

Religions and Cultures of India



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Osher Course
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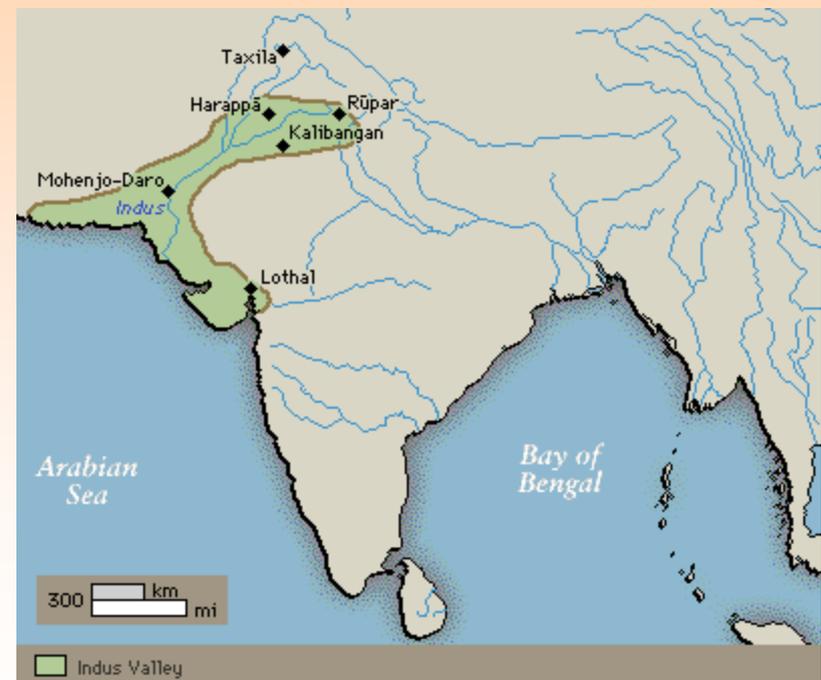
Today's agenda

- Brief survey of religions in India
- Focus on:
 - Hinduism
 - Sikhism
 - Jainism



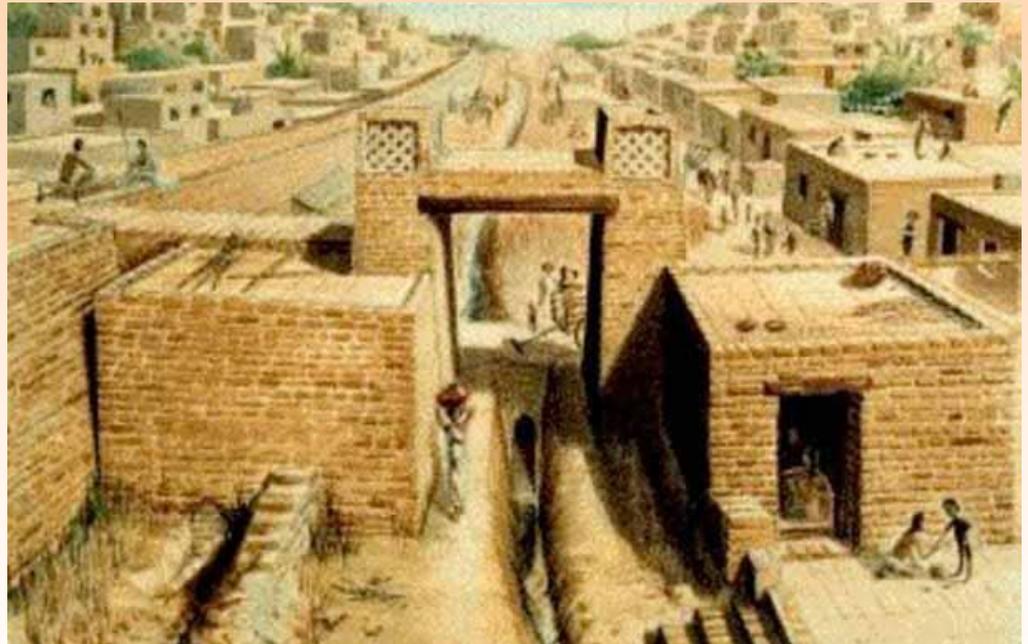
A bit of history

- Harappan (Indus Valley) Civilization (3000 bc)
 - Rediscovered in 1920s.
 - 100s of cities.
 - Script remains undeciphered.



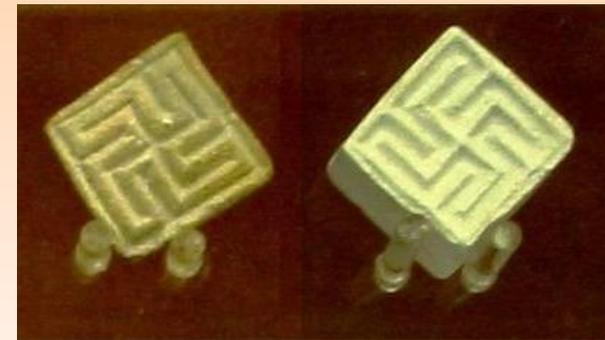
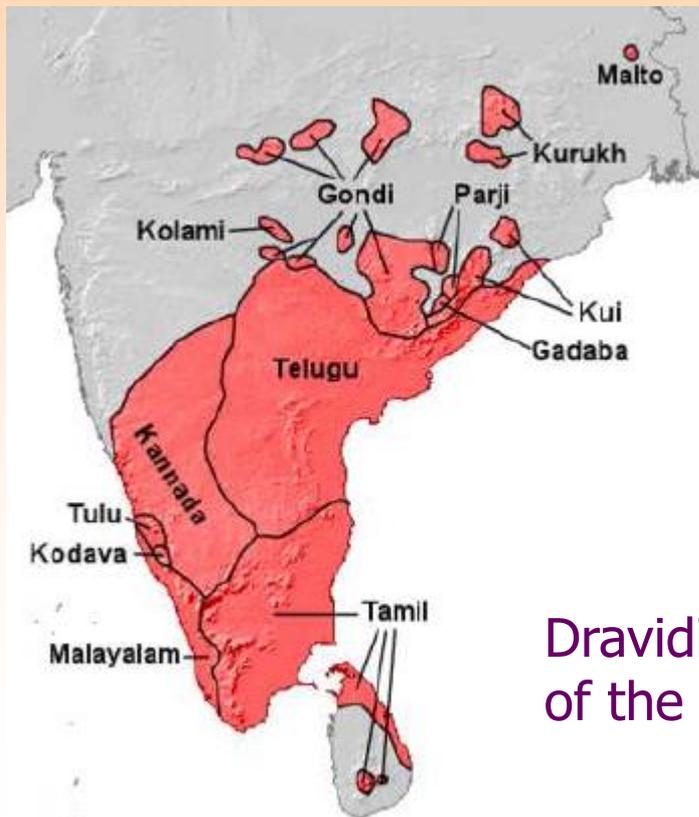
A bit of history

- Harappan culture thrived for 1500 years.
 - Indoor plumbing.
 - No weapons.



A bit of history

- Traces of Indus Valley culture persist.

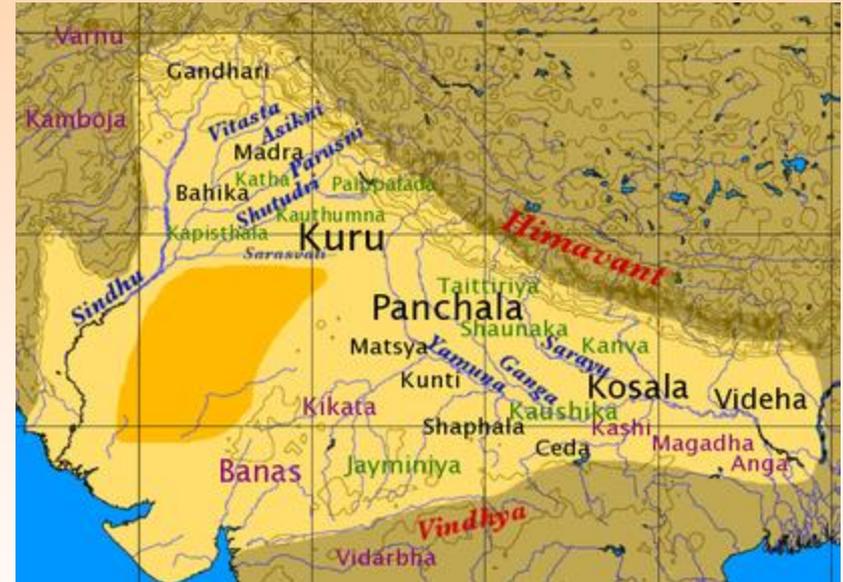


Swastika

Dravidian languages
of the south

A bit of history

- Rise of Aryan culture, 1500 bce.
 - From what is now Iran
 - Aryan = noble people
 - Iran = Aryan = Ireland
 - Nomadic, pastoral people.
 - Warlike, chariot-riding.



A bit of history

- Part of Indo-European migration

Germanic

German, English, Dutch,
Danish, Swedish, Icelandic

Baltic

Latvian,
Lithuanian

Slavic

Russian, Polish,
Czech, etc.

Celtic

Gaelic
Irish
Welsh
Breton

Spanish
French
Catalan

Latin

Italian

Greek

Hittite

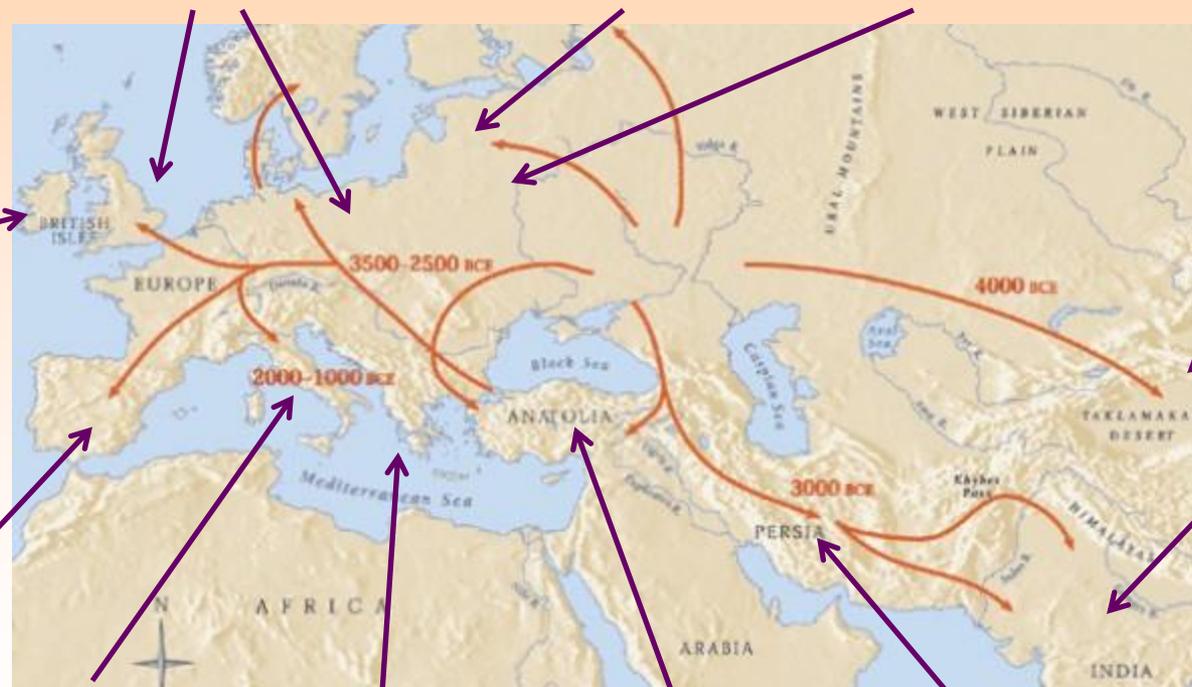
Persian

Farsi, Kurdish, Pashto

Tocharian

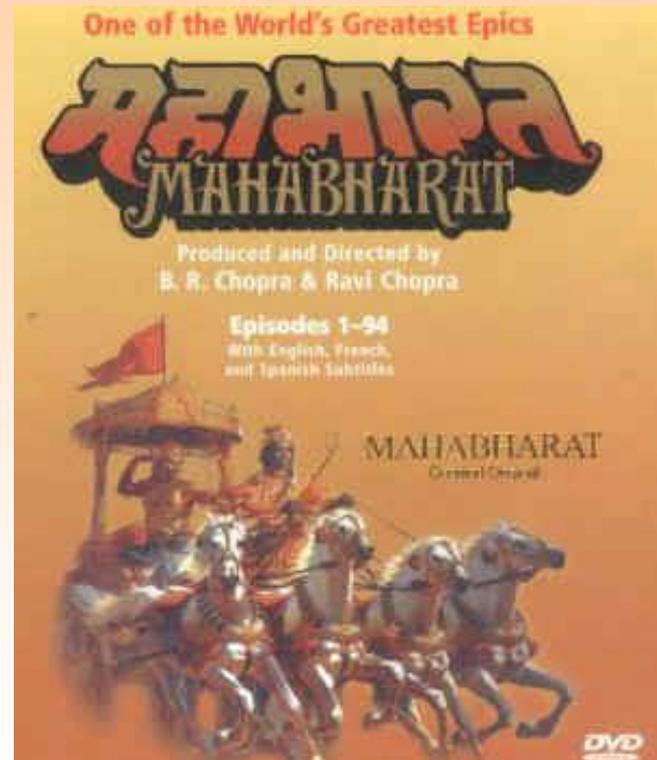
Sanskrit

Hindi,
Punjabi,
Gujarati,
Bengali



A bit of history

- Hindu literature (written in Sanskrit)
 - Vedas
 - Rigveda, etc.
 - Upanishads
 - Puranas
 - Mahabharata
 - Bhagavad Gita
 - Ramayana



DVD for TV dramatization
of the *Mahabharata*

A bit of history

- Muslim invasions (1200 ad)
 - Mughals (1600)
 - Today's Hindu/Muslim conflict is a legacy of this period.



A bit of history

- British Raj (ca 1760)
- Independence (1947)

- Mohandas Gandhi



- Jawaharlal Nehru, 1st prime minister

A bit of history

- Partition of India set stage for today's tension.
 - Ethnic cleansing
 - 25 million migrated
 - Half a million died in “communal” violence.



South Asia today



Cultural Background

- Indians are the world's consummate networkers.
 - They spend much energy maintaining a worldwide network of family members and friends.



Cultural Background

- Marriage is a major affair.
 - May be arranged.
 - Implies a change in networking relationships
 - Weddings can last days.



Cultural Background

- Authority is important
 - Respect for parents.
 - Boss is authoritarian.
 - But not government.
 - Tolerance for wide range of lifestyles.



Namaste (namaskar)

Cultural Background

- Everyone has a place.
 - “Caste” is from Sanskrit for “color.”
 - *Brahmins* (priests)
 - *Kshatriyas* (soldiers)
 - *Vaisyas* (merchants and farmers)
 - *Sudras* (laborers and servants), outcastes.
 - Some 4635 *jatis* (occupations, ethnic/linguistic groups, religious sects).
 - 134 *jatis* consist of *dalits* (untouchables)

Cultural Background

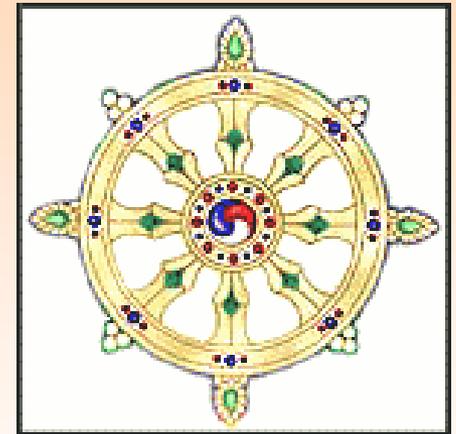
- Government quotas for “scheduled” castes & classes (less privileged).



Untouchables (Dalits)

Cultural Background

- Dharma = personal duty
 - Related to age, caste, *jati*
 - Social obligation
 - Religious rituals
 - Stages of life (*ashrama*)
 - Student – prepare for life
 - Adulthood – work, family
 - Retirement – share wisdom
 - Withdrawal – seek *moksha*



Dharmacakra
Symbol of dharma

Religions in India

- Best known religions:
 - Hindu (80%)
 - Muslim (14%)
 - Christian (2.4%)
 - Sikh (2%) - blend of Hindu & Muslim
 - Buddhist (0.7%) - exported to rest of Asia
 - Jains (0.5%) - pioneers in math & logic
 - Baha'i (0.2%) – seen as successor to the above
 - Parsi (<0.01%) – Zoroastrian faith

Religions in India

- **Hindu** faith defines the basic worldview of Indian culture.
 - Shaped by Vedic tradition.
 - It is adapted to all levels of understanding.



Swaminarayan Akshardham temple,
New Delhi
World's largest Hindu temple (2005)

Religions in India

- **Muslims** came to north India as Mughal invaders, to south as traders.
 - Almost as many as in Pakistan.
 - Communal strife between Hindu and Muslim is a basic fact of life.



Taj Mahal, built by Shah Jehan, Mughal ruler

Religions in India

- **Christians** have lived in India since the earliest days of the faith.
 - 1/4 of Kerala, 1/3 of Goa.
 - Roman Catholic schools have contributed to educational system.



St. Thomas Basilica, Chennai

Religions in India

- **Sikhs** practice a faith that contains elements of Hinduism and Islam.
 - Founded by Guru Nanak, 16th c.
 - Recognized by turbans, steel bracelets.
 - Sikh men generally use the surname *Singh*, women use *Kaur*.



Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab State

Religions in India

- **Buddhism** is India's main contribution to world spirituality.
 - Rarely practiced in India today.
 - Except among followers of B. R. Ambedkar.
 - Will discuss with east Asian religions.



Mahabodhi Temple
Site of Buddha's enlightenment

Religions in India

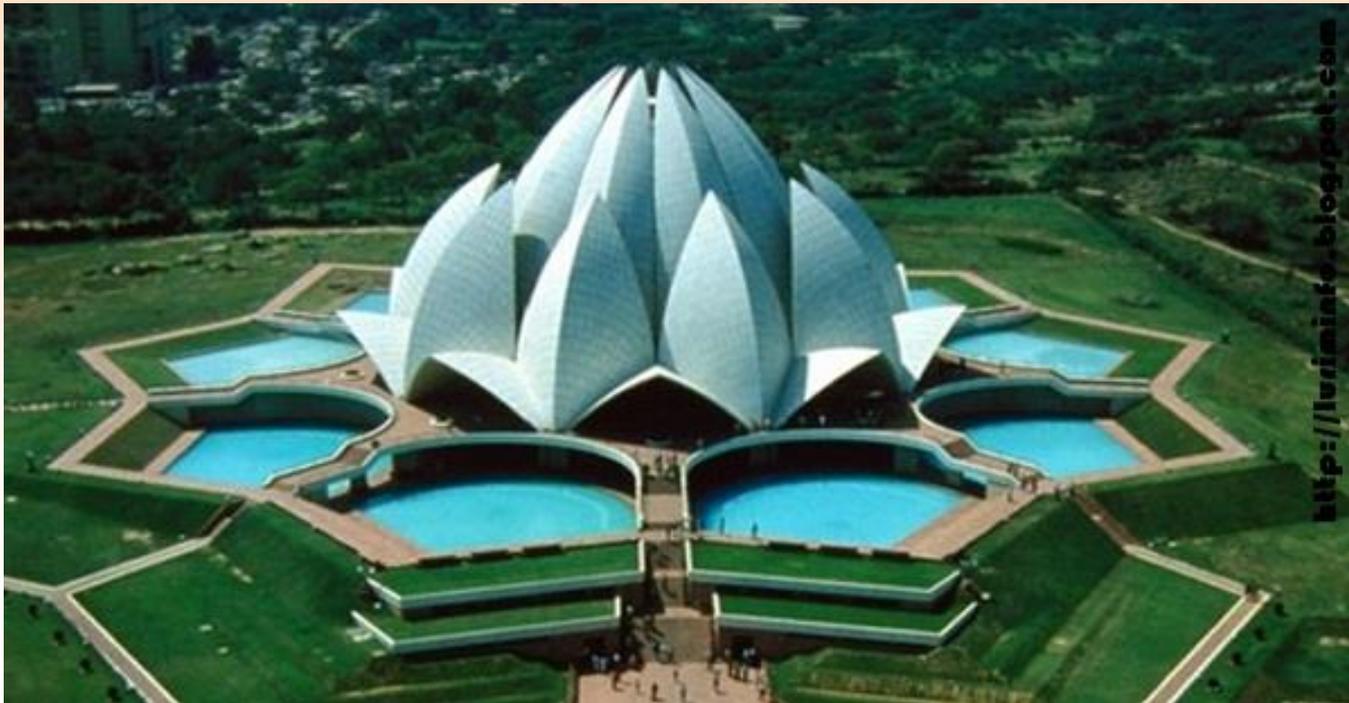
- **Jains** have profound respect for life.
 - Pioneers in formal logic and math.



Jain temples, Palitana, Gujarat State

Religions in India

- **Baha'i faith sees itself as successor to Judaism, Buddhism, Islam.**
 - Founded by Baha'u'llah in Persia, 19th c.
 - Headquarters in Haifa, Israel



Lotus
Temple,
Delhi

Religions in India

- **Zoroastrianism** is ancient religion of Persia.
 - Survives among a few **Parsis** in India.
 - Tata family is Parsi.
 - India's most prominent business family.



Parsi Temple, Kohlkata

Hinduism

- A faith as complex as India itself.
 - No particular creed, no distinction from philosophy
 - Several levels of sophistication
 - 6 major orthodox schools
 - *Samkhya* (dualism)
 - *Yoga* (meditation)
 - *Nyaya* (logic)
 - *Vaisheshika* (empiricism)
 - *Mimamsa* (ethics)
 - *Vedanta* (today's primary topic)
 - Associated with Adi Shankara



"Om" symbol

Hindu gods

- 330 million gods (according to scripture)
 - They are **avatars** of underlying reality.
 - Gods may be avatars of other gods.



CB022903 [RF] © www.visualphotos.com

Temple relief sculpture

Hindu gods



Vishnu, the Creator



Shiva, the Destroyer

Hindu gods



Ganesha, Overcomer
of Obstacles

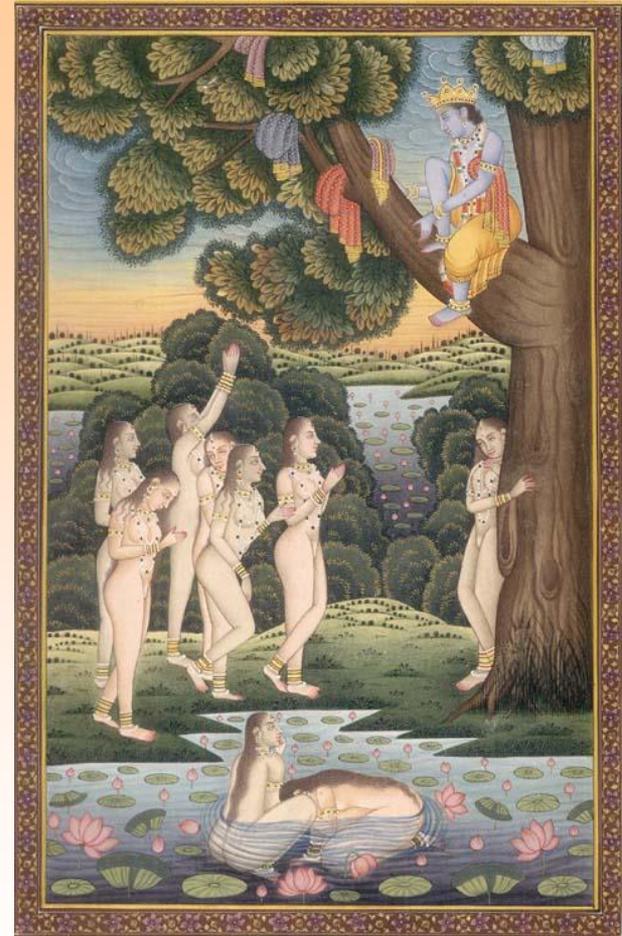


Rama, Hero of Ramayana
7th avatar of Vishnu

Hindu gods



Indra, War God



Krishna, the Playboy

Hindu shrines



Taxi shrine
Sai Baba of Shirdi, Ganesha

Hindu shrines



Shop shrine

Local Hindu temple

- SV temple in Penn Hills.
- One of the first Hindu temples in US.
- Popular site for weddings.



Sri Venkayeswara Temple

Puja ceremony

- Basic ceremony is the *puja*.
 - Takes place in temple or at home.
 - May involve *mantra* (recitation), *mandala* (symbols), music, flowers, fruits, offerings.



Puja thali (puja tray)

Puja ceremony

- Basic ceremony is the *puja*.
 - Takes place in temple or at home.
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Puja ceremony in home



Puja ceremony

- Possible elements of puja ritual :
 - Invoke deity by reciting a mantra or prayer.
 - Offer water.
 - Wash deity's feet & sprinkle with perfumes.
 - "Dress" deity with cotton thread.
 - Offer flowers, fruit, sandalwood paste, incense, water, music.
 - Give thanks, offer flame, and eat *prashad* (food offering).

Puja ceremony

Water container

Incense
(joss stick) holder

Sandalwood powder
for tilak or bindi



Stand for
diva lamp

Bell to call worshipers

Kumkum powder
container

Kumkum powder
for tilak or bindi

Pilgrimage



Pilgrims on *ghats* (steps) along Ganga (Ganges) in Varanasi

Pilgrimage



Pilgrims at Amarnath Caves (Kashmir), site of phallic symbol of Shiva

Pilgrimage



India's largest pilgrimage, to Sabarimala Temple, Kerala State.
Attracts 5 crore (50 million) a year to worship Ayyappan.
Pilgrims wear bags containing ghee and other offerings

Samsara and karma

- *Samsara* (wandering) is the endless cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation).
 - First clearly appears in Upanishads.
 - We don't know why.
 - Also occurs in writings of Plato, among some native Americans, Trobriand Islanders, etc.



Samsara and karma

- *Karma* = action
 - What goes around comes around.
 - Karma is **not** fate or luck.
 - Our destiny is a result of our actions.
 - In particular, our form in the next incarnation.

Samsara and karma

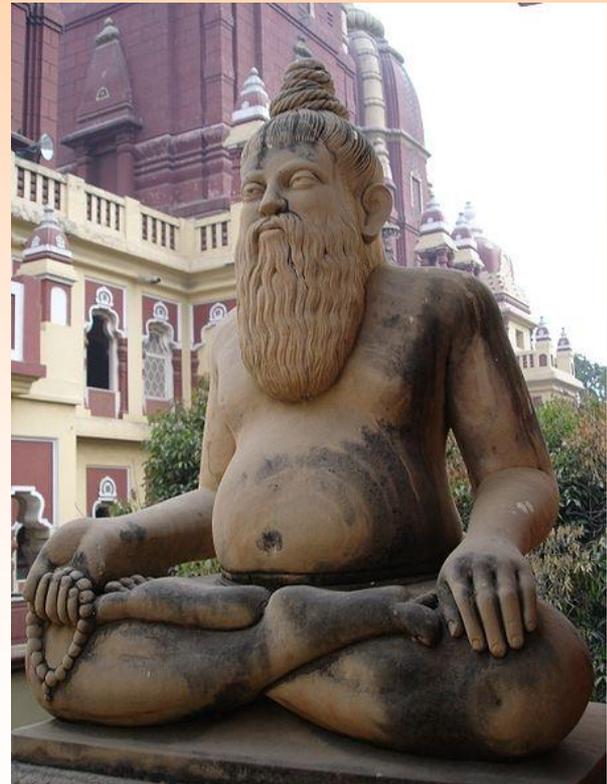
- Early solution: *moksha* (liberation) through asceticism.
 - Practice persists today
 - The *sadhu* and *yogi*.

Sadhus



Yoga

- Yoga is traditional training for mental discipline.
 - *Yoga* is from *yoke*, or connection.
 - *Religion* is from *reconnect*.
 - Meditation \neq spacing out, relaxing

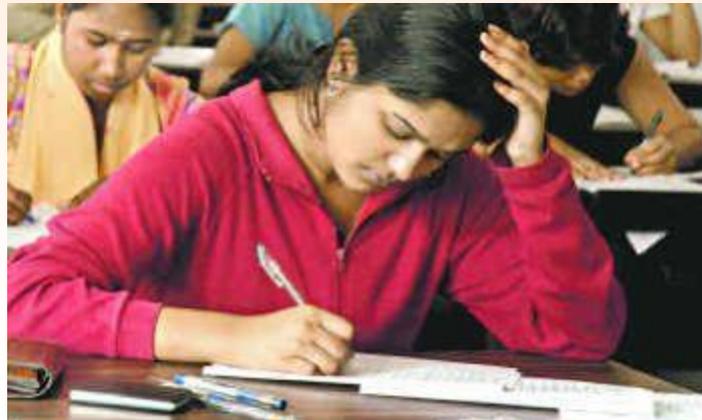


Statue of a yogi in meditation

Yoga

- Indians rely on mental training and discipline rather than external order for a sense of security.
 - Emphasis on rigorous training and intellectual achievement.
 - Yoga & meditation take the form of **study**.

Taking college
entrance exam



Pantheism

- Indians do not feel a need to structure and engineer their world.
 - Hindu world is *pantheistic*.
 - Needs no maintenance.
 - So, nothing works.

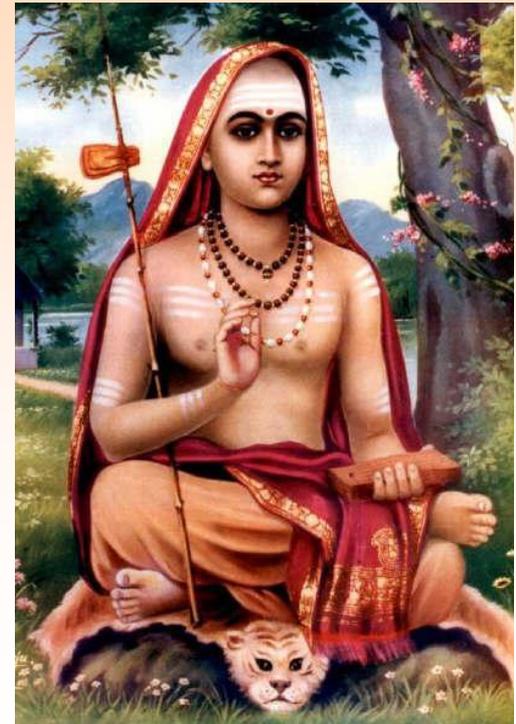


Street scene, Varanasi

Mysticism

- Mysticism = underlying unity
 - What we see is *maya* (illusion).
 - Confusion is due to confused thought.
 - The reality underneath makes sense.

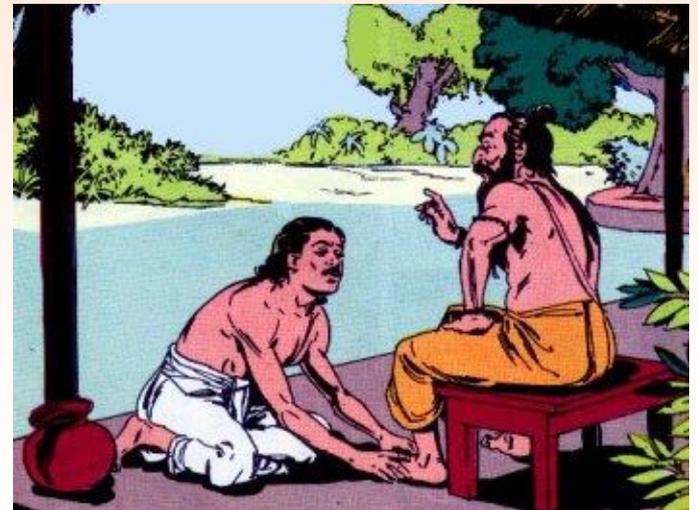
Adi Shankara
exponent of Vedanta



Mysticism

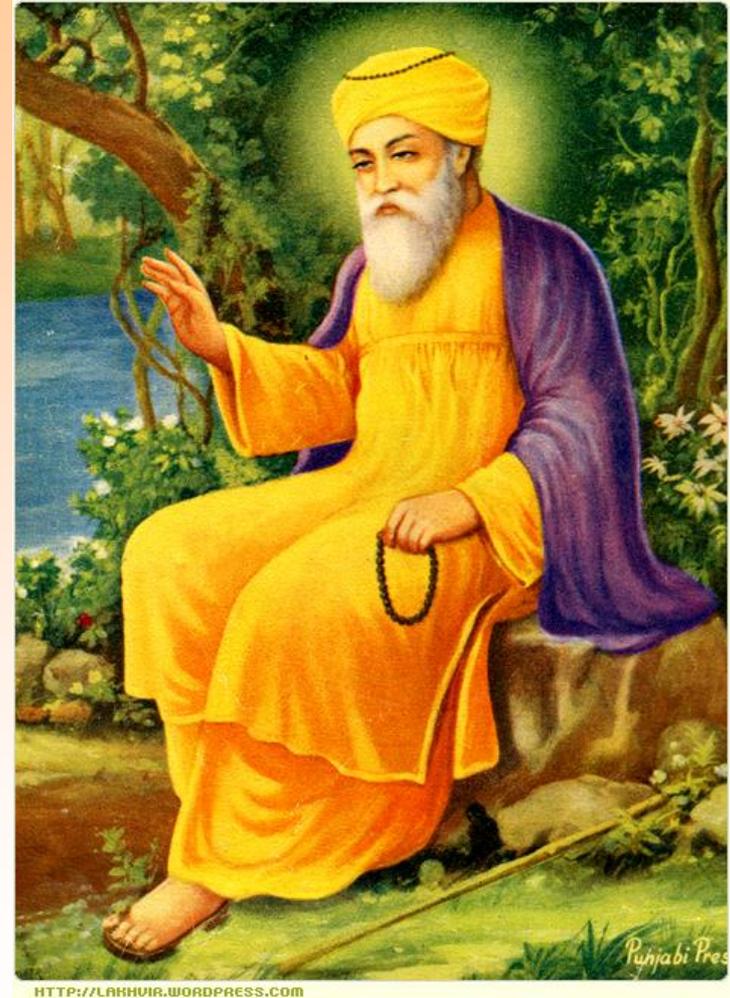
- Brahman-Atman.
 - *Brahman--Tat Tvam Asi*
 - तत् त्वम् असि (“you are it.”)
- From dialog between Uddalaka (Aruni) and his son in Upanishads.

Shvetaketu touching father's feet
to show respect.
Still practiced today.



Sikhism

- Blends Hindu and Muslim faiths
 - Founded 15-16th c. in Punjab by Guru Nanak.



Sikhism



Sikh family

Sikhism

The 5 K's:

- *Kesh* – Uncut hair
- *Kanga* – Wooden comb worn under turban
- *Kara* – Steel bracelet
- *Kachera* – Cotton underwear
- *Kirpan* – curved sword



Sikhism

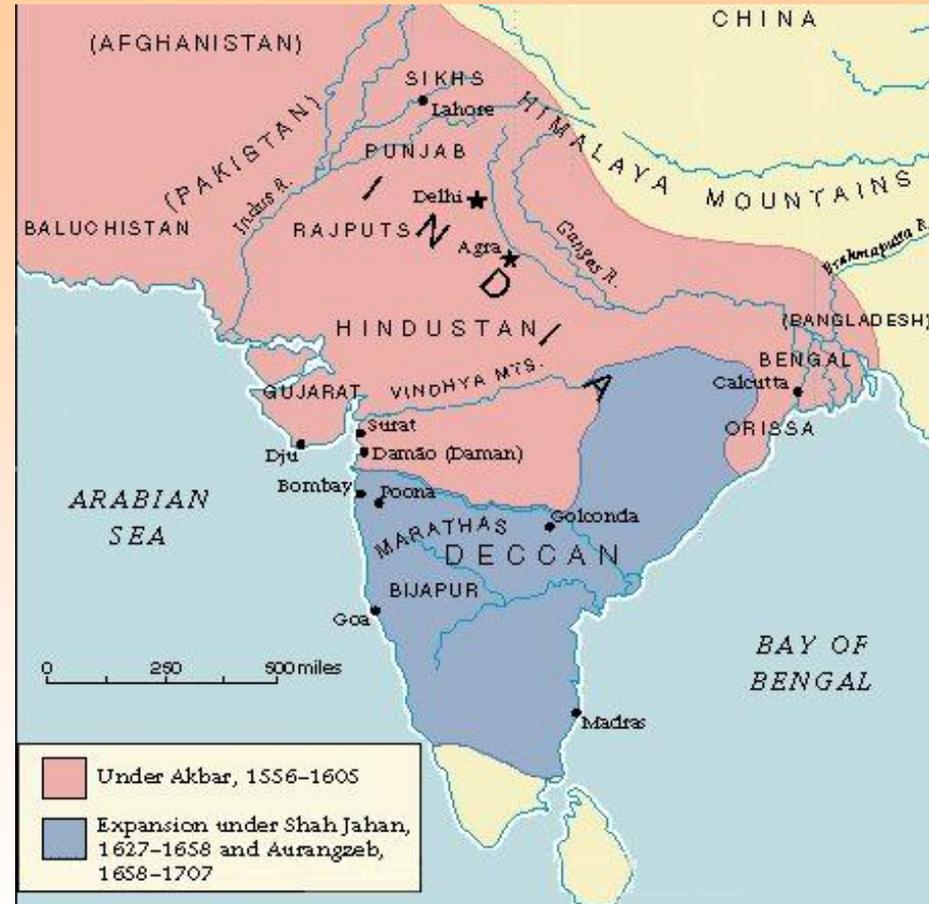
- Sikh names:
 - Men adopt *Khalsa* (baptismal) name **Singh** (= lion).
 - Reflects egalitarianism because it replaced Caste name.
 - Women adopt *Khalsa* name **Kaur** (= princess).
 - Practice may vary.
 - May retain original surname after Singh or Kaur
 - May drop Kaur/Singh.

Manmohar Singh,
Indian prime minister



Sikhism

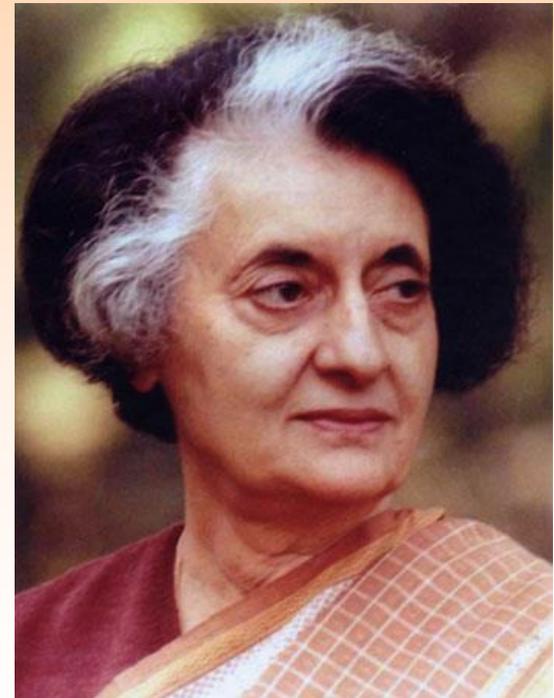
- Originated under Mughal rule in Punjab.
- 15-16th c.
- Conquered Punjab, 18th c.
- Subjugated by British, 19th c.



Mughal Empire

Sikhism

- India/Pakistan partition in 1947.
 - Sikhs/Hindus vs. Muslims in Punjab
 - 100,000s of deaths.
 - Ethnic cleansing.
 - 2.5 million Sikhs migrated from West to East Punjab
- Indian army stormed Golden Palace, 1984.
 - Indira Gandhi assassinated by Sikh bodyguard.



Sikhism

- Based on teaching of 10 gurus.
 - 10th Guru Gobind Singh decreed that collection of writings **Guru Granth Sahib** would be the final guru (teacher).

Written primarily in *Sant Bhasa*, related to Punjabi



Sikhism

- “God is neither Hindu nor Muslim.”
-- Guru Nanak
- Some tenets and practices:
 - Monotheism
 - Goal is *moksha* (salvation from *samsara*)
 - ...but not via asceticism, rituals, pilgrimage
 - Family life, private meditation.
 - Rejection of caste, gender inequality
 - Rejection of *halal*, *kosher*, alcohol
 - Some Sikhs avoid beef, pork, or all meat.

Sikhism

Guru Granth Sahib
inside a *gurdwara*
(gateway to the guru)



Worshippers
remove shoes
and cover head



Sikhism

Langar (free meal)
inside *gurdwara*,
served every
afternoon



Langar in U.K.

Sikhism

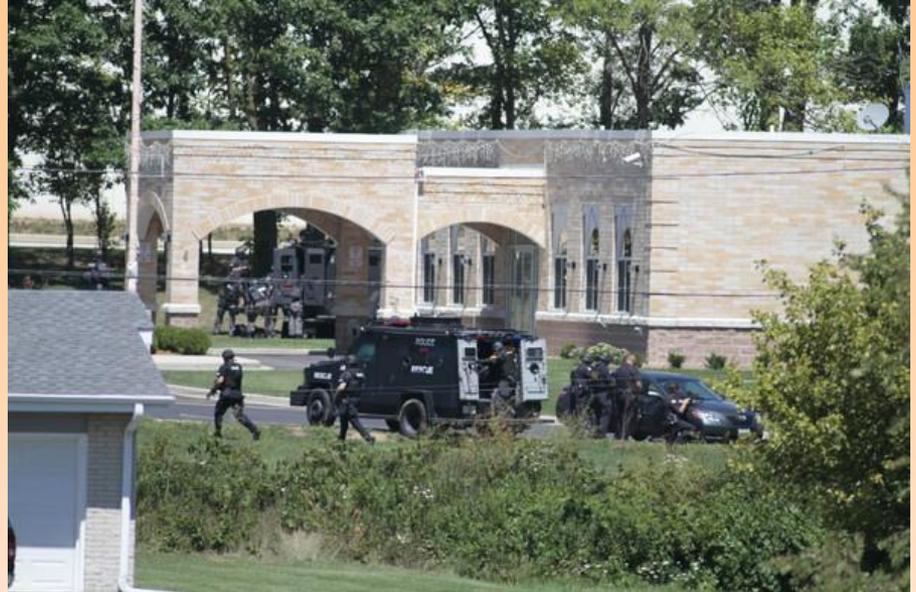
Local Sikh
temple



Gurdwara in Monroeville

Sikhism

Sikh Temple
of Wisconsin
attacked by
gunman
Aug 5, 2012



*Gurdwara
Oak Creek, Wisc.*



*Lt. Brian Murphy took
9 bullet wounds while
defending temple*

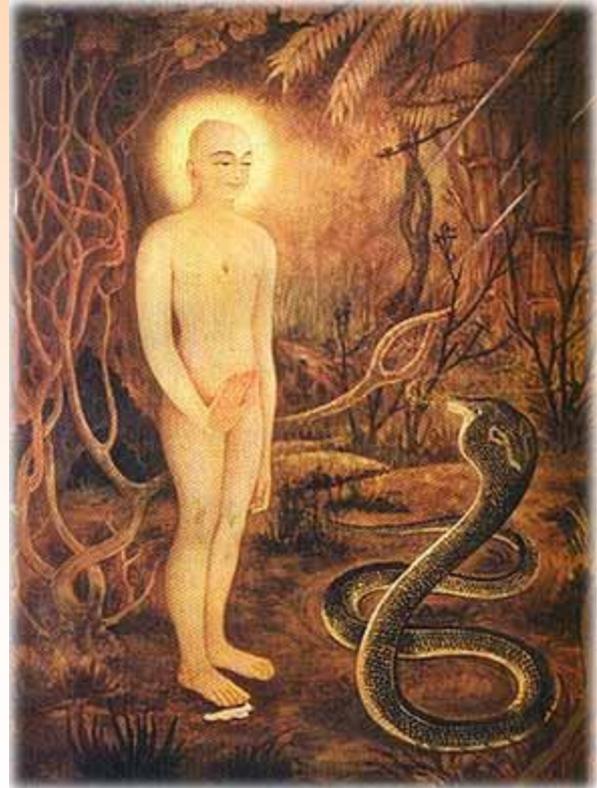
Jainism

- Perhaps the world's most extreme religion.



Jainism

- Founded by Mahavira
 - Jains say he *revived* Jainism.
 - Became ascetic at age 30.
 - Pulled out hair by the roots.
 - Rejected clothing.
 - Intense fasting, meditation.

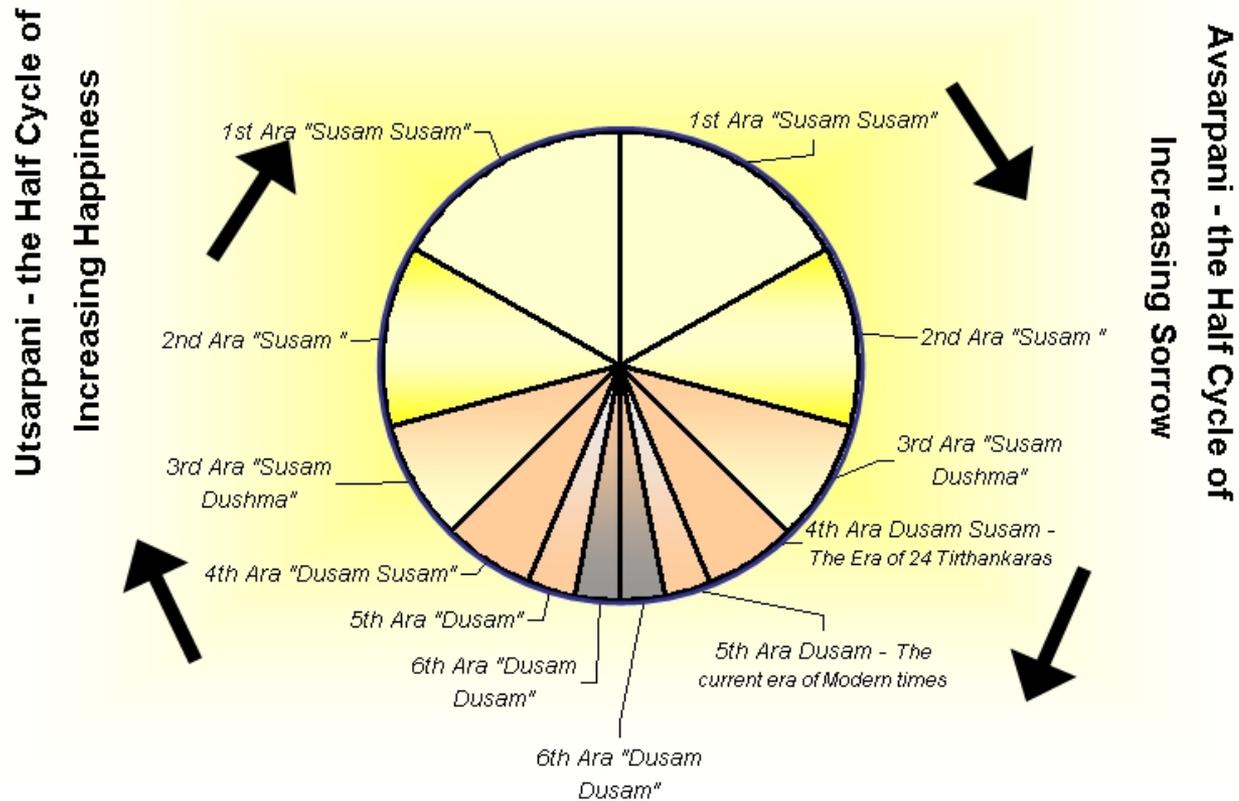


Jainism

- Enlightenment at age 42.
 - Became 24th *Tirthankara*.
 - Eventually starved himself to death.
 - Recognized as a *jina* or conqueror.
 - Followers are *jainas* or Jains.
 - First *Tirthankara* lived 10^{224} years ago.
 - 2nd lived 5×10^{223} years ago...
 - 22nd lived 5000 years ago.
 - 23rd lived 2800 years ago.

Jainism

The Jain Cosmic Wheel of time



Jainism

- Five types of souls:
 - *5 senses* – Gods, humans, other mammals, birds
 - *4 senses* (no hearing) – Scorpions, spiders, flies, beetles.
 - *3 senses* (no sight) – Moths, centipedes.
 - *2 senses* (no smell) – Worms, microbes.
 - *1 sense* (only touch) – Plants, stones, lakes, raindrops, flames, wind.
- Similar to Leibniz's monadology.



Jainism

- *Ahimsa* – Nonviolence
 - Avoid harming beings with souls.
 - Especially higher beings.
 - Eat as low on the food chain as possible.
 - To avoid bad karma.
 - Bad karma causes sticky substance to adhere to one's soul, and prevents it from rising to heaven.

Jainism

- Two lifestyles
 - Monastic.
 - Aiming for salvation after this life.
 - Strict observance
 - Extreme nonviolence and respect for life, truthfulness, no stealing, celibacy, no possessions (no clothes in Digambara order).



Jainism

- Two lifestyles
 - Household.
 - More practical observance.
 - Nonviolence (pacifist, vegan), truthfulness, honest labor, chastity,



Jain family

Jainism

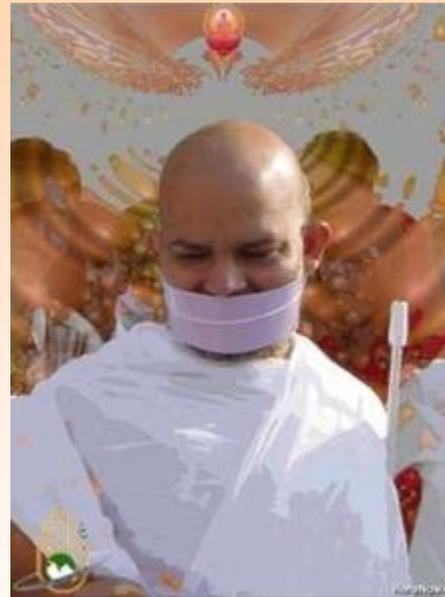
- Local Hindu Jain temple



Hindu Jain Temple, Monroeville

Jainism

- Monastic Jains



Jain monks, Shvetambara Order

Jainism

- Monastic Jains



Jainist "sky clad" monks (Digambara Order)

Jainism

- Monastic Jains



Sky clad monks at Jain festival in Kundalpur, 2006,
to celebrate 50 women becoming Jain nuns.
These nuns pulled out their own hair.

Jainism

- Monastic Jains

Hair removal
during initiation



Jain nuns on pilgrimage

Jainism

- Jain householders
 - Honest in business.
 - Non-exploitive occupations.
 - No farmers.
 - Pacifists.



Jains praying for peace

Jainism



Jain meal

Strictly vegan

No roots, tubers (potatoes, turnips, squash, carrots, mushrooms, onions, garlic)

Perhaps no foods with many seeds (figs, pomegranates, tomatoes)

Jainism

- Small in number, but large in influence.
 - Pioneers in logic, mathematics.
 - Origin of vegetarianism in India.
 - Inspiration for Mohandas Gandhi's nonviolent resistance.





Jainism

- Extreme religion – Why?
 - Jains want to make sense of the world.
 - Preying on living things for survival makes no sense.
 - In general, human predicament may require an extreme solution.
 - Yet extreme \neq harmful.
 - World's most extreme religion is world's most harmless religion.

- 
- Questions?
 - Comments?