, an ascetic holy man, apparently content and at peace with the world. These experiences prompted Gautama to abandon royal life and take up a spiritual quest.

For six years, Siddhartha submitted himself to rigorous ascetic practices, studying and following different methods of meditation with various religious teachers. But he was never fully satisfied. One day, however, he was offered a bowl of rice from a young girl and he accepted it. In that moment, he realised that physical austerities were not the means to achieve liberation. From then on, he encouraged people to follow a path of balance rather than extremism. He called this ***The Middle Way***. At the age of 35, Siddhartha sat under the Bodhi tree, in the town of Bodhi Gaya in India, and meditated. He purified his mind of all defilements and attained enlightenment after many days, thus earning the title Buddha, or “Enlightened One”.

Thereafter, he attracted a band of followers and instituted a monastic order. He spent the rest of his life teaching the path of awakening he had discovered, traveling throughout the north-eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, and died at the age of 80 (483 BCE) in Kushinagar, India.



Principles

Samsara is “the cycle of birth and death”. Sentient beings crave pleasure and are averse to pain from birth to death. Buddhists strive to end the sufferings by eradicating the causes and conditions, applying the methods laid out by the Buddha and subsequent Buddhists.

Karma in Buddhism is the force that drives saṃsāra. Good, skillful deeds (kusala) and bad, unskillful (akusala) actions produce “seeds” in the mind that come to fruition either in this life or in a subsequent rebirth. The avoidance of unwholesome actions and the cultivation of positive actions is called **śīla**.

Rebirth refers to a process whereby beings go through a succession of lifetimes as one of many possible forms of sentient life, each running from conception to death. Buddhism rejects the concepts of a permanent self or an unchanging, eternal soul, as it is called in Hinduism and Christianity. Each rebirth takes place within one of five realms according to Theravadins, or six according to other schools. These are further subdivided into 31 planes of existence.

Branches of Buddhism

Two branches of Buddhism are generally recognized: Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”) and Theravada (“The School of the Elders”).

- **Mahayana** The followers of Mahayana believe that Buddha taught universal salvation. One should not aim at personal nirvana and should help ease the suffering of humanity. Mahayana Buddhism is found throughout East Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan etc.) and includes the traditions of Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Shingon, and Tiantai (Tendai). In India, this form of Buddhism is followed in Ladakh, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh.
- **Theravada** The Theravada Buddhism is better known as the earliest form of Buddhism. The ‘Thera’ means old and ‘Vada’ means school. The aim of this form of Buddhism is to attain personal nirvana through the triple recourse to ethical conduct, mental discipline and higher knowledge or wisdom. It has a widespread following in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar etc.). In India, this strain of Buddhism is represented by the followers of Dr B.R.Ambedkar known as the Ambedkar Buddhists, who are exclusive to India.

In some classifications, **Vajrayana** practiced mainly in Tibet and Mongolia, and adjacent parts of China and Russia is recognized as a third branch. **Hinayana** is an ugly Mahayana polemical term coined by Mahayanists to both classify and refer to those schools of Buddhism with which the Mahayana disagreed.



The Four Noble Truths

The teachings on the Four Noble Truths are regarded as central to the teachings of Buddhism. These four truths explain the nature of dukkha, its causes, and how it can be overcome. They can be summarized as follows:

- The truth of dukkha (suffering, anxiety, dissatisfaction): explains the nature of dukkha.
- The truth of the origin of dukkha: It says that the origin of dukkha can be known. The origin of dukkha is commonly explained as craving conditioned by ignorance. On a deeper level, the root cause of dukkha is identified as ignorance.
- The truth of the cessation of dukkha: It says that the complete cessation of dukkha is possible.
- The truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha: It identifies a path to cessation of dukkha.

Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of a set of eight interconnected factors or conditions, that when developed together, lead to the cessation of dukkha. The Eight factors are:

- **Right View (or Right Understanding)**: Viewing reality as it is, not just as it appears to be
- **Right Intention (or Right Thought)**: Intention of renunciation, freedom and harmlessness
- **Right Speech**: Speaking in a truthful and non-hurtful way
- **Right Action**: Acting in a non-harmful way
- **Right Livelihood**: A non-harmful livelihood
- **Right Effort**: Making an effort to improve
- **Right Mindfulness**: Awareness to see things for what they are with clear consciousness
- **Right Concentration**: Correct meditation or concentration, explained as the first four jhānas

Practices

The foundations of Buddhist tradition and practice are the Three Jewels: the **Buddha**, the **Dharma** (the teachings), and the **Sangha** (the community). Taking “refuge in the triple gem” has traditionally been a declaration and commitment to being on the Buddhist path, and in general distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist. Other practices may include following ethical precepts; support of the monastic community; renouncing conventional living and becoming a monastic; the development of mindfulness and practice of meditation; cultivation of higher wisdom and discernment; study of scriptures; devotional practices; ceremonies; and in the Mahayana tradition, invocation of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

The Buddhist place of worship is called a **Vihara** or **Gompa**, which usually houses one or more statues of the Buddha. The five great events in Buddha’s life are represented by symbols as under:

- Birth by Lotus and Bull



- Great Renunciation by Horse
- Nirvana by Bodhi Tree
- First Sermon by Dharmachakra or Wheel
- Parinirvana or death by the Stupa.

Dharmachakra

The Wheel of Law or dharmachakra, is the most important symbol of Buddhism. According to the Buddha, dharma is the law that ensures the welfare of the greatest number of people if practiced faithfully. The wheel symbolises the goodness in every person. The wheel has eight spokes representing the eight virtues enumerated by the Eight Fold Path, the path to salvation.

Tibetan Buddhism

The Tibetan Buddhism is “essentially Buddhism of the Mahayana school, with elements of modified Shaivism and native ritualistic shamanism”. Monks belonging to this strain of Buddhism are called lamas. Tibetan Buddhism, also called Lamaism, is a predominant religion of Tibet, Mongolia and other parts of the world. In India it is practised by over 1,20,000 Tibetans settled in their different settlements at Dharamsala, Dehradun (UP), Kushalnagar (Karnataka), Darjeeling (West Bengal), Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh.

The Tibetan Buddhism follows a strict code of traditional hierarchy. The supreme position is occupied by two lamas: the Dalai Lama (Grand Lama) and the Panchen Lama (Bogodo Lama). Of the two, the Dalai Lama is more powerful and is considered as the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism, while the Panchen Lama is the second most senior religious authority. Next in rank are the Hutukhtus, or spiritual dignitaries. The Rimpoches or Hobilghans or bodhisattvas form the third level of authority.

The present and the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was identified and enthroned in 1940, in Lhasa. After the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1950, the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 and established a Government-in-exile at Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh.

Sikhism

Sikhism began about 500 years ago by Guru Nanak and preaches a message of devotion and remembrance to God at all times, truthful living and equality of mankind and denounces superstitions and blind rituals. Sikhism is open to all through the teachings of its 10 Gurus enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book, Adi Granth or Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Principles of Sikhism

Sikhs believe that God is Monistic or Non-dual. He is the creator of the Universe, whose existence and continued survival depends on His will. God is both Saguna (with attributes) and Nirguna (without attributes) and is called by names such as Sat (truth), Sat Guru (true Guru), Akal Purkh



(timeless being), Kartar (creator) and Wahi-Guru (praise to the God).

The belief in the ten Gurus – spiritual guides who dispel ignorance and darkness is the essential element of Sikh religion. According to it the only way to achieve liberation (mukti) from the cycle of birth and death is by being God-conscious (gurmukh).

The Khalsa and five K's

The concept of Khalsa, literally meaning 'the pure', was introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. He established this new fraternity with five followers (later known as Panj Pyares), who were baptized with amrit as Khalsas. The Khalsa symbolised coalescence of serenity and strength, purity and power, shastra (scripture) and shastra (weapon), and the power of wisdom (jnana shakti) and the power of action (kriya shakti).

It was made obligatory for every Sikh to wear the Five K's – Keshha (long hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (steel bracelet), Kaccha (short drawers) and Kirpan (sword).

Sri Guru Granth Sahib

The Guru Granth Sahib (also known as the Adi Granth) is considered the Supreme Spiritual Authority and Head of the Sikh religion. It is a collection of devotional hymns and poetry which proclaims God, lays stress on meditation on the True Guru (God) and lays down moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation and unity with God.

The writings of the Gurus appear chronologically. Each of the Gurus signed their hymns as Nanak. Guru Granth Sahib has 3,384 hymns, of which Guru Nanak Dev contributed 974 hymns including sloks and pauris. It also contains Bhagatas of Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Sheikh Farid, Trilochan, Dhanna, Beni, Sheikh Bhikan, Jaidev, Surdas, Parmanand, Pipa and Ramanand. The fifth Guru Arjan Dev began the great task of collection of the holy compositions as Sri (Amritsar) and compiled the Holy Granth Sahib.

Islam

Basic Knowledge

The religion of Islam teaches that in order to achieve true peace of mind and surety of heart, one must submit to God and live according to His Divinely revealed Law. The word 'Muslim' means one who submits to the will of God, regardless of their race, nationality or ethnic background.

Muslims believe that all of God's prophets which include Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, brought the same message of Pure Monotheism. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad is not considered as the founder of a new religion, as many people mistakenly think, but he was the Final Prophet of Islam.

Principles of Islam

According to traditional Islamic belief, the religion has existed since time immemorial. Allah, the



Almighty God, created Adam (the father of the human progeny) out of a lump of clay and commanded the angels to greet him with a 'Sijda' (prostration in humility). All the angels obeyed the command with the exception of Iblis (the Satan). This resulted in Satan's condemnation and Allah commanded that whosoever followed the Satan's path will forfeit His pleasure and that his abode will be in the fire of hell eternally.

Basic Islamic Beliefs are:

- **Tawheed:** This means, believe in One, Unique, Incomparable God Who is the Creator, the Ruler and the Sustainer of the universe, and none has the right to be worshipped but He alone
- Belief in the existence of Angels of God as the honoured creatures
- Belief in God's Revealed Books
- Belief in the Prophets and Messengers of God
- Belief in the Day of Judgement and Life after Death
- Belief in Predestination – God's complete authority over human destiny

Main sects of Islam

The followers of Muslim are divided into two main sects: **Shiah and Sunni**. Though essentially following the same beliefs and tenets, they differ on two points: the succession to Prophet Muhammad, and the religious authority in Islam after him.

Shiism is a minority branch of Islam which makes up about one tenth of the total population of the Muslim world. The Shiites form an important part of the population in a number of Arab countries like Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon and Iran. The Shiahs consider Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet as his rightful heir. They maintain that Ali was the first legitimate Imam or Khalifah (Caliph) and therefore reject Abu Bakr, Omar and Usman, the first three Khalifahs of the Sunni Muslims, as usurpers.

There are two main shiite sects:

- The **"Twelvers"** are by far the largest group of Shiah Islam. They believe that the line of Ali became extinct with al-Askari, the Twelfth Imam, who mysteriously disappeared in 873 AD. They however refuse to accept that al-Askari died and believe that he will appear shortly before the end of the world.
- The **Ismailites or Seveners** are the second largest shiite sect. Their spiritual leader is the Aga Khan. The Ismailites only recognize the seven first Imams.

Sunnism is the main branch of Islam and recognizes the legitimacy of the first four Khalifahs or Caliphs. The Sunnis believe that the office of the Prophet was not hereditary and no one could claim to be his sole heir. The community chooses one amongst themselves as their leader or the Khalifah.

There are four orthodox sects among the Sunni Muslims i.e. **Hanafiyah** (followers of Imam Abu



Hanifah), **Shafiyah** (followers of Imam Ash-Shafii), **Malakiyah** (followers of Imam Malik) and **Hanbaliyah** (followers of Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal).

Khalifah

The word Caliph or Khalifah, means 'successor' or 'deputy'. It is used to designate the Prophet's successor as leader of the Muslim community. This title was used by the successive Arab empires and by the Ottoman sultans. The Ottoman Caliphate was maintained for two years after the abolition of the Sultanate, until it was itself abolished by Kemal Ataturk in February 1924.

Prophets of Islam

According to Islamic belief, Allah has sent various Prophets to the world at different times and different places to guide the people on the righteous path.

The names of the following Prophets are mentioned in the Holy Quran: Adam, Sheth, Idris, Nuh (Noah), Hud, Salih, Lut, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail, Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph), Shuaib, Dawud (David), Sulaiman (Solomon), Ilyas, Al-Yasa (Elisha), Musa (Moses), Aziz (Ubair or Ezra), Ayyub (Job), Dhul-Kifl (Isaih or Kharqil Bin Thauri), Yunus (Jonah), Zakariya (Zachariah), Yahya (John the Baptist), Isa (Jesus Christ) and Muhammad.

Prophet Muhammad

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Prophet Muhammad is considered as the messenger of Allah and the last of all Prophets who restored Islam to its pristine purity. Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 AD at **Makkah**. At the age of 40, Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) in a cave at Mount Hira near Makkah. The revelations continued for 23 years, and they are collectively known as the **Quran**.

He began preaching these revelations to the common populace in Makkah. Due to sever opposition from the unbelievers, Prophet Muhammad and his followers undertook the great migration or **Hijra** to a town called Yathrib, which later came to be known as Medina. This emigration marks the beginning of the Muslim Calendar.

In Medina, Islam began to flourish and Prophet Muhammad died at the age of 63. As a mark of respect to the Prophet, the Muslims use the words 'Peace Be Upon Him' after his name.

Islam in India

Islam first came to India at the Malabar Coast of Kerala through Arab traders as early as 6 AD. Several centuries later the local population that embraced Islam became a well-knit social and cultural group known as the **Moplas**.

Within the next 200 years, the first Muslim empire, the Delhi Sultanate, was established in India with its capital in Delhi. This was followed by several other Muslim dynasties like the Khiljis, the Tughlaqs, the Lodis and the Mughals. The period of the Mughals was the golden age of Islam in



India. The religion flourished under the Mughal rule and many Indians embraced Islam. Today Muslims constitute about 12% of India's population and are concentrated largely in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Kashmir.

Haj Pilgrimage and Haj Committee

Eid-al-Adha is celebrated by Muslims worldwide, to mark the conclusion of Haj, one of the five pillars of Islam. This festival is celebrated to commemorate Abraham's willingness to offer his promised son as sacrifice according to God's command. In the end, God intervened and asked for a lamb as sacrifice. To mark this event, Muslims worldwide offer sheep as sacrifice.

Haj is one of the five tenets of Islam. It's every Muslim's desire to perform Haj at least once in his life time. Performing Haj is obligatory to every sane, financially able and adult Muslim.

The Haj Pilgrimage

This Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia is one of the largest pilgrimages in the world. The Haj is a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and their submission to Allah. The pilgrimage occurs from the 8th to 12th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th and last month of the Islamic calendar. It's worth note that due the Islamic calendar being eleven days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, the Haj changes from year to year. There are some rites performed during Haj.

Here are short notes about them:

- **Tawaf:** The pilgrims perform their first Tawaf, which involves all of the pilgrims visiting the Kabah and walking seven times counter-clockwise around the Kaaba.
- **Arafat :** The second day rite is of Arafat. The pilgrims proceed to Mina where they spend the night in prayer.
- **Muzdalifah:** This is the third day rite in which after the sunset, the pilgrims leave Arafat for Muzdalifah, an area between Arafat and Mina. Pilgrims spend the night sleeping on the ground with open sky, and in the morning they gather pebbles for the next day's ritual of the stoning of the Devil (Shaitan) after returning to Mina.
- **Ramy al-Jamarat :** At Mina the pilgrims perform Ramy al-Jamarat, throwing stones to signify their defiance of the Devil. This symbolizes the trials experienced by Abraham while he was going to sacrifice his son as demanded by God. The Devil challenged him three times, and three times Abraham refused. Each pillar marks the location of one of these refusals.
- **Eid al-Adha :** After the Stoning of the Devil, the pilgrims perform animal sacrifices, to symbolize God having mercy on Abraham and replacing his son Ishmael with a ram, which Abraham then sacrificed. Traditionally the pilgrims slaughtered the animal themselves, or oversaw the slaughtering. However now, the pilgrims buy a sacrifice voucher in Makkah before the greater Haj begins, which allows an animal to be slaughtered in their name on the



10th, without the pilgrim being physically present.

- **Tawaf Al-Ifaadah** : The pilgrims re-visit the Masjid al-Haram mosque in Mecca for another tawaf, to walk around the Kaaba. This is called Tawaf al-Ifadah, which symbolizes being in a hurry to respond to God and show love for Him, an obligatory part of the Haj. The night of the 10th is spent back at Mina
- **Tawaf al-Wida**: Finally, before leaving Mecca, pilgrims perform a farewell tawaf called the Tawaf al-Wida.

Difference between Haj and Umrah

It is not necessary that Mecca can be visited by Muslims at the time of Haj only. *Umrah is a pilgrimage to Mecca performed by Muslims that can be undertaken at any time of the year.* So, Umrah is called a 'minor pilgrimage' or 'lesser pilgrimage', the Haj being the 'major' pilgrimage and which is compulsory for every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it. The Umrah is not compulsory but highly recommended.

Haj Committee of India

Haj Committee of India is a statutory body constituted under the Haj Committee Act 2002. It is empowered to make arrangements for the Indian Pilgrims only in India under the present norms.

On reaching Jeddah / Madinah airport the responsibility to look after the Pilgrims and to redress their grievances is that of the Indian Consulate stationed at Jeddah. However, Haj Committee of India is committed to monitor the facilities made available to the Pilgrims and hence any shortcomings should be brought to the attention of its concerned Officers.

Thus, we see that the Haj Committee of India's role is only advisory in nature as far as the arrangements in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are concerned. Ministry of Civil Aviation is the nodal agency and is fully responsible for any shortcomings in the air transportation of Pilgrims and their belongings to and from Saudi Arabia.

The precursor to the present Haj Committee was Haj Committee, Bombay which is working since British Era. The current chairperson of the Haj Committee of India is Mohsina Kidwai.

The functions are as follows:

- Organizing the All India Annual Conference for Haj for deliberation upon arrangements.
- Making announcement of Haj via newspapers and inviting applications from sane, physically fit and financial able Muslims.
- The applications are first received by State Haj Committees and then they are forwarded to Haj Committee of India after the last date for submission of applications is over.
- Please note that Haj Quota is not fixed by the Haj Committee. The Haj Quota is fixed by the Government. The State-wise quota of Haj Seats is distributed among the States and Union



Territories on the basis of Muslim Population of these States/Union Territories. In case the State Haj Committees receive applications in excess of the quota, then the seats are confirmed to the intending Pilgrims through draw of lots, which is called qurrah.

- Haj Applications received through the State Haj Committees are scrutinized by the Haj Committee of India. The data is computerised and sent to Consulate General of India, Jeddah. It is utilized for the purposes of making allotment of accommodation at Makkah and Madina, flight allotment and for the monitoring the movement of the pilgrims.

VIP Haj Quota

There is a VIP Haj quota also. Recently, the Supreme Court of India slashed the VIP quota for Haj pilgrimage from 5050 seats to 300. The remaining 4750 seats will be added to the general category. As per the ruling of the court under the reduced quota, the President of India can recommend 100 pilgrims, the vicepresident⁷⁵, the prime minister ⁷⁵ and the Minister for External Affairs 50 pilgrims, while, the 200 seats would be reserved for the Haj Committee of India (HCI). For Haj 2012, 11000 seats have been reserved under government quota. After cutting the seats under discretionary quota and the HCI, the rest of the seats would go to the Haj committees of various states and Union territories.

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Haj Subsidy

The Haj subsidy is an airfare subsidy given to Indian Muslim Haj pilgrims. Since 1973, pilgrims applying through the Haj Committee of India are offered a concessionary fare on Air India. As of 2013, an estimated 100,000 Indian Muslim make use of the subsidy. In 2013-14, government provided Rs. 691 crores as Haj subsidy; while it was Rs. 836 crore in the previous year. We make a note here that in May 2012, the Supreme Court of India ordered the government to end the practice by 2022. Haj subsidy is being provided from year 1991. Also we note that apart from Muslims, no other religious community in India gets any subsidy for a religious pilgrimage. The Haj subsidy is also against the teachings of Islam and this statement was reverberated by Minority Ministry in 2010.

Sufism

Sufism or *tasawwuf*, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims believe that Sufism is outside the sphere of Islam.

The Origin

The origins of Sufism can be traced to the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, whose teachings attracted a group of scholars who came to be called "*Ahle Suffe*", the People of Suffe, from their practice of sitting at the platform of the mosque of the Prophet in Medina. There they engaged themselves in discussions concerning the reality of 'Being', and in search of the inner path and



devoted themselves to spiritual purification and meditation. These individuals were the founders of Sufism.

Fundamental principles

Sufis represented the inner side of the Islamic creed, which stresses on self-realisation, beautification of the soul through piety, righteousness and universal love for all. The Sufis consider that there is a particular Divine Attribute that dominates the being of every prophet and saint, such that they can be said to be the incarnation of that attribute. The aim of Sufism is the cultivation of Perfect Beings who are mirrors reflecting the Divine Names and Attributes.

Sufism and Communal Harmony

In India, Sufism helped in maintaining communal harmony and social stability by advocating religious tolerance and by borrowing spiritual techniques and practices from other religions. Sufism has adapted extensively from the Vedanta school of the Hindu philosophy.

In Sufism, a perfect being is also called a **Wali** (saint), a word that literally means 'sincere friend'. The superstructure of Sufism is built upon the concept of teacher, **pir** or **murshid**.

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The cardinal doctrines of the Sufism included

1. Complete surrender to the will of God
2. Annihilation of the self
3. Becoming a perfect person

These three cardinal principles altogether make the **Doctrine of Fana** which means *annihilation of human attributes through Union with God*.

Sufism had succeeded in inculcating the sentiments of fraternity, equality and equity, coupled with sense of service to humanity, in the followers, irrespective of race, community, caste, creed and colour.

Sama

The musical and ecstatic aspect of Sufism is called Sama. This is a particular kind of devotional dance akin to Kirtana and was introduced by Jalaluddin Rumi. The Sufi, while being spiritually enraptured, gives the attention of his or her heart to the Beloved. With particular movements and often special and rhythmical music, he engages in the selfless remembrance of God.

Sufis identify two types of Sama poetry:

- First praising God (this is called Hamd), Prophet (this is called Naat) and the Sufi saints (this is called)
- The second focussing on spiritual emotion or mystical love, ecstatic states and on separation and union.



The Sama poetry is mostly sung in the form of Qawwali. Music of Sama is set within metric framework, accompanied by Dholak, Tabla, Sarangi, Harmonium and Sitar.

Muslim Religious Movements

Dawoodi Bohras

The word 'Bohra' is derived from the Gujarati word vohorvu or vyavahar meaning "to trade". The Muslim community of Daudi Bohras traces its ancestry to early conversions to Ismaili Shiism during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Imam, al-Mustansir (1036-1094 AD). When schisms occurred in the Ismaili dawah (mission) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Egypt, the Ismailis in India followed the Fatimid Tayyibi dawah of Yemen. Subsequently, this community split a number of times to form the Jafari Bohras, Daudi Bohras, Sulaymani Bohras, Aliyah Bohras and other lesser-known groups.

The religious hierarchy of the Daudi Bohras is essentially Fatimid and is headed by the dai mutlaq who is appointed by his predecessor in office. The dai appoints two others to the subsidiary ranks of madhun (licentiate) and mukasir (executor). These positions are followed by the rank of shaikh and mullah, both of which are held by hundreds of Bohras. An Aamil leads the local congregation in religious, social and communal affairs. Each town has a mosque and an adjoining jamaat-khanah (assembly hall) where socio-religious functions are held.

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The Bohras recognize the seven pillars of Islam. Walayah (love and devotion) for Allah, the Prophets, the imam and the dai is the first and most important of the seven pillars. The others are tahrah (purity & cleanliness), salat (prayers), zakat (purifying religious dues), saum (fasting), haj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and jihad (holy war).

The Bohras enjoy a great degree of social and religious cohesion. Every Bohra is required to take an oath of allegiance (Misaaq), which is a formal initiation into the faith. The oath, inter alia, commits a Bohra towards adherence to the Shariah and accepting the leadership of the Sayyidna and the dai.

The cult of Sayyidna, the high priest, and the Kothar, the clergy, is deeply ingrained in the Bohra psyche. Every Bohra follows a system of tax payment to the Syedna, who also exercises a great control over the marriage and death rites. Another distinctive feature is their use of a Fatimid lunar calendar which fixes the number of days in each month.

Progressive Dawoodi Bohra

It is a movement within the Dawoodi Bohra subset of Mustaali Ismaili Shia Islam led by Asghar Ali Engineer. They separated from the mainstream Dawoodi Bohra community on social and economic issues. They called themselves as Progressives or Reformists and challenged the absolute authority and supremacy of the Dai, or spiritual leader of the community. They alleged that the 51st Dai Sayedna Taher Saifuddin claimed infallibility and issued new doctrines pronouncing that all



properties owned by the Bohras belonged to the Syedna, and that they are mere munims or account keepers on his behalf. The Dai Syedna professed to be instituted a doctrine of Raza, which required that without first attaining his permission, his followers could do nothing (secular or religious). It was in the year 1902 when the policy of requiring a Raza began. Several Bohras challenged the authority of Taher Saifuddin through litigation and his claims were rejected by the court. The Progressive Dawoodi Bohra community also claims that the 52nd Da'i Sayedna Mohammad Burhanuddin asserted the same rights as Taher Saifuddin, but, the District Court of Udaipur upheld his

claims. However, the Rajasthan High Court at Jodhpur, held later that the Waqf Act of 1954 provided exclusive control of property such as mosques to the Waqf Board, and that the Syedna have no rights over them.

Wahabism

Wahabism was the first great modern expression of the awakening of the Arab Islam in the 18th century. Its founder was Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahab. He preached and propagated the "pure faith" based only on the Holy Quran and the Sunnah and criticised the loosening of moral standards under foreign influences. Wahabism led in 1932 to the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The only other Wahabi state is Qatar.

The Wahabis do not receive the decisions of the four orthodox sects, but say that any man who can read and understand the Quran and the Ahadith can judge for himself in the matters of doctrine. They do not offer prayers to any prophet, wali, pir or saint. They do not even perform any act of reverence at the Prophet's mosque at Madina. They observe only four main festivals, namely, Idul-Fitr, Idul-Azha, Yaum Al-Ashura and the Lailat-al Qadr and do not observe Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Milad-un-Nabi) as a festival.

Christianity

Christianity is the religion of the followers of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity has the largest adherents all over the world numbering more than 1.5 billion.

Origin

Jesus Christ was born as a Jew in Bethlehem in 4 BC. He was believed to have possessed supernatural powers. He began travelling widely and preaching to people in various towns. Alarmed by the growing popularity of Jesus Christ and his preaching, some Jewish priests conspired to kill him and succeeded in having him crucified. On the third day after his Crucifixion, Jesus was resurrected. He lived on earth for another 40 days and then ascended to heaven.

The incidents preceding and succeeding his birth matched the prophesies of the Old Testament, according to which, the son of God would be born on the earth to rid humanity of its sins. The



followers of Jesus formed a new faith, which was named as **Christianity** (after Christ) and its followers, **Christians**.

Fundamental principles of Christianity

Christians are monotheists and insist that the originator and preserver of creation is one but is represented in the Holy Trinity, as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christians see God as the Lord of Israel and the father of the divine and human figure of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, was the eternal word of God who assumed human form to serve humanity and to rescue the human beings. Jesus Christ suffered and died to redeem mankind from sin. Christians also believe that Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of God as the final judge of the dead, and that He will return again as prophesised.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ chose 12 learned men as messengers and directed them to spread his teachings and guide the populace. The 12 **apostles** are Peter (Simon); his brother Andrew; James; and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, the sons of Zebedee; Thomas and Matthew; James, son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Patriot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus Christ.

Bible

The holy book of the Christians is the Bible. The Bible contains a collection of writings dating from 9 BC to 1 AD written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and English. The Bible is divided into the Old Testament with 46 books and the New Testament with 27. The **Old Testament** is a Hebrew text, sacred to both the Jews and Christians and contains information about the creation of the world. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ, which form the centre of Christian belief, are recorded in the **New Testament**.

Christian Sects

Christianity became the formal religion of the Roman Empire after Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, converted to Christianity in 313 AD. The religion was known as **Catholic** or universal, with the Roman Pope as its head. By 1054 AD many differences arose and the Church formally split into the **Eastern Orthodox** and the **western Roman Catholic** schools.

In the 15th century, a new school of philosophy began to question the supremacy of the Pope. In the 16th century Martin Luther advocated many reforms in the Church, which led to yet another split in the Christian community and the formation of **Protestant** churches across Northeast Europe. The Protestants disapproved of the authority of the Pope and advanced the cause of the Bible as the sole authority.

Christianity in India

By tradition, Christianity is said to have arrived in South India with the arrival of St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ, at the Malabar Coast in 52 AD. He spent some years in South India and



died near Madras. However, others believe that the first missionary to arrive in the country was Saint Bartholomew. Historically, Christian missionary activity started with the advent of St. Francis Xavier in 1544 AD.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries Catholic as well as Protestant missionaries preached Christian doctrines in India and also made important contributions to social improvement and education in India.

The great period of expansion of Christianity in India began in 1858, when the British government took over rule in India from the East India Company. Christians from many countries came as missionaries.

At present Christians are scattered all across India but most of them are concentrated in the Northeast and in Kerala and other southern states. Today, there are 23 dioceses in India with 11 of them being located in Kerala.

The Syrian Church

- The Christians belonging to the Syrian Church are found in South India and claim an apostolic foundation for their Church.
- They believe that Christianity was introduced in India by St. Thomas in 52 AD at the Malabar Coast. He established seven Christian communities or churches in Kerala.
- The Malabar Church renounced the authority of the Pope and asserted its independence in 1653 AD. This is known in history as the 'Coonen Cross Declaration'.
- The Christian communities then split into many groups – East Syrian Catholics, West Syrian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox, Marthoma, Church of the East and the Latin Church.
- Today, the Chaldean Syrian Church is one of four archbishoprics in the Assyrian Church of the East, and has about 15,000 members in and around Thrissur City. Its cathedral is the Mart Mariam Cathedral, Thrissur City's first Christian church.

The Roman Catholic Church

- With the arrival of the Portuguese to India, the visits of Roman Catholic Missions to India became more organised, and were initially concentrated to Goa, Cochin, Tuticorin and other coastal areas.
- Francis Xavier (1506-52 AD) became the first Jesuit missionary to arrive in India.
- In 1557 AD, Pope Paul IV declared Goa an archdiocese with its supremacy extending from the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa to China, and all Christians, including the East Syrian Church, brought under its jurisdiction.

The Protestant Missions

- The first Protestant missionaries, German Lutherans, came to India in 1706 AD at



Tranquebar, near Tiruchinapally, under the protection of the King of Denmark.

- By the 19th century several other missions were established in different parts of South India.

The North Indian Church

Some consider that St. Thomas had travelled to North India and introduced Christianity. Others consider it to be the influence of merchants from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

Under the influence of the Portuguese, several missionaries began to visit North India between 16th-18th Centuries. The Jesuit missions were sent regularly to the Mughal Courts from the time of Akbar to that of Aurangzeb.

William Carey arrived in India in 1793 AD. Carey's pioneering work in Bible translation, primary education and journalism had a profound influence in Bengal and other parts of India. Numerous other missionaries began visiting India after the passing of Charter Acts by the British Parliament in 1813 and 1833 AD.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest religions of the world, evolved in Egypt about 3,700 years ago. It believes in the unity and oneness of the universal Creator. Judaism is the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people.

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History of Judaism

- According to Jewish tradition, **Abraham** was the leader of a tribe named Habiru (Hebrew) in Chaldea in about 2000 BC. He advocated the theory of monotheism and decided to move his tribe to Canaan (Palestine) to propound his theory. Here, the Hebrews mixed freely with local people and eagerly sought converts to their faith.
- Abraham's grandson Jacob had an encounter with a mysterious being who told Jacob that in future, his name would be known as **Israel**. The renamed Israel had 12 sons, who later became the progenitors of 12 tribes named after them. These tribes bore the collective name of **Bene Israel** or 'Children of Israel'.
- The Israelis grew in number and for approximately two centuries dwelt in Egypt, where they were enslaved. In about 1200 BC, under the leadership of **Moses**, they escaped and wandered in the wastes of Sinai (Egypt) for a long time. Here, Moses, the first Prophet of god, received revelation of the law, the **Ten Commandments**, which is today known as the **Sefer Torah**, the Jewish scripture.
- After this, a kingdom was founded in Canaan with Jerusalem as its capital. In this city, a temple was built to perform sacred rites.
- After King Solomon died, Israel was split into two kingdoms. The Southern Kingdom was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and called Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.



- The remaining 10 tribes comprised the Northern Kingdom. When the Assyrians invaded the Northern Kingdom, they scattered the Israelites to various parts of their empire, northeast of Israel. Today they are referred to as the **ten lost tribes**. The Scriptures suggest they will be identified and returned to Israel in the Last Days.

Beliefs and Practices in Judaism

The Jews believe in one god as was instituted by Abraham, Who they call **Yahweh** and from whom all creation flows. Judaism believes in prophets, of whom Moses was the first. According to tradition, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. Every devout Jew follows these commandments till today.

The religion gives great importance to a good moral life and does not advocate asceticism, celibacy or self-imposed suffering, as it believes that the path to salvation is only through good deeds.

The religious scripture **Sefer Torah** consists of the first five books of the Old Testament. There are 613 precepts in the Torah to regulate the daily life of every Jew and this number is symbolised in the threads of the prayer shawls (**tsisith**) that every adult male Jew is enjoined to wear for prayers. The **Talmud**, the body of Jewish law, is considered Yahweh's exclusive and immutable law. The **Synagogue** is the Jewish place of worship.

Jewish sects

The Jews have three principle sects: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformist.

- The **Orthodox** cling to all ancient traditions and forms of religious worship and practices
- The founder of the **Reform** movement adopted the philosophy of changing with the times, and religious services and rituals were considerably shortened.
- The **Conservative** Jews followed a middle path, retaining some features of the Orthodox groups but permitting relaxation in certain cases.

Judaism in India

It is commonly accepted that the Jews have been in India for over 2,000 years ever since they first landed on the West coast of India. The Indian Jews are known as a peace-loving community. They follow the Hebrew calendar. The Indian Jews have a special thanks giving ceremony known as **Eliyahoo-ha-Nabior** i.e. 'gratitude to Elijah the Prophet', on festive occasions. Indian Jews fall into five categories:

- **Bene Israel** – meaning Children of Israel. Marathi speaking. Arrived in Maharashtra 2,100 years ago.
- **Cochin Jews** – arrived in India 2,500 years ago and settled down in Kerala as traders.
- **Baghdadi Jews** - Jews who came to India as traders from West Asia, mainly from Baghdad. They are settled mainly in Mumbai, Pune and Kolkata.



- **Bene Menashe** – The Manipur Jews constitute a community which sees itself as descendants of the Manasseh (Menashe) Tribe (which is one of the 10 lost tribes of Jews).
- **Bene Ephraim** – also called “Telugu Jews”. They are a small group who speak Telugu. Their observance of Judaism dates to 1981.

Zoroastrianism

Parsism or Zoroastrianism is about 2600 years old and finds its origin in Persia. The religion was founded by Spenta Zarathustra or Zoroaster, who is considered as the Prophet of the Parsis.

Zoroastrian practice is based on the responsibility of every man and woman to choose between good and evil, and to respect God's creations.

Zarathustra preached the oneness of god and believed that Ahura Mazda was the one and only god, who is formless and has six great aspects called the Amesha-Spentas. These are Ardibehest, Bahman, Shahrivar, Spendarmad, Khordad and Amardad. The Parsis believe that the Ahura Mazda is eternally in conflict with Angra Mainyu or Ahirman, who represents the evil force.

Practices

The Parsi place of worship is called the fire temple. Five daily prayers, usually hymns or Gathas uttered by Prophet Zarathustra are said in the home or the temple, before a fire, which symbolizes the realm of truth, righteousness and order. Fire is regarded as the son of Ahura Mazda, and represents god.

In Zoroastrianism, Dakhma-nashini is the only method of corpse-destruction. This involves the destruction of the dead body in the stone-enclosed Dakhma, by the flesh-eating bird or the rays of the Sun.

Religious Scriptures

Zenda Avesta is the religious scripture of the Parsis. It contains the teachings, sermons and prayers composed by Prophet Zoroaster and his disciples and followers. Avestha is also the name of the language in which it is composed.

It is divided into five parts: the Yasna (worship with ceremony and offerings), the Videvdad (laws against demons), the Yashts (worship), the Khordeh Avestha, which comprises of selected portions of the Avestha and forms the book of daily prayers of the Zoroastrians, and the five Gathas – Ahunavaiti, Ushtavaiti, Spenta-Mainyu, Vohu-Khshathra and Vashishta-Ishti, which contain the 17 hymns of God received by Prophet Zarathushtra by way of a Divine Revelation.

Sects

There are three principle sects among the Parsis: Shahenshai, Kadmi and Fasli. The only difference between the three sects is the calendar they adhere to.

- The Faslis follow the traditional Persian calendar



- The Shahenshais calculate their calendar from the last Sassanian king, Yazdegard III
- The Kadmis claim their calendar is the oldest and most accurate.

Zoroastrians of India

The first Zoroastrians to enter India arrived on the Gujarat coast in the 10th century and by the 17th century, most of them had settled in Bombay. Today, there are approximately 90,000 Parsis in India and are concentrated largely in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The Bahai Faith

The Bahai Faith is a monotheistic religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh in 19th-century Persia. The Bahais believe that the 'Promised One' of all ages and peoples, Bahá'u'lláh revealed himself in 1863. He dispatched one of the distinguished Bahai teachers, Jamal Effendi to India to spread the teachings of the Bahai faith in the years 1874-75.

Beliefs and practices

The Bahais believe in the three cardinal principles – oneness of mankind, oneness of God and oneness of religion. Bahais believe that throughout history the Creator has educated humanity through a series of Divine Manifestations. These Manifestations include: Krishna, Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad. They believe that in the present age, God has revealed Himself through Bahaullah, whose name means 'The Glory of God'. He is regarded as their Prophet.

The Bahais work for the removal of prejudices based on caste, creed, religion, sex, colour, race and language. They advocate universal education and the inculcation of a scientific outlook among people. The Bahais do not believe in superstitions, ceremonies, rituals and dogmas.

The Bahais pray to the one true God, the Creator of the universe. The act of praying is described as 'a conversation with God'.

It is obligatory for every Bahai to pray and meditate on the Words of God every day. There are prayers for all occasions and these can be offered individually or collectively.

The Lotus Temple

The Bahai House of Worship at New Delhi is popularly known as the Lotus Temple. The temple gives the impression of a half-open lotus flower afloat, surrounded by its leaves. There is no clergy in the temple, no idols, no pictures, no sermons, no rituals. It is a place for communication between man and his Creator, God.

The shrine has been designed by a young architect, Mr. Fariburz Sabha, a Canadian citizen and a Bahai of Iranian descent, who was selected from among the world's top architects.



Prelims Model Questions

1. The Carvaka School in Hindu Philosophy:
1. is one of the six schools of Hindu Philosophy
 2. is predominantly atheistic
 3. is one of the present living traditions of Hinduism

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

- [A] Only 1 & 2
[B] Only 2 & 3
[C] Only 2
[D] 1, 2 & 3

Answer: [C] Only 2

Hinduism, otherwise a highly theistic religion, hosted atheistic schools; the thoroughly materialistic and anti-religious philosophical Carvaka (Nastika) school that originated in India around the 6th century BCE is probably the most explicitly atheistic school of Indian philosophy. It is not included among the six schools of Hinduism generally regarded as orthodox. Our understanding of Carvaka philosophy is fragmentary, based largely on criticism of the ideas by other schools, and it is no longer a living tradition.

2. With reference to the ancient Sraman tradition, which among the following statements is / are correct?



1. It was a non-Vedic religious movement
2. It is generally known to have given rise to both Jainism and Buddhism
3. The concepts of Samsara and Moksha are generally ascribed to Sraman tradition

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

- [A] Only 1 & 2
- [B] Only 2 & 3
- [C] Only 1 & 3
- [D] 1, 2 & 3

Answer: [D] 1, 2 & 3

Sramana was a non-Vedic Indian religious movement parallel to but separate from the historical Vedic religion. The Sramana tradition gave rise to Yoga, Jainism, Buddhism, and some nastika schools of Hinduism such as Carvaka and Ajivika, and also popular concepts in all major Indian religions such as samsara (the cycle of birth and death) and moksha (liberation from that cycle).

3. With reference to the Nyaya philosophy, which among the following statements is / are correct?

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1. Nyaya is predominantly based on reasoning and logic
2. According to this school, the only way to attain liberation is obtaining valid knowledge of the external world and its relationship with the mind and self
3. The final goal of this philosophy is to set out the methods and conditions of determining true knowledge

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

- [A] Only 1 & 2
- [B] Only 1
- [C] Only 1 & 3
- [D] Only 2 & 3

Answer: [A] Only 1 & 2

Statement-1: Nyaya is predominantly based on reasoning and logic

This statement is a correct statement. The Nyaya system of philosophy was established by the sage Gautama. It is primarily concerned with the conditions of correct knowledge and the means of receiving this knowledge. Nyaya is predominantly based on reasoning and logic and therefore is also known as Nyaya Vidya or Tarka Sastra — “the science of logic and reasoning.”

Statement-2: According to this school, the only way to attain liberation is obtaining



valid knowledge of the external world and its relationship with the mind and self

The above statement is a correct statement. Using systematic reasoning, this school of philosophy attempts to discriminate valid knowledge from invalid knowledge. This philosophy asserts that obtaining valid knowledge of the external world and its relationship with the mind and self is the only way to attain liberation.

Statement-3: The final goal of this philosophy is to set out the methods and conditions of determining true knowledge

This is not a correct statement. The philosophy says that if one masters the logical techniques of reasoning and assiduously applies these in his daily life, he will rid himself of all suffering. But the methods and conditions of determining true knowledge are not the final goal of nyaya philosophy. It sees logical criticism as an instrument that enables one to discriminate valid from invalid knowledge. The ultimate goal of nyaya philosophy, like that of the other systems of Indian philosophy, is liberation — the absolute cessation of pain and suffering.

4. In the Indian Philosophy, the Vaisesika system is closely allied to the Nyaya system of philosophy. Consider the following statements with this respect:
1. Both Nyaya and Vaisheshika view ignorance as the root cause of all pain and misery
 2. Both Nyaya and Vaisheshika accept four independent sources of knowledge — perception, inference, comparison, and testimony
 3. Both Nyaya and Vaisheshika accept the liberation of the individual self as the end goal

Which among the above statements is / are correct?

- [A] Only 1 & 2
- [B] Only 2 & 3
- [C] Only 1 & 3
- [D] 1, 2 & 3

Answer: [C] Only 1 & 3

Vaisesika is allied to the nyaya system of philosophy. Both systems accept the liberation of the individual self as the end goal; both view ignorance as the root cause of all pain and misery; and both believe that liberation is attained only through right knowledge of reality. There are, however, two major differences between nyaya and Vaisesika.

First, nyaya philosophy accepts four independent sources of knowledge — perception, inference, comparison, and testimony — but vaisesika accepts only two — perception and inference.

Second, nyaya maintains that all of reality is comprehended by sixteen categories



(padarthas), whereas vaishesika recognizes only seven categories of reality. These are: dravya (substance), guna (quality), karma (action), samanya (generality), visesa (uniqueness), samavaya (inherence), and abhava (nonexistence). The term padartha means “the object denoted by a word,” and according to vaishesika philosophy all objects denoted by words can be broadly divided into two main classes

— that which exists, and that which does not exist. Six of the seven padarthas are in the first class, that which exists. In the second class, that which does not exist, there is only one padartha, abhava, which stands for all negative facts such as the nonexistence of things.

5. Which among the following philosophies originated from relatively secular scholars?
1. Vaisheshika
 2. Nyaya
 3. Yoga
 4. Mimansa

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

[A] 1 & 2

[B] 2 & 3

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[C] 3 & 4

[D] 1 & 4

Answer: [A] 1 & 2

Vaisheshika and Nyaya are two philosophies which comparatively originated from the secular scholars rather than the religious or divine men.

6. Apart from Quran, Sunnah and Hadith are two important sources of the Islamic Shariah. How Sunnah is different from Hadith?
- [A] While Sunnah denotes the way Prophet Muhammad lived his life, Hadith refers to what has been approved or disapproved by the Prophet
- [B] While Sunnah refers to the laws which one should follow, Hadith refers to what Prophet Mohammad himself followed
- [C] While Sunnah is a binding law on every Muslim, Hadith is a guideline which every Muslim is expected to follow
- [D] None of the explanations given in option A, B and C is correct

Answer: [A] While Sunnah denotes the way Prophet Muhammad lived his life, Hadith refers to what has been approved or disapproved by the Prophet

Islamic Shariah stands for a compendium of Islamic Laws. Shariah is an Arabic word that means a stream of water where people come to quench their thirst. The Islamic Shariah has



two fundamental sources: the Quran and Hadith, the sayings and guiding acts of the Prophet. Some sources say that Shariah has two fundamental sources viz. Quran and Sunnah.

Sunnah

- In Islam, the Arabic word sunnah has come to denote the way Prophet Muhammad lived his life. The Sunnah is the second source of Islamic jurisprudence, the first being the Quran. Both sources are indispensable; one cannot practice Islam without consulting both of them.

Hadith

- The Arabic word hadith (pl. ahadith) is very similar to Sunnah, but not identical. A hadith is a narration about the life of the Prophet or what he approved – as opposed to his life itself, which is the Sunnah as already mentioned.

The Quran says that Allah has sent His prophets to all peoples in different periods of time, to establish justice, equity and morality. Prophet Abraham was sent to the land that we know today as Iraq. To his prophetic chain belongs Moses, who was bestowed by God His book, the Torah, and His Law, which is called the Shariah of Moses. Likewise, Jesus was blessed by God with the Bible. In the last of the Abrahamic chain of prophets came Mohammad who was born in the Arabian city of Mecca. He was blessed with the divine word, the Quran and Islamic Shariah.

7. How the Sthanakavasi sect is different from other sects of Jainism?

1. The followers of Sthanakavasi faith practice idol worship
2. The followers of Sthanakavasi wear saffron cloths

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

- [A] Only 1
- [B] Only 2
- [C] Both 1 & 2
- [D] Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: [D] Neither 1 nor 2

Sthanakavasi sect of Jainism believes that soul is nirakar “without form”, and hence do not pray to any statue. They wear white cloths and cover mouth with a white cloth. Except on the crucial point of idol-worship, Sthanakwasi do not differ much from other Shwetambar Jains and hence now-a-days they invariably call themselves as Shwetambar Sthanakwasi. However, there are some differences between the Sthanakwasi; and the Murtipujak Shwetambar in the observance of some religious practices. The Sthanakwasi do not believe in idol-worship at all. As such they do not have temples but only sthanakas, that is, prayer halls, where they carry on



their religious fasts, festivals, practices, prayers, discourses, etc.

8. Which among the following was the main contribution of Jainism to Indian Philosophy ?

- [A] The doctrine of rebirth
- [B] The doctrine of Syadvada
- [C] The doctrine of immortality of soul
- [D] The doctrine of Brahma is nirguna

Answer: [B] The doctrine of Syadvada

The doctrine of Syadvada is based on the premise that every proposition is only relatively true. It all depends on the particular aspect from which we approach that proposition.

9. Consider the following observations about various branches of Buddhism:

1. Hinayana included what is now called the Theravada
2. Mahayana compiled Sutta Pitaka and the Vinaya Pitaka
3. Vajrayana is otherwise known as Tantric Buddhism

Which among the above statements is / are correct?

- [A] 1 & 2
- [B] 1 & 3
- [C] Only 1
- [D] 1, 2 & 3

Answer:

Buddhism developed in two directions represented by two different groups. One was called the Hinayana (Sanskrit: "Lesser Vehicle"), a term given to it by its Buddhist opponents. This more conservative group, which included what is now called the Theravada (Pali: "Way of the Elders") community, compiled versions of the Buddha's teachings that had been preserved in collections called the Sutta Pitaka and the Vinaya Pitaka and retained them as normative.

The other major group, which calls itself the Mahayana (Sanskrit: "Greater Vehicle"), recognized the authority of other teachings that, from the group's point of view, made salvation available to a greater number of people. These supposedly more advanced teachings were expressed in sutras that the Buddha purportedly made available only to his more advanced disciples.

As Buddhism spread, it encountered new currents of thought and religion. In some Mahayana communities, for example, the strict law of karma (the belief that virtuous actions create pleasure in the future and nonvirtuous actions create pain) was modified to accommodate new emphases on the efficacy of ritual actions and devotional practices. During the second half of the 1st millennium ce, a third major Buddhist movement, Vajrayana



(Sanskrit: “Diamond Vehicle”), or Esoteric Buddhism, developed in India. This movement was influenced by gnostic and magical currents pervasive at that time, and its aim was to obtain spiritual liberation and purity more speedily.

10. The Four Noble Truths are a central theme in the Buddhism. Which among the following statements conform to the Four Noble Truths?

1. To live is to suffer
2. Origin of suffering is attached to desire
3. Individualism contributes to suffering

Choose the correct option from the codes given below:

- [A] Only 1 & 2
- [B] Only 2 & 3
- [C] Only 1 & 3
- [D] 1, 2 & 3

Answer: [D] 1, 2 & 3

“To live is to suffer” is the essence of first noble truth. It means that life is accompanied by inevitable pain, sickness and disappointment. However, this is life and we live it. While living life we suffer, because suffering is part of living. In the second noble truth there are three kinds of desires: desire for sense pleasure (kama tagna), desire to become (bhava tanha) and desire to get rid of (vibhava tanha). The second noble truth basically states that the origin of suffering is attached to desire. According to teachings of Buddha, individualism contributes to suffering. Buddha says “there is only one of you, if you overemphasize your desires you are not doing your best.” The meaning is that if you are only looking out for your own self and your own well being you are not doing your best because there are so many other people out there that you could be helping.