

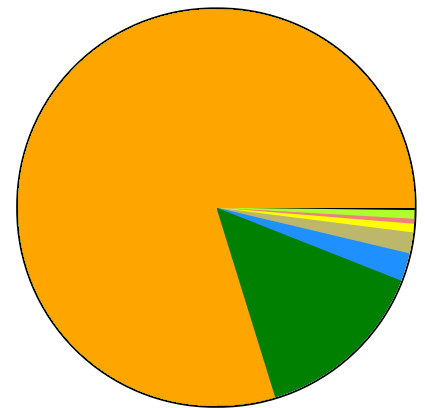
Religion in India

Religion in India is characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. India is a secular state by the 42nd amendment to the Constitution in 1976, meaning that all religions are treated equally by the state. The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four of the world's major religions; namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Throughout India's history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture. Religious diversity and religious tolerance are both established in the country by the law and custom; the Constitution of India has declared the right to freedom of religion to be a fundamental right.^[2]

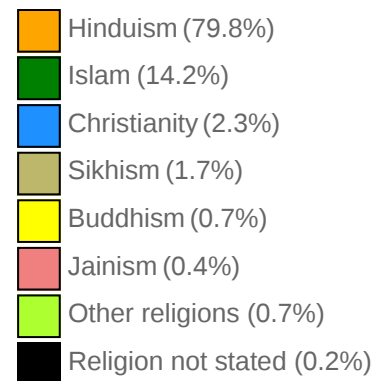
Northwest India was home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, the Indus valley civilisation. Today, India is home to around 90% of the global population of Hindus. Most Hindu shrines and temples are located in India, as are the birthplaces of most Hindu saints. Allahabad hosts the world's largest religious pilgrimage, Kumbha Mela, where Hindus from across the world come together to bathe in the confluence of three sacred rivers of India: the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the Saraswati. The Indian diaspora in the West has popularised many aspects of Hindu philosophy such as yoga, meditation, Ayurvedic medicine, divination, karma, and reincarnation.^[3] The influence of Indian religions has been significant all over the world. Several Hindu-based organisations, such as the Hare Krishna movement, the Brahma Kumaris, the Ananda Marga, and others have spread Indian spiritual beliefs and practices.

According to the 2011 census, 79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism and 14.2% adheres to Islam, while the remaining 6% adheres to other religions (Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and various indigenous ethnically-bound faiths). Christianity is the 3rd largest religion in India. Zoroastrianism and Judaism also have an ancient history in India, and each has several thousands of Indian adherents. India has the largest population of people adhering to Zoroastrianism (i.e. Parsis and Iranis) and Bahá'í Faith in the world,^[4] even though these religions are not native to India. Many other world religions also have a relationship with Indian spirituality, such as the Baha'i faith which recognises the Buddha and Krishna as manifestations of the God Almighty.^[5]

India has the third largest Shia population in the world and being the cradle of Ahmadiyya Islam, it is one of the countries in the world with at least 2 million Ahmadi Muslims. The shrines of some of the most famous saints of Sufism, like Moinuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Auliya, are found in India, and attract visitors from all over the world.^[6] India is also home to some of the most famous monuments of Islamic architecture, such as the Taj Mahal and the Qutb Minar. Civil matters related to the community are dealt with by the Muslim Personal Law.^[7] and constitutional amendments in 1985 established its primacy in family matters.^[8]



Religion in India (2011 Census)^[1]



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Stone sculpture of Saraswati (the Hindu goddess of Knowledge and Education) at the Temple of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Tamil Nadu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

History

Pre-historic religion

Evidence attesting to prehistoric religion in the Indian "subcontinent" derives from scattered Mesolithic rock paintings depicting dances and rituals. Neolithic pastoralists inhabiting the Indus Valley buried their dead in a manner suggestive of spiritual practices that incorporated notions of an afterlife.^[9] Other South Asian Stone Age sites, such as the Bhimbetka rock shelters in central Madhya Pradesh and the Kupgal petroglyphs of eastern Karnataka, contain rock art portraying religious rites and evidence of possible ritualised music.^[10]

Indus Valley Civilization

The Harappan people of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which lasted from 3300 to 1400 BCE and was centered on the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra river valleys, may have worshiped an important mother goddess symbolising fertility.^[11] Excavations of Indus Valley Civilisation sites show seals with animals and "fire-altars", indicating rituals associated with fire. A *linga-yoni* of a type similar to that which is now worshiped by Hindus has also been found.^[11]

Evolution of Hinduism in India

Hinduism is often regarded as the oldest religion in the world,^[12] with roots tracing back to prehistoric times, over 5,000 years ago.^[13] Hinduism spread through parts of Southeastern Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Hindus worship a single god with different forms.^[14]

Hinduism's origins include the cultural elements of the Indus Valley Civilisation along with other Indian civilisations. The oldest surviving text of Hinduism is the Rigveda, produced during the Vedic period and dating to 1700–1100 BCE.^[15] During the Epic and Puranic periods, the earliest versions of the epic poems, in their current form including Ramayana and Mahabharata were written



Akshardham, one of the largest Hindu temples in the world.^{[15][16]}

roughly from 500–100 BCE,^[18] although these were orally transmitted through families for centuries prior to this period.^[19]

After 200 BCE, several schools of thought were formally codified in the Indian philosophy, including Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva-Mimamsa and Vedanta.^[20] Hinduism, otherwise a highly theistic religion, hosted atheistic schools and atheistic philosophies. Other Indian philosophies generally regarded as orthodox include Samkhya and Mimamsa.

Rise of Shramana Religions

Historical roots of Jainism in India is traced back to 9th-century BC with the rise of Parshvanatha and his non-violent philosophy.^{[21][22]} Mahavira the 24th Jain Tirthankara (599–527 BCE) before that 23 Tirthankaras (started from Shri Rishavdeva) for this chaubishi, (before that infinite 24 tirthankara) stressed five vows, including ahimsa (non-violence) and asteya (non-stealing). Gautama Buddha, who founded Buddhism, was born to the Shakya clan just before Magadha (which lasted from 546–324 BCE) rose to power. His family was native to the plains of Lumbini, in what is now southern Nepal. Indian Buddhism peaked during the reign of Ashoka the Great of the Mauryan Empire, who patronised Buddhism following his conversion and unified the Indian subcontinent in the 3rd century BCE. He sent missionaries abroad, allowing Buddhism to spread across Asia.^[23] Indian Buddhism declined following the loss of royal patronage offered by the Kushan Empire and such kingdoms as Magadha and Kosala.



Palitana Jain Temples



Buddhist Mahabodhi Temple

The decline of Buddhism in India has been attributed to a variety of factors, which include the resurgence of an aggressive Hinduism in the 10th and 11th centuries under Sankaracharya, the later Turkish invasion, the Buddhist focus on renunciation as opposed to familial values and private property, Hinduism's own use and appropriation of Buddhist and Jain ideals of renunciation and ahimsa, etc. Although Buddhism virtually disappeared from mainstream India by the 11th century CE, its presence remained and manifested itself through other movements such as the Bhakti tradition, Vaishnavism and the Bauls of Bengal, who are influenced by the Sahajjyana form of Buddhism that was popular in Bengal during the Pala period.

Bhakti Movement

During the 14–17th centuries, when North India was under Muslim rule, the Bhakti movement swept through Central and Northern India. The Bhakti movement actually started in the eighth-century Tamil south India (present day Tamil Nadu and Kerala), and gradually spread northwards.^[24] It was initiated by a loosely associated group of teachers, or saints. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, Surdas, Meera Bai, Kabir, Tulsidas, Ravidas, Namdeo, Tukaram and other mystics were some of the saints in the North. They taught that people could cast aside the heavy burdens of ritual and caste, and the subtle complexities of philosophy, and simply express their overwhelming love for God. This period was also characterised by an abundance of devotional literature in vernacular prose and poetry in the ethnic languages of the various Indian states or provinces. The Bhakti movement gave rise to several different movements throughout India.

During the Bhakti movement, many Hindu groups regarded as outside the traditional Hindu caste system followed Bhakti traditions by worshipping/followingsaints belonging to their respective communities. For example, Guru Ravidas was a Chamar of Uttar Pradesh; Guru Parsuram Ramnami was a Chura of Chhattisgarh; and Maharishi Ram Naval was a Bhangi of Rajasthan. In their lifetimes,

several of these saints even went to the extent of fighting conversion from foreign missionaries, encouraging only Hinduism within their communities. In Assam for example, tribals were led by Gurudev Kalicharan Bramha of the Brahmo Samaj; in Nagaland by Kacha Naga; and in Central India by Birsa Munda, Hanuman Oaron, Jatra Bhagat and Budhu Bhagat.

Sikhism

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539) was the founder of Sikhism. The Guru Granth Sahib was first compiled by the fifth Sikh guru, Guru Arjan Dev, from the writings of the first five Sikh gurus and others saints who preached the concept of universal brotherhood, including those of the Hindu and Muslim faith. Before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru Granth Sahib was declared the eternal guru. Sikhism recognises all humans as equal before Waheguru,^[25] regardless of colour, caste or lineage.^[26] Sikhism strongly rejects the beliefs of fasting (vrata), superstitions, idol worship^{[27][28]} and circumcision.^{[29][30]}



Harmandir Sahib, commonly known as the *Golden Temple*, in Amritsar

Introduction of Abrahamic religions

Judaism



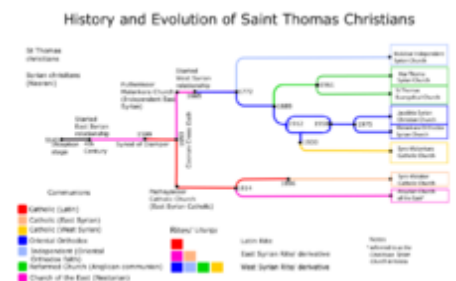
Interior of Paradesi Synagogue in Kochi, the oldest still-active synagogue in India

Jews first arrived as traders from Judea in the city of Kochi, Kerala, in 562 BCE.^[31] More Jews came as exiles from Israel in the year 70 CE, after the destruction of the Second Temple.^[32]

Christianity

The works of scholars and Eastern Christian writings say that Christianity was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who visited Muziris in Kerala in 52 CE and baptised Kerala's Jewish settlements, who are known as Saint

Thomas Christians (also known as Syrian Christians or Nasrani) today.^{[33][34][35][36][37]} Although the exact origins of Christianity in India remain unclear, there is a general scholarly consensus that Christianity was rooted in India by the 3rd century AD, including some communities who used Syriac liturgically, and it is a possibility that the religion's existence in India extends to as far back as the 1st century.^{[38][39][40]} Christianity in India has different denominations like Roman Catholicism, Oriental Orthodox, and Protestantism.



Saint Thomas Christian's - Divisions- History

Most Christians reside in South India, particularly in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa.^{[41][42]} There are also large Christian populations in the North-east Indian states.^[43] Christianity in India was expanded in the 16th Century by Catholic Portuguese expeditions and by Protestant British and US missionaries in the 18th century.^[44]

Islam

Though Islam came to India in the early 7th century with the advent of Arab traders in Malabar coast, Kerala, it started to become a major religion during the Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent. Islam's spread in India mostly took place under the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526–1858), greatly aided by the mystic Sufi tradition.^[45]

Islam is the second largest religion in India, with 14.2% of the country's population or roughly 172 million people identifying as adherents of Islam (2011 census).^{[46][47][48][49][50][51]}



The Jama Masjid in Delhi is one of the world's largest mosques.

Demographics

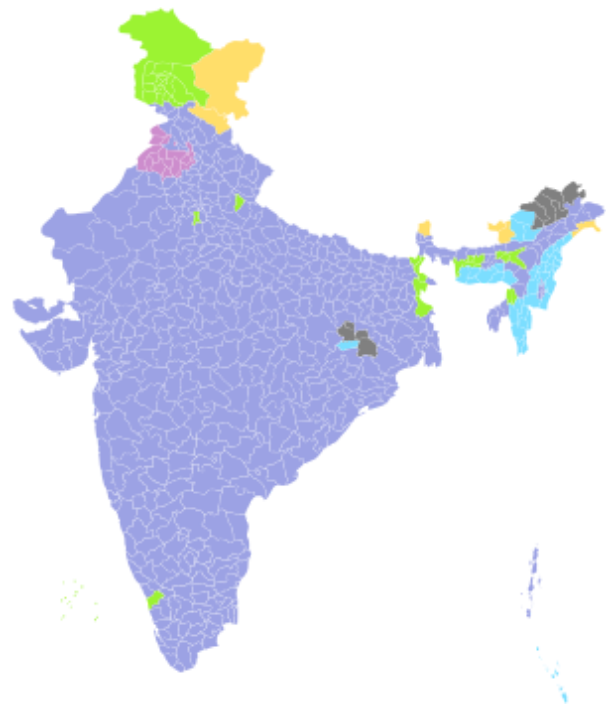
Statistics

There are six religions in India which have been awarded "National minority" status—Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Zoroastrians.^{[52][53]}

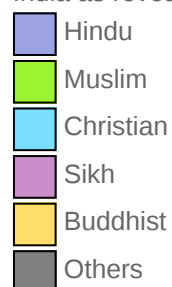
Population trends for major religious groups in India (1951–2011)



Manarcad Church One of the famous pilgrim centers of Syrian Christians



Predominant religious confessions by district in India as revealed by the 2011 census.



Religious group	Population % 1951	Population % 1961	Population % 1971	Population % 1981	Population % 1991	Population % 2001	Population % 2011 ^[54]
Hinduism	84.1%	83.45%	82.73%	82.30%	81.53%	80.46%	79.80%
Islam	9.8%	10.69%	11.21%	11.75%	12.61%	13.43%	14.23%
Christianity	2.3%	2.44%	2.60%	2.44%	2.32%	2.34%	2.30%
Sikhism	1.79%	1.79%	1.89%	1.92%	1.94%	1.87%	1.72%
Buddhism	0.74%	0.74%	0.70%	0.70%	0.77%	0.77%	0.70%
Jainism	0.46%	0.46%	0.48%	0.47%	0.40%	0.41%	0.37%
Zoroastrianism	0.13%	0.09%	0.09%	0.09%	0.08%	0.06%	n/a
Others/Religion not specified	0.43%	0.43%	0.41%	0.42%	0.44%	0.72%	0.9%

The following is a breakdown of India's religious communities:

Characteristics of religious groups^[54]

Religious group	Population (2011) %	Growth (2001-2011) ^{[55][56]}	Sex ratio (2011) (total) ^[57]	Sex ratio (2011) (rural)	Sex ratio (2011) (urban)	Sex ratio (2011) (child) ^[58]	Literacy (2011) (%) ^[59]	Work participation (2011) (%) ^{[57][60]}
Hinduism	79.80%	16.8%	939	946	921	913	73.3%	41.0%
Islam	14.23%	24.6%	951	957	941	943	68.5%	32.6%
Christianity	2.30%	15.5%	1023	1008	1046	958	84.5%	41.9%
Sikhism	1.72%	8.4%	903	905	898	828	75.4%	36.3%
Buddhism	0.70%	6.1%	965	960	973	933	81.3%	43.1%
Jainism	0.37%	5.4%	954	935	959	889	94.9%	35.5%
Others/Religion not specified	0.90%	n/a	959	947	975	974	n/a	n/a

Religions

Hinduism is an ancient religion (although Hinduism is diverse, with monotheism, henotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism, monism, atheism, agnosticism, and gnosticism being represented^{[61][62][63][64]}), and Hinduism is also the largest religious grouping in India; around 966 million adherents as of 2011; compose 79.8% of the population.^[54] The term *Hindu*, originally a geographical description, derives from the Sanskrit, *Sindhu*, (the historical appellation for the Indus River), and refers to a person from the *land of the river Sindhu*^[65]

Buddhism is an Indian, transtheistic religion and philosophy. Around 8.5 million Buddhists live in India, about 0.7% of the total population, although unofficial estimates suggest up to 12 million. Buddhism as a religion is practised mainly in the foothills of the Himalayas and is a significant religion in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, the Ladakh district in Jammu and Kashmir, Darjeeling in West Bengal and the Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. Besides, a significant number of Buddhists reside in Maharashtra. They are the Neo-Buddhists or Navayana Buddhists who, under the influence of B. R. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism in order to escape the casteist practices within Hinduism. Ambedkar is a crucial figure, along with Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka and Kripasaran Mahasthavira of Chittagong behind the revival of Buddhism in India in the 19th and 20th centuries. The escape of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzing Gyatso to India fleeing Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959 and the setting up of the Tibetan Government in Exile at Dharamshala in



Map of the British Indian Empire in 1909, shaded by prevailing religion.



Prayer flags above the Buddhist monastery (*gumpa*) of Tanze, in the Kurgiakh Valley. The wind is believed to propagate prayers printed on the flags.



Muslims praying in a mosque in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

up 2.3% of the population. St. Thomas is credited with introduction of Christianity in India. He arrived in Malabar Coast in 52 AD.^{[33][34][75]} Christians comprise a majority in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya and have significant populations in Kerala and Goa.



A popular Bahá'í House of Worship in Delhi, India

including the Cochin Jews of Kerala, the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, and the Baghdadi Jews near Mumbai. In addition, since

McLeodganj in Himachal Pradesh has also accelerated the resurgence of Buddhism in India. The effective religion in Sikkim, which joined the Indian Union in 1975 (making it India's 22nd state) remains Vajrayana Buddhism, and Padmasambhava or Guru Ugyen is a revered presence there.

Jainism is a non-theistic Indian religion and philosophical system originating in Iron Age India. Jains compose 0.4% (around 4.45 million) of India's population, and are concentrated in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.^[66]

Sikhism began in sixteenth century North India with the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive human gurus. As of 2011, there were 20.8 million Sikhs in India. Punjab is the spiritual home of Sikhs, and is the only state in India where Sikhs form a majority. There are also significant populations of Sikhs in neighbouring Chandigarh, Delhi and Haryana, which were historically part of Punjab.

Islam is a monotheistic religion centered on the belief in one God and following the example of Muhammad. It is the largest minority religion in India. According to the 2011 census, India is home to 172 million Muslims,^[54] the world's third-largest Muslim population after those in Indonesia (210 million)^[67] and Pakistan (195 million).^[68] Muslims compose 14.23% of the Indian population.^{[54][69]} Muslims are a majority in states Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep,^[66] and live in high concentrations in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, and Kerala.^{[66][70]} There has been no particular census conducted in India with regards to sects, but sources suggest the largest denomination is Sunni Islam^[71] with a substantial minority of Shiite Muslims and Ahmadi Muslims. Indian sources like Times of India and DNA reported the Indian Shiite population in mid-2005–2006 to be between 25% and 31% of entire Muslim population of India, which accounts them in numbers between 40^[72] to 50 million^[73] of a total of 172 million Muslims in India.^{[71][74]}

Christianity is a monotheistic religion centred on the life and teachings of Jesus as presented in the New Testament. It is the third largest religion of India, making



St. Paul's Cathedral, Kolkata.

As of the census of 2001, Parsis (followers of Zoroastrianism in India) represent approximately 0.006% of the total population of India,^[76] with relatively high concentrations in and around the city of Mumbai. Parsis number around 61,000 in India. There are several tribal religions in India, such as Donyi-Polo. Santhal is also one of the many tribal religions followed by the Santhal people who number around 4 million but only around 23,645 follow the religion. About 2.2 million people in India follow the Bahá'í Faith, thus forming the largest community of Bahá'ís in the world.^[77]

Judaism is also present in India, a monotheistic religion from the Levant. There is today a very small community of Indian Jews. There were more Jews in India historically, including the Cochin Jews of Kerala, the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, and the Baghdadi Jews near Mumbai. In addition, since

independence two primarily proselyte Indian Jewish communities in India: the Bnei Menashe of Mizoram and Manipur, and the Bene Ephraim, also called **Telugu Jews**. Of the approximately 95,000 Jews of Indian origin, fewer than 20,000 remain in India. Some parts of India are especially popular with Israelis, swelling local Jewish populations seasonally.

Around 0.07% of the people did not state their religion in the 2001 census.



The interior of the Paradesi Synagogue in Cochin.

Law

The preamble to the Constitution of India proclaims India a "sovereign socialist secular democratic republic". The word *secular* was inserted into the Preamble by the Forty-second Amendment Act of 1976. It mandates equal treatment and tolerance of all religions. India does not have an official state religion; it enshrines the right to practise, preach, and propagate any religion. No religious instruction is imparted in government-supported schools. In S. R. Bommai vs. Union of India the Supreme Court of India held that secularism was an integral tenet of the Constitution.^[78]

Freedom of religion is a fundamental right according to the Indian Constitution. The Constitution also suggests a uniform civil code for its citizens as a Directive Principle.^[79] This has not been implemented until now as Directive Principles are Constitutionally unenforceable. The Supreme Court has further held that the enactment of a uniform civil code all at once may be counter-productive to the unity of the nation, and only a gradual progressive change should be brought about (*Pannalal Bansilal v State of Andhra Pradesh, 1996*).^[80] In *Maharishi Avadesh v Union of India (1994)* the Supreme Court dismissed a petition seeking a writ of mandamus against the government to introduce a common civil code, and thus laid the responsibility of its introduction on the legislature.^[81]

Major religious communities not based in India continue to be governed by their own personal laws. Whilst Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews have personal laws exclusive to themselves; Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs are governed by a single personal law known as Hindu personal law. Article 25 (2)(b) of the Constitution of India states that references to Hindus include "persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion".^[82] Furthermore, the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 defines the legal status of Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs as legal Hindus but not "Hindus by religion".^[83] Supreme Court in 2005 gave verdict that Jains, Sikhs and Buddhist are part of broader Hindu fold, as they are Indic religions and interconnected to each other, though they are distinct religions.^[84] The only Indian religion exclusively covered under the secular ("civil") law of India is Brahmoism starting from Act III of 1872.

Aspects

Religion plays a major role in the Indian way of life.^[85] Rituals, worship, and other religious activities are very prominent in an individual's daily life; it is also a principal organiser of social life. The degree of religiosity varies amongst individuals; in recent decades, religious orthodoxy and observances have become less common in Indian society, particularly amongst young urban-dwellers.

Rituals

The vast majority of Indians engage in religious rituals on a daily basis.^[86] Most Hindus observe religious rituals at home.^[87] Observation of rituals vary greatly amongst regions, villages, and individuals. Devout Hindus perform daily chores such as worshipping puja, fire sacrifice called Yajna at the dawn after bathing (usually at a family shrine, and typically includes lighting a lamp and offering foods before the images of deities), recitation from religious scripts like Vedas, Puranas singing hymns in praise of gods etc.^[87]

A notable feature in religious ritual is the division between purity and pollution. Religious acts presuppose some degree of impurity, or defilement for the practitioner, which must be overcome or neutralized, before or during ritual procedures. Purification, usually with water, is thus a typical feature of most religious action.^[87] Other characteristics include a belief in the efficacy of sacrifice and concept of merit, gained through the performance of charity or good works, that will accumulate over time and reduce sufferings in the next world.^[87]

Muslims offer five daily prayers at specific times of the day, indicated by adhan (call to prayer) from the local mosques. Before offering prayers, they must ritually clean themselves by performing wudu, which involves washing parts of the body that are generally exposed to dirt or dust. A recent study by the Sachar Committee found that 3–4% of Muslim children study in madrasas (Islamic schools).^[88]

Diet

Dietary habits are significantly influenced by religion. Almost one-third of Indians practice lacto-vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is less common amongst Sikhs and almost uncommon amongst Muslims, Christians, Bahá'ís, Parsis, and Jews.^[89] Jainism requires monks and laity, from all its sects and traditions, to be vegetarian. Furthermore, the religion also bars Jains from eating any vegetable that involves digging it from the ground. This rule, therefore, excludes potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, garlic, radish etc. from Jain diet. Islam and Judaism bar pork.

Ceremonies

Occasions like birth, marriage, and death involve what are often elaborate sets of religious customs. In Hinduism, major life-cycle rituals include annaprashan (a baby's first intake of solid food), upanayanam ("sacred thread ceremony" undergone by upper-caste youths), and shraadh (paying homage to a deceased individual).^{[90][91]} According to the findings of a 1995 national research paper, for most people in India, a betrothal of a young couple placing an expectation upon an exact date and time of a future wedding was a matter decided by the parents in consultation with astrologers.^[90] A significant reduction in the proportion of arranged marriages has however taken place since 1995, reflecting an incremental change.

Muslims practice a series of life-cycle rituals that differ from those of Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists.^[92] Several rituals mark the first days of life—including the whispering call to prayer, first bath, and shaving of the head. Religious instruction begins early. Male circumcision usually takes place after birth; in some families, it may be delayed until after the onset of puberty.^[92]

Marriage requires a payment by the husband to the wife, called Meher, and the solemnisation of a marital contract in a social gathering.^[92] After burial of the dead, friends and relatives gather to console the bereaved, read and recite the Quran, and pray for the soul of the deceased.^[92] Indian Islam is distinguished by the emphasis it places on shrines commemorating great Sufi saints.^[92]

Pilgrimages

Many Hindu families have their own family patron deity or the Kuladaivat.^[93] This deity is common to a lineage or a clan of several families who are connected to each other through a common ancestor.^{[93][94]} The Khandoba of Jejuri is an example of a Kuladaivat of some Maharashtrian families; he is a common Kuladaivat to several castes ranging from Brahmins to Dalits.^[95] The practice of worshipping local or territorial deities as Kuladaivats began in the period of the Yadava dynasty.^[94] Other family deities of the people of Maharashtra are Bhavani of Tuljapur, Mahalaxmi of Kolhapur, Renuka of Mahur, and Balaji of Tirupati.

India hosts numerous pilgrimage sites belonging to many religions. Hindus worldwide recognise several Indian holy cities, including Allahabad, Haridwar, Varanasi, Ujjain, Rameshwaram and Vrindavan. Notable temple cities include Puri, which hosts a major Jagannath temple and Rath Yatra celebration; Tirumala - Tirupati, home to the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple; and Katra, home to the Vaishno Devi temple.



A puja performed on the banks of the overflowing Shipra River in Ujjain during the summer monsoon



A vegetarian thali from Rajasthan.



A Hindu marriage.

Badrinath, Puri, Dwarka and Rameswaram compose the main pilgrimage circuit of Char Dham (four abodes) hosting the four holiest Hindu temples: Badrinath Temple, Jagannath Temple, Dwarkadheesh Temple and Ramanathaswamy Temple respectively. The Himalayan towns of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri compose the smaller Chota Char Dham (mini four abodes) pilgrimage circuit. The Kumbh Mela (the "pitcher festival") is one of the holiest of Hindu pilgrimages that is held every four years; the location is rotated amongst Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. The Thalaimaipathi at Swamithope is the leading pilgrim center for the Ayyavazhis.

Amongst the Eight Great Places of Buddhism, seven are in India. Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar are the places where important events in the life of Gautama Buddha took place. Sanchi hosts a Buddhist stupa erected by the emperor Ashoka. Many Buddhist monasteries dot the Himalayan foothills of India, where Buddhism remains a major presence. These include the Rumtek Monastery, Enchey Monastery and Pemayangtse Monastery in Sikkim, the Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh, the Kye Monastery and Tabo Monastery in Spiti, the Ghum Monastery in Darjeeling, and Durpin Dara Monastery in Kalimpong, the Thikse Monastery in Leh, the Namgyal Monastery in Dharamshala, among many others.

For Muslims, the Dargah Shareef of Khwaza Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer is a major pilgrimage site. Other Islamic pilgrimages include those to the Tomb of Sheikh Salim Chishti in Fatehpur Sikri, Jama Masjid in Delhi, and to Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai. Dilwara Temples in Mount Abu, Palitana, Pavapuri, Girnar and Shravanabelagola are notable pilgrimage sites (irtha) in Jainism.

The Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar is the most sacred gurdwara of Sikhism, while the Lotus Temple in Delhi is a prominent house of worship of the Bahá'í faith.

Relatively new pilgrimage sites include the samadhi of Meher Baba in Meherabad, which is visited by his followers from around the world^[96] and the Saibaba temple in Shirdi.^[97]

Minority beliefs and sects

Hinduism contains many different sub-cultures just like most other religions. The major aspects outlined above hold true for the majority of the Hindu population, but not all. Just as each state is home to an individual language, Hinduism harbors various sub-cultures whose traditions may or may not be shared by other Indians. A sect from Gujarat called the *Prajapatis* for example, hold water as the sacred ornament to every meal. Before and after a meal, an individual is expected to pour water in the palms of their right hand and sip the water three times.^[98] This is often seen as a purification gesture: food is regarded as being holy and every individual must purify themselves before touching their food.

Other minor sects in India carry no specific name, but they are uniquely identified by the last names of each family. This convention is used more frequently in South India than North India. For example, a relatively prominent sect in southern India prohibits making important decisions, commencing new tasks, and doing other intellectually or spiritually engaged actions after sunset. Historians believe that this tradition was derived from the concept of Rahukaalam, in which Hindus believe that a specific time period



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



The Sanchi Stupa in Madhya Pradesh is the oldest stone structure in India. Built by Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BCE, it houses the relics of Buddha Siddhartha Gautama.



Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim is one of the major tourist attractions of North-East India.



Maramon Convention, the largest annual Christian gathering in Asia, organised by the Mar Thoma Church.

of the day is inauspicious. Stringent family beliefs are thought to have led to the development of a more constrained religious hierarchy.^[99] Over time, this belief was extended to discourage taking major actions and even staying awake for long periods of time after sunset. Examples of families which follow this tradition include *Gudivada*, *Padalapalli*, *Pantham*, and *Kashyap*.^[98]

Religion and politics

Politics

Religious ideology, particularly that expressed by the *Hindutva* movement, has strongly influenced *Indian politics* in the last quarter of the 20th century. Many of the elements underlying India's *casteism* and *communalism* originated during the rule of the *British Raj*, particularly after the late 19th century; the authorities and others often politicised religion.^[100] The *Indian Councils Act 1909* (widely known as the *Morley-Minto Reforms Act*), which established separate Hindu and Muslim electorates for the Imperial Legislature and provincial councils, was particularly divisive. It was blamed for increasing tensions between the two communities.^[101]

Due to the high degree of oppression faced by the lower castes, the Constitution of India included provisions for *affirmative action* for certain sections of Indian society. Many states ruled by the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) introduced laws that made conversion more difficult; they assert that such conversions are often forced or allured.^[102] The BJP, a national political party, also gained widespread media attention after its leaders associated themselves with the *Ram Janmabhoomi movement* and other prominent religious issues.^[103]

A well-known accusation that Indian political parties make for their rivals is that they play vote bank politics, meaning give political support to issues for the sole purpose of gaining the votes of members of a particular community. Both the *Congress Party* and the BJP have been accused of exploiting the people by indulging in vote bank politics. The *Shah Bano case*, a divorce lawsuit, generated much controversy when the Congress was accused of appeasing the Muslim orthodoxy by bringing in a parliamentary amendment to negate the *Supreme Court's* decision. After the *2002 Gujarat violence*, there were allegations of political parties indulging in vote bank politics.^[104]

During an election campaign in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP released an inflammatory CD targeting Muslims.^[105] This was condemned by the *Communist Party of India (Marxist)* as playing the worst kind of vote bank politics.^[106] Caste-based politics is also important in India; caste-based discrimination and the *reservation system* continue to be major issues that are hotly debated.^{[107][108]}

Education

Several political parties have been accused of using their political power to manipulate educational content in a *revisionist* manner. Congress governments promoted hegemony of Socialist-Marxist authors ideologically aligned to policies of Nehru Gandhi family. The government was accused of being too sympathetic to the Muslim viewpoint. Muslim invaders were projected as heroes and rich legacy of Indian Civilisation was marginalised. The BJP-led *NDA* government tried to standardise school textbooks and remove Marxist-Islamist ideological biases. Leftist media and congress party referred to it as the "saffronisation" of textbooks, saffron being colour of Indian religions. The next government, formed by the UPA and led by the Congress Party, pledged to de-saffronise textbooks.^[109] Hindu groups alleged that the UPA promoted Marxist and pro-Muslim biases in school curricula.^{[110][111]}

India is the home and birthplace of four major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism," and also the home to Judaism and Christianity.^[112] All of these religions were passed down over time, not with the help of immigrants. Most people see India as being strongly based upon Hinduism, however, Hinduism cannot be characterised as a religion. Millions of people in India have been taught through heritages, that Hinduism is a philosophy. "Hindu" for many Persians and Arabs was not considered a religious word but as a geographical and cultural one used to describe the land next to the Indus River.^[113]



Takht Sri Hazur Sahib, Nanded, built over the place where Guru Gobind Singh was cremated in 1708, the inner chamber is still called *Angitha Sahib*.

Communalism

Communalism has played a key role in shaping the religious history of modern India. As an adverse result of the British Raj's divide and rule policy, British India was partitioned along religious lines into two states—the Muslim-majority Dominion of Pakistan (comprising what is now the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh) and the Hindu-majority Union of India (later the Republic of India). The 1947 Partition of India led to rioting amongst Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in Punjab, Bengal, Delhi, and other parts of India; 500,000 died as a result of the violence. The twelve million refugees that moved between the newly founded nations of India and Pakistan composed one of the largest mass migrations in modern history.^[114] Since its independence, India has periodically witnessed large-scale violence sparked by underlying tensions between sections of its majority Hindu and minority Muslim communities. The Republic of India is secular; its government recognizes no official religion. According to Taslima Nasrin, most secular people in India are pro-muslim and anti-Hindu.^[115]

Communal conflicts

Communal conflicts have periodically plagued India since it became independent in 1947. The roots of such strife lie largely in the underlying tensions between sections of its majority Hindu and minority Muslim communities, which emerged under the Raj and during the bloody Partition of India. Such conflict also stems from the competing ideologies of Hindu nationalism versus Islamic fundamentalism; both are prevalent in parts of the Hindu and Muslim populations. This issue has plagued India since before independence. The lack of education among the masses and the ease with which corrupt politicians can take advantage of the same has been attributed as the major reason for religious conflicts in India. Even though Freedom of religion is an integral part of the India constitution, the inability to hold communal mob's accountable has limited the exercise of religious freedom in India.



Aftermath of Hindu-Muslim clashes in Calcutta following the 1946 Direct Action Day

Alongside other major Indian independence leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and his *shanti sainiks* ("peace soldiers") worked to quell early outbreaks of religious conflict in Bengal, including riots in Calcutta (now in West Bengal) and Noakhali District (in modern-day Bangladesh) that accompanied Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Direct Action Day, which was launched on 16 August 1946. These conflicts, waged largely with rocks and knives and accompanied by widespread looting and arson, were crude affairs. Explosives and firearms, which are rarely found in India, were far less likely to be used.^[116]

Major post-independence communal conflicts include the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots, which followed Operation Blue Star by the Indian Army; heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopters were employed against the Sikh partisans inside the Harmandir Sahib, causing heavy damage to Sikhism's holiest Gurdwara. According to the Indian government estimates, the assault caused the deaths of up to 100 soldiers, 250 militants, and hundreds of civilians.^[117]

This triggered Indira Gandhi's assassination by her outraged Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984, which set off a four-day period during which Sikhs were massacred; The Government of India reported 2,700 Sikh deaths however human rights organisations and newspapers report the death toll to be 10,000–17,000. In the aftermath of the riot, the Government of India reported 20,000 had fled the city, however the PUCL reported "at least" 50,000 displaced persons.^[118]

The most affected regions were neighbourhoods in Delhi. Human rights organisations and the newspapers believe the massacre was organised.^[119] The collusion of political officials in the massacres and the failure to prosecute any killers alienated normal Sikhs and increased support for the Khalistan movement. The Akal Takht, the governing religious body of Sikhism, considers the killings to be a genocide.^[120]

Other incidents include the 1992 Bombay Riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Mosque as a result of the Ayodhya debate, and the 2002 Gujarat violence where more than 2,000 Muslims were killed and which was preceded by the Godhra Train Burning.^[121] Terrorist activities such as the 2005 Ram Janmabhoomi attack in Ayodhya, the 2006 Varanasi bombings, the 2006 Jama Masjid

explosions, and the 11 July 2006 Mumbai Train Bombings are often blamed on communalism. Lesser incidents plague many towns and villages; representative was the killing of five people in Mau, Uttar Pradesh during Hindu-Muslim rioting, which was triggered by the proposed celebration of a Hindu festival.^[121]

See also

- Demographics of India
- Hinduism in India
- Irreligion in India
- Dalit Buddhist Movement
- Navayana Buddhism
- Donyi-Polo
- Hindu festivals
- Islam in India
- Sikhism in India
- Jainism in India
- Parsis
- Ayyavazhi and Hinduism
- History of Buddhism in India
- Christianity in India
- Religion in Kerala

Notes

Footnotes

- [^] **α**: The data exclude the Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul subdivisions of Manipur's Senapati district
- [^] **β**: The data are "unadjusted" (without excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir); the 1981 census was not conducted in Assam and the 1991 census was not conducted in Jammu and Kashmir
- [^] **γ**: Oberlies (1998, p. 155) gives an estimate of 1100 BCE for the youngest hymns in book ten. Estimates for a *terminus post quem* of the earliest hymns are far more uncertain. Oberlies (p. 158), based on "cumulative evidence", sets a wide range of 1700–1100 BCE. The ETEC (s.v. Indo-Iranian languages p. 306) gives a range of 1500–1000 BCE. It is certain that the hymns post-date Indo-Iranian separation of ca. 2000 BCE. It cannot be ruled out that archaic elements of the Rigveda go back to only a few generations after this time, but philological estimates tend to date the bulk of the text to the latter half of the second millennium.
- [^] **Δ**: According to the most conservative estimates given by Symonds (1950, p. 74), half a million people perished and twelve million became homeless.
- [^] **ε**: Statistic describes resident Indian nationals up to six years in age.

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