Religions and Cultures of India

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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.

Dravidian languages of the south

Swastika
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**

**Tocharian**

**Sanskrit**
- Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali

**Persian**
- Farsi, Kurdish, Pashto
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
- Jawaharllal 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.

Creation of Bangladesh (1971).
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.
  - 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
Religions in India

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

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*.
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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
- Bell to call worshipers
- Stand for diva lamp
- 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 ≠ spacing out, relaxing
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.
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.
  - 15-16\textsuperscript{th} c.
- Conquered Punjab, 18\textsuperscript{th} c.
- Subjugated by British, 19\textsuperscript{th} c.
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
    - 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)

Worshipers 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

Lt. Brian Murphy took 9 bullet wounds while defending temple

Gurdwara
Oak Creek, Wisc.
Jainism

- Perhaps the world’s most extreme religion.

  - Swastika (4 types of incarnation)
  - Ahimsa (nonviolence)
  - Right faith, knowledge, conduct
  - Stop and think before acting
  - Siddha in heaven
  - Mutual assistance of all beings
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 $5 \times 10^{223}$ years ago…
  - 22nd lived 5000 years ago.
  - 23rd lived 2800 years ago.
Jainism

The Jain Cosmic Wheel of Time

1st Ara "Susam Susam"
2nd Ara "Susam"
3rd Ara "Susam Dushma"
4th Ara "Dusam Susam"
5th Ara "Dusam"
6th Ara "Dusam Dusam"

1st Ara "Susam Susam"
2nd Ara "Susam"
3rd Ara "Susam Dushma"
4th Ara Dusam Susam - The Era of 24 Tirthankaras
5th Ara Dusam - The current era of Modern times
6th Ara "Dusam Dusam"

Utsarpani - the Half Cycle of Increasing Happiness
Avsarpani - the Half Cycle of Increasing Sorrow
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,
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 ≠ harmful.
    - World’s most extreme religion is world’s most harmless religion.
• Questions?
• Comments?