



*Religion in
Ancient India*

Hinduism



Origins of Hinduism

- **Aryans**

- “Noble Ones”; Indo-Iranian people who conquered India
- migrated from Central Asia using chariots

- **Raja**

- king; ruler of Aryan village
- **maharaja** = “great king” or emperor



Origins of Hinduism

• Sanskrit संस्कृता वाक्

– writing system of the Aryans

– religious texts, known as “Vedas”, were written in Sanskrit

– still used for Hindu and some Buddhist worship services

Vowels

अ a आ ā इ i ई ī उ u ऊ ū ऋ ṛ ॠ ṛī
लृ ḷ ए e ऐ ai ओ o औ au
ṁ (anusvāra) ḥ (visarga)

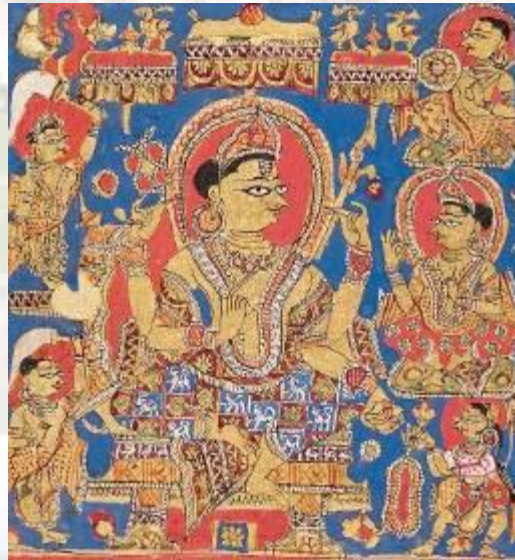
Consonants

Gutturals:	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa
Palatals:	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña
Cerebrals:	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa
Dentals:	त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na
Labials:	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma
Semivowels:	य ya	र ra	ल la	व va	
Sibilants:	श śa	ष ṣa	स sa		
Aspirate:	ह ha				s = ' (avagraha) - the apostrophe

Important Writings

- **Vedas**

- वेद "knowledge" in Sanskrit
- most famous and most important Sanskrit text
- Rig Veda → contains the "Hymn to Indra"



Important Writings

- Upanishads



- Ramayana



- Mahabharata

– including the **Bhagavad-Gita**



Social Classes

- **Varnas**
 - social divisions (classes)
- **Caste System**
 - class system based on birth, wealth, and occupation



"Varnas" (Social Classes)

- **Brahmins**

- priests and teachers



- **Kshatriyas**

- rulers and warriors;
"rajas"



"Varnas" (Social Classes)

- **Vaisyas**

- farmers,
craftspeople,
traders (merchants)



- **Sudras**

- laborers and
non-Aryans



"Varnas" (Social Classes)

- **Untouchables**

- people without "varna";
outside the castes;
"outcasts"
- often diseased
 - leprosy



Social Classes



- **Brahmins**
 - priests / teachers
- **Kshatriyas**
 - rulers / warriors
- **Vaisyas**
 - skilled workers
- **Sudras**
 - unskilled workers
- **Untouchables**
 - outcasts

Gods of Hinduism

- **Thousands of gods (*devas*) or one god with many forms?**
 - different versions of Hinduism have different views of the gods
 - many gods are considered to be incarnations (“avatars” or forms) of just one god or just a few gods
 - some Hindus think of themselves as monotheistic (having one god with many forms)



10 forms of Vishnu

Gods of Hinduism

- Hindu “Trinity” (Trimurti)

– three main gods

- Brahma
- Vishnu
- Siva (Shiva)



Gods of Hinduism



- **Brahma**
 - the Creator
 - a “universal spirit”
 - many Hindus believe that all of their gods are part of Brahma, the universal spirit
 - monotheistic?
polytheistic?

Gods of Hinduism

- **Vishnu**

- the Preserver
- preserves creation
- preserves **dharma**
 - eternal order, righteousness, religion, law and duty



Gods of Hinduism

- **Siva (Shiva)**
 - the Destroyer
 - destroys the “old” so that the “new” can form
 - ex. the form of a butterfly is not possible without destroying the form of a caterpillar



Transmigration of the Soul

- Karma

- sum of good deeds + bad deeds
→ determines how you will live your next life

- through pure acts, thoughts, and devotion, one can be reborn at a higher level

- through evil acts, crime, etc. one can be reborn at a lower level



Transmigration of the Soul

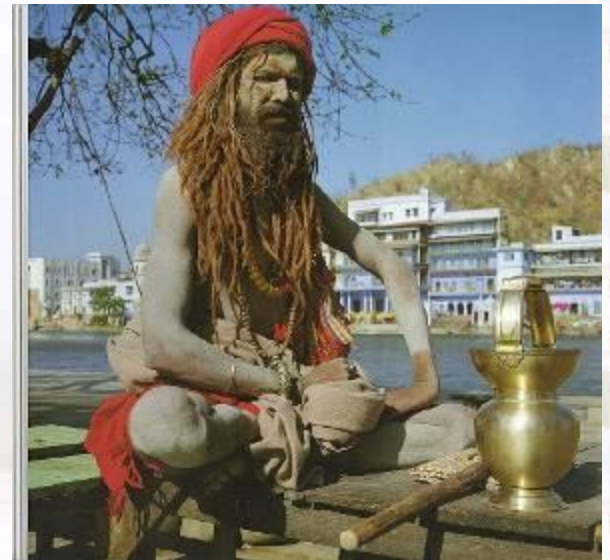
- **Supreme goal of mankind**
 - is to, by practicing **dharma**, achieve **enlightenment** which leads to **moksha**.
 - **Moksha** मोक्ष "release" or liberation from *samsara*
 - **break cycle of reincarnation**



Meditation

- **Meditation**

- eliminate outside distractions, achieve peace, focus – “Om”



- **Yoga**

- the most common form of meditation



Jainism

- **Jainism**

- based on the teachings of Mahavira; wealthy man, yet unhappy with Hinduism

- teachings

- injure no life
- tell the truth
- do not steal
- own no property

- **Ahimsa**

- non-violence

- avoidance of violent actions



Jainism

- **Swastika**

- 卐 or 卐 ; derived from Sanskrit, meaning “well-being”

- used by Nazi’s

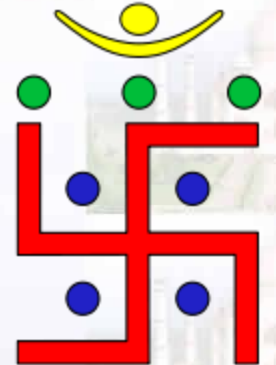
- Adolf Hitler picked the swastika as the Nazi symbol because it was used by the Aryans

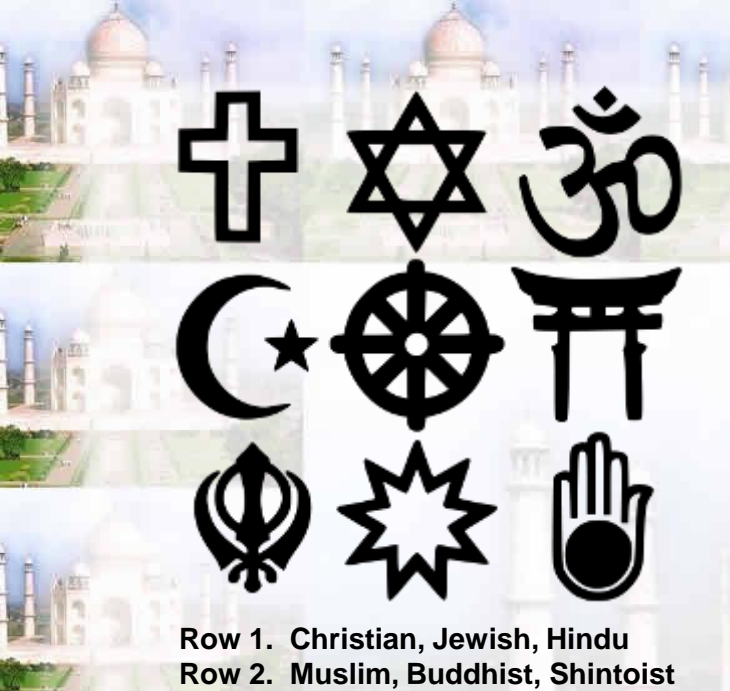
- Hitler considered the “Aryan race” to be superior

- blonde hair, blue eyes, white skin

- ironic choice of symbols

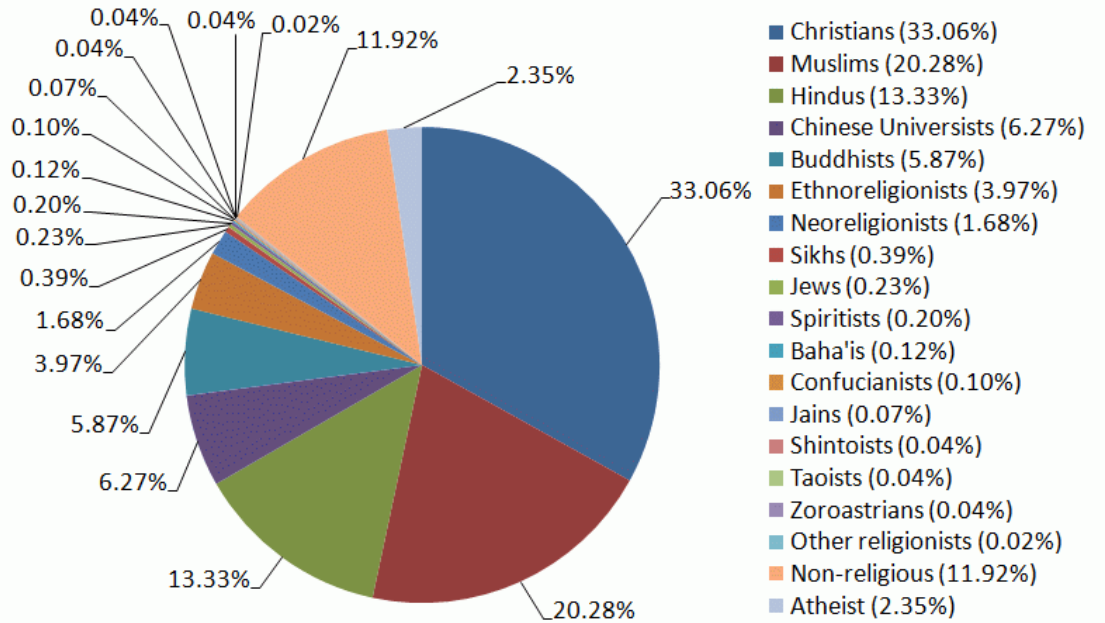
- Nazi’s used genocide against the Jews, yet the symbol represents “well-being” and is used by the Jains, who practice non-violence



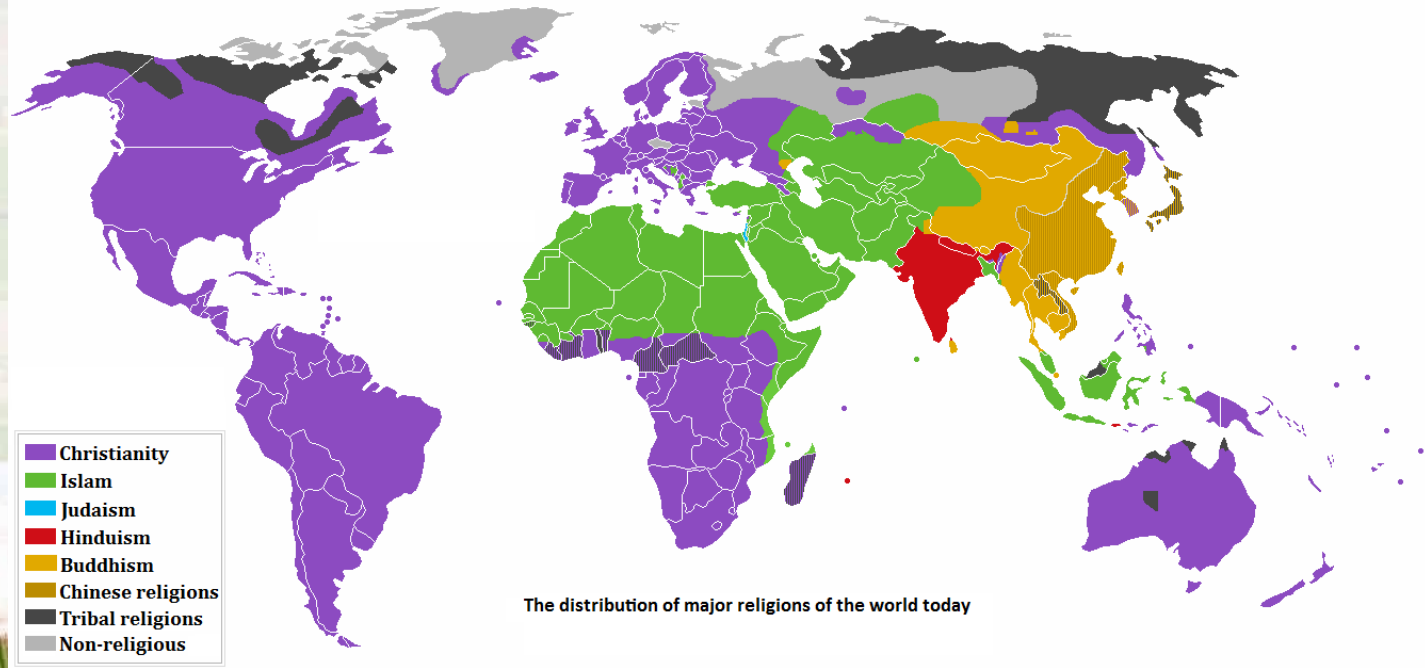


Row 1. Christian, Jewish, Hindu
 Row 2. Muslim, Buddhist, Shintoist
 Row 3. Sikh, Baha'i, Jain

Worldwide percentage of Adherents by Religion (mid 2005)



The Religions of the World



The distribution of major religions of the world today

Hindu Story of Creation

- http://www.ancientindia.co.uk/hinduism/story/sto_set.html