

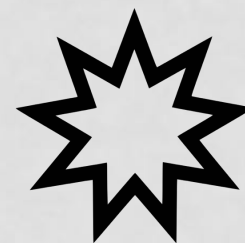
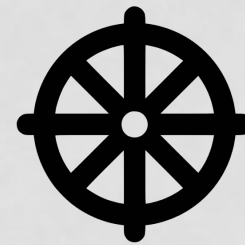


WEEK 7 – HINDU ETHICS

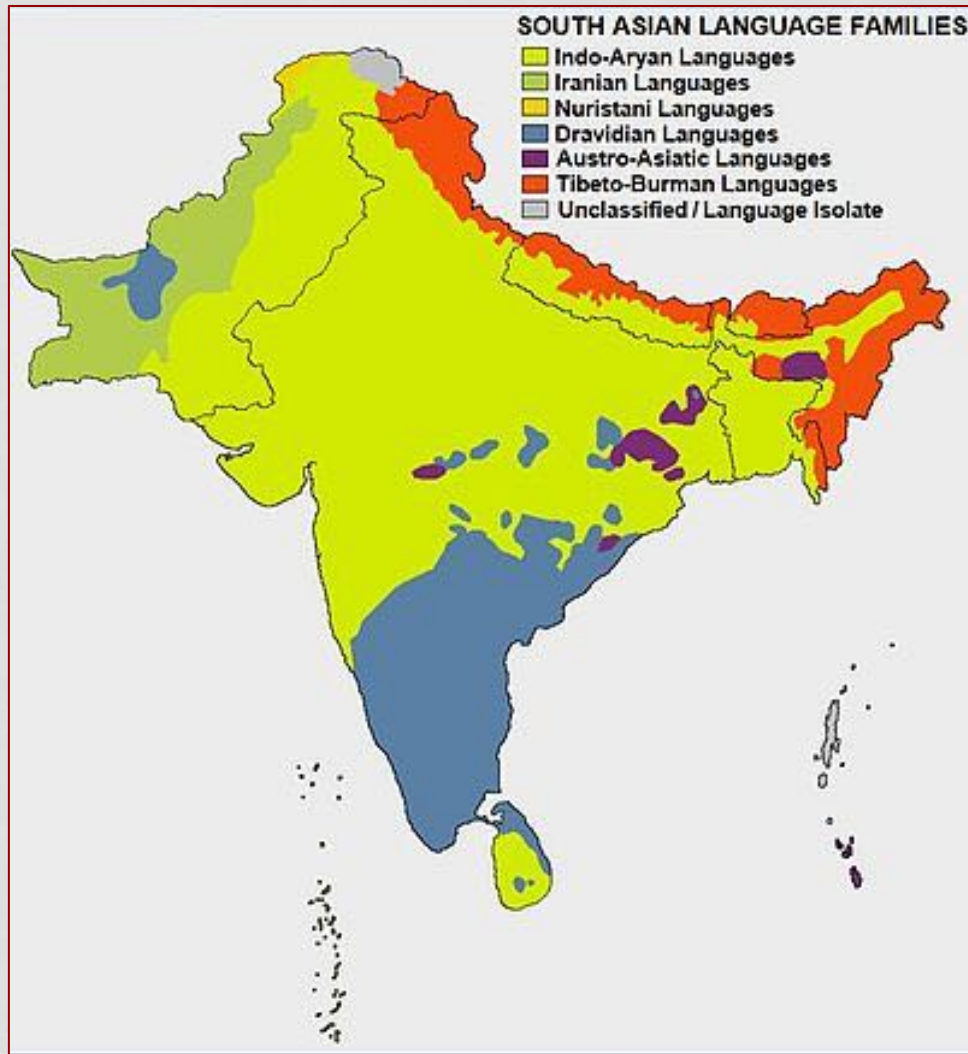
HINDUISM & GANDHI

RELIGION(S) IN INDIA

- India is the 2nd most populated country in the world with over 1.37 billion people, making it roughly 18% of the total world population
- **Birthplace of 4 major religions**
 - Hinduism
 - Buddhism
 - Jainism
 - Sikhism
- Home to a number of other religions such as **Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Baha'i and Tribal**



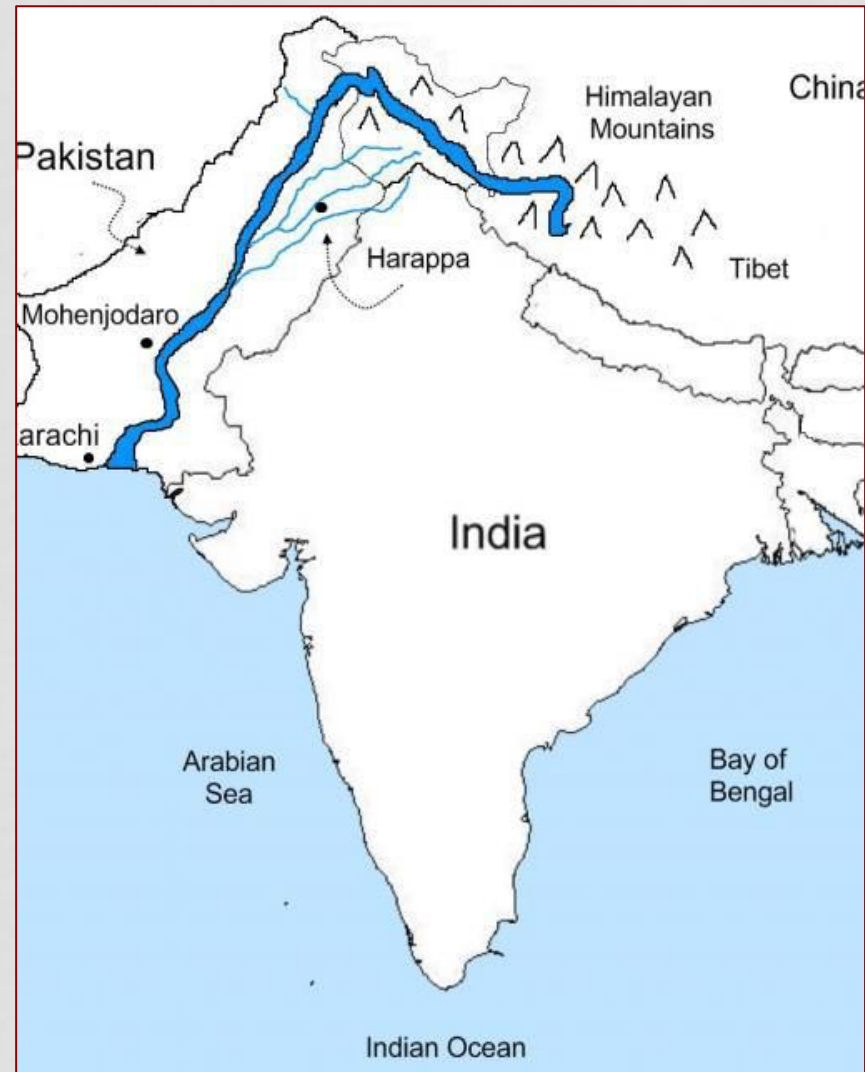
LANGUAGES OF SOUTH ASIA



- **Home to 7 different language families**
 - Indo-European 74%
 - Dravidian 24%
 - Austro-Asiatic 1.2%
 - Tibeto-Burman (.6%)
- **Over 700 living and distinct languages, with 29 languages having over 1 million speakers**
- **22 Official state languages**
 - “Union Gov’t” - Hindi & English
- **6 “Classical” Languages:** Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam & Oriya

“HINDU”-ISM

- **“Hindu”**: first used in ancient times by Persians as a **geographical term for people who lived beyond the Indus River** (Sanskrit: *sindhu*).
- Used indiscriminately as a religious designation later by the British in the late 18th century **to designate anyone non-Muslim/Buddhist/Jain/Sikh/Christian etc.**
- **Term inherently problematic** since it encompasses a huge range of religious beliefs, practices, and traditions (e.g. Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, etc.) in a single term



TYPOLOGIES AND ORIENTATIONS – DYNAMICS OF HINDUISM



- **Brahmanic vs. Renunciant orientations (e.g. Early Vedic vs. Yoga/asceticism)**
- **Margas: “Paths”**
 - **Karma marga: path of action (karma)** - exemplified by Vedic/Brahmanical ritualists
 - **Jñāna marga: path of knowledge** - exemplified by Upanishads and renunciant traditions of the Buddhists, Jains, and Shaivas)
 - **Bhakti Marga: path of devotion** – exemplified by numerous devotional cults to various gods/goddesses
- **Primary religions today in India**
 - **Vaishnavism** – worship of Lord Vishnu including cults of Rama/Krishna and their consorts – more Vedic oriented
 - **Shaivism** – worship of Lord Shiva – more ascetic/folk/Tantric in orientation
 - **Shaktism** – Goddess cults - folk/Tantric
 - **Vedanta** – philosophical/Upanisadic
 - **Guru-oriented Cults** – very diverse

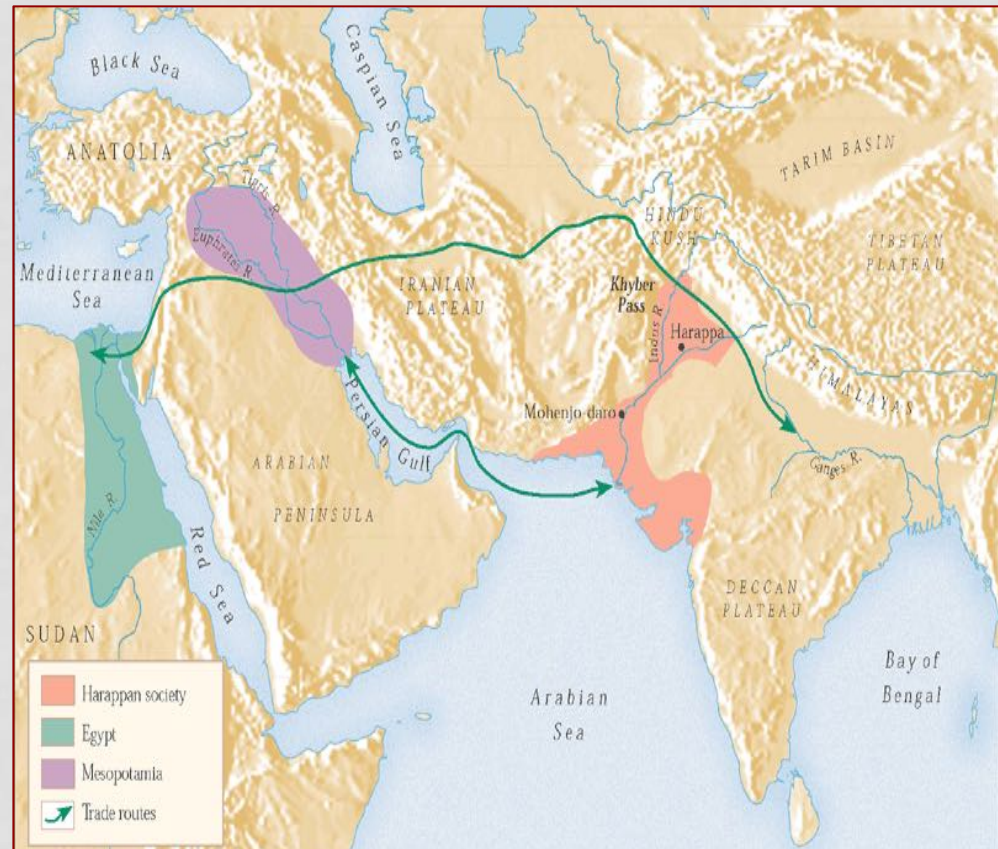
“HINDU”-ISM



- Because there is such a wide variety of traditions under the term “Hinduism” there is:
 - No single historical founder
 - No unified system of belief or scripture
 - No single **soteriology (doctrine of salvation/final aim)**
 - No centralized authority (e.g. church/pope) and bureaucratic structure
- **The formation of “Hinduism” as a world religion occurred in the 19th century**, the term first being used by Western orientalists and later by “Hindu” reformers and nationalists during the fight for Independence from British colonization

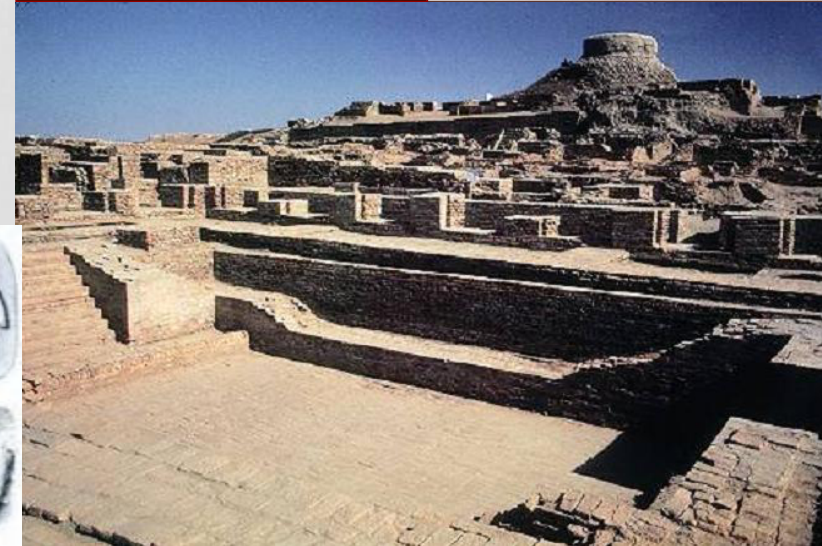
INDUS VALLEY/HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION (3300–1300 BCE)

- Roots of Hinduism go back to the **Indus Valley civilization** which begin in 7000 BCE, reached its zenith in 2500 BCE and disbanded towards the Gangetic Valley around 1500 BCE
 - Primary reason believed to be the rivers drying up from **natural/human causes**
- Excavations began in 1921 first with **Harappa** and soon after **Mohenjo-Daro**, the two most important cities of the Indus
 - Over 1200 sites were eventually discovered, covering an area of almost 800,000 square miles
- Along with Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China it was **one of the four earliest civilizations of the Old World**. Of the four it was the most widespread. All were actively trading with each other since early times.



INDUS VALLEY/HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

- Highly developed, carefully planned urban cultures with sophisticated water & irrigation technologies, drainage, plumbing, religious centers, brick houses - in general a **high standard of living for the time**.
 - For now, we can only infer what Indus valley religion was like from the archeological record – however there are many iconographic **continuities between the religions of the Indus valley civilization and later India**
- **Writing** was found here also, though it has yet to be deciphered



INDO-ARYAN

- After the decline of the Indus Valley, there were many **waves of migrations** over a period of **Indo-European** speaking groups known as the **Aryans**
- The “**Vedic culture**” which emerged out of this contact was an amalgamation of these migrants and the indigenous groups who incorporated each others' beliefs and practices
 - Eventually **Sanskrit**, the primary Indo-European language of the early Vedas, **became the dominant literary language in the North**
 - In the South, **Dravidian** languages such as Tamil continue to dominate
- Was discovered in the 19th century that Sanskrit was linguistically related to English

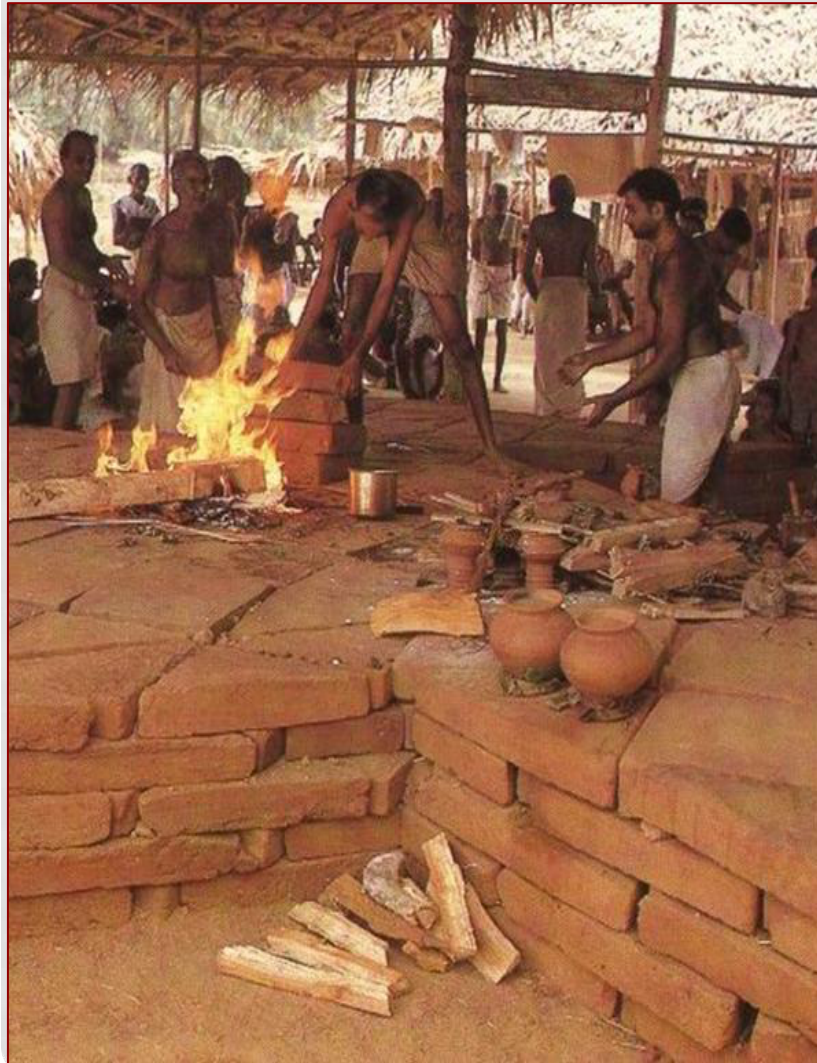


INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

English	Latin	Greek	Iranian	Sanskrit
mother	māter	mētēr	mātar	mātr̥
three	trēs	treīs	trayō	trayaḥ
murder	morior	mrotós	merə	mṛta
star	stēlla	astér	stārəm	str̥
is	est	estí	asti	asti

- There are thousand of cognate words - linguists believe there was a **proto Indo-European language** which was common to all these varied languages.
 - It was this discovery which was the basis of the Nazi meta-narrative as the original Aryans, and their adoption of the Hindu symbol of the swastika (a Sanskrit term).

VEDIC PERIOD (1500-500 BCE)



- What we know about early Vedic civilization comes from the sacred **Vedas** (“divine knowledge”) the oldest being the **Rig Veda** (1500-1200 BCE)
- These hymns were preserved and passed down orally for thousands of years by lineages of **Brahmins**, the priestly class, before being eventually put in to writing
- Central religious practice: **sacrifice and ritual**
 - For worldly ends (fertility/rain/etc.) and to maintain the **cosmic order (Rta) through Dharma** – “the order of ritual and duty which conforms humans to the sacred order of things”
 - “The right way was the rite way” i.e. morality = correct ritual/ethical actions

VEDIC RITUAL

According to the **Purusha Sukta** ("Hymn of the Cosmic Man") of the Rig Veda **all sacrifice is a recreation of the primordial sacrifice** of the Purusha at the time of creation - replicates and harnesses these same creative forces

- From this primordial sacrifice arose:
- **1. The Cosmic Order:** e.g. Eye = Sun; Breath = Wind; Moon = Mind
- **2. The Divine Order** - the various gods
- **3. The Social Order** - idealized order where everyone has a specific role/function/duty in society (later foundation for caste system)
 - **brahmins** (priests) - Head/mouth
 - **kshatriyas** (warriors/kings) - Shoulders/arms
 - **vaishyas** (merchants/farmers/artisans) - Legs
 - **shudras** (servants, janitors, barbers, etc.) - Feet
- **4. The Ritual Order** – through ritual one could access, engage, and maintain all these orders
- The myth also affirmed that the **entire universe came from a single source** - by following your dharma (moral duties) one helped to achieve harmony with the natural order of the cosmos



THE UPANISHADS: 900 BCE – 200 CE



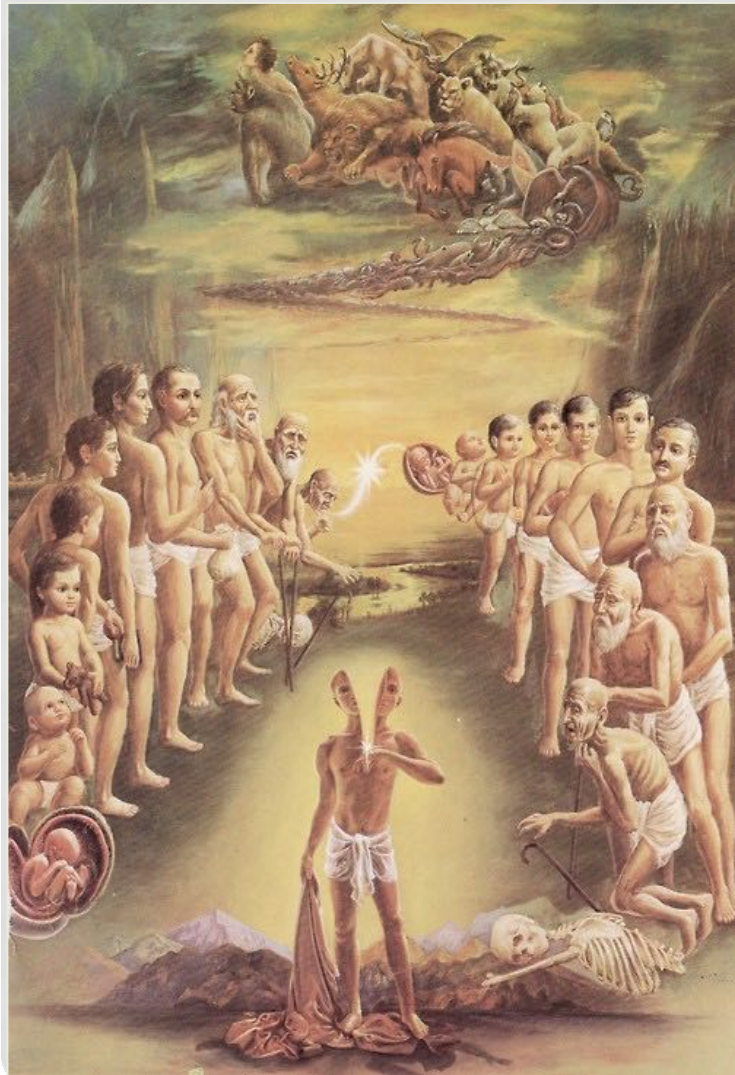
- Ritualism of the Vedas become more institutionalized over the centuries and in the control of the elite **Brahmin** class
 - **Very expensive, too elaborate and required knowledge of Sanskrit**
- **The Upanishad** literature arose as a response to this – itinerant **sadhus** (wandering ascetics) and **sannyasis** (renunciants) renounced the world began living in the forests, asking deeper questions regarding the nature of ultimate reality
 - **Focus became on the higher unity behind all the diversity** (as first seen in the Purusha Shukta)
- Represented a challenge to the priestly sacrificial tradition since it **emphasized direct and personal religious experience over ritual**
- From these groups **Jainism and Buddhism** also arose (collectively known as **Shramanas**, distinguishing that **they did not follow the authority of the Vedas**)

THE UPANISADS

- Shift from **ritual action (karma)** to a focus on **knowledge/gnosis (jñana)**
 - **Emphasized the internal world while rejecting the external world** as *Maya*, “the world of illusion”
 - **Internalization of Vedic sacrificial rituals** – true sacrifice involved ethical action and liberating knowledge – e.g. renunciation, celibacy, vegetarianism, and especially **meditation and yoga**
- **Posited 2 States of Reality**
 - **Samsara**: the endless cycle of birth and death, the ever-changing field of relative existence (**relative reality**)
 - **Moksha**: state of liberation from *samsara* in which one becomes established in the non-changing absolute (**absolute reality**)



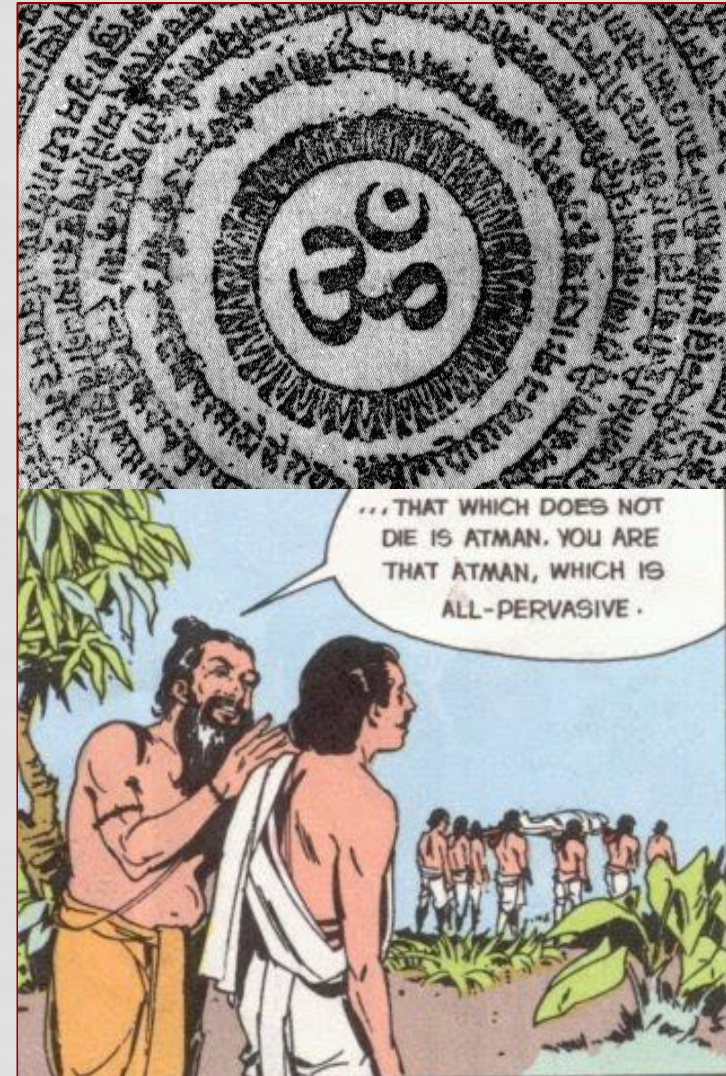
KARMA



- **Moksha** (liberation) is importantly also from **karma**, the storehouse of actions that accrue like a substance to the individual self/ego (**jiva**) which is born out of our desire, life after life
 - **Reincarnation:** “the self changes from body to body like one changes clothes”
 - One wanders in the “great chain of being” (**samsara**) according to his/her own actions (**karma**)
 - Where you are today is based upon past actions, where you go in the future is based on present actions
 - **Thus meritorious action leads to merit and happiness, while evil action leads to sin and suffering**
- **Through ascetic practice/ethical actions one can “burn” this karma** – which leads to liberating knowledge of one’s true Self
 - **Minimize karma (actions) + knowledge = liberation**

BRAHMAN AND ATMAN

- **Brahman** (the Self of the Cosmos) and **Atman** (the true Self of individuals, beyond ego) become the **most common designations for this absolute or ultimate reality**
- **Moksha** is realizing your true identity as **atman** and that one's *atman* is the same as **Brahman**
 - **Tat Tvam Asi – “Thou art That”**
 - Understood as our divine essence or source, which underlies all of existence and identified with the sound **Om**
- Thus all people are connected not only to all others (**atman**) but ultimately with the essence of the cosmos itself (**brahman**)



THE EPIC PERIOD: THE MAHABHARATA: “THE GREAT TALE OF THE BHARATA DYNASTY”



- Some parts of epic go as far back 8th and 9th centuries BCE, though its **main period of production is from 400 BCE to 400 CE.**
- **Longest poem ever written** - over 100,000 *shlokas* (over 200,000 individual verse lines)
- The most important chapter of the Mahabharata is **The Bhagavad Gita**, considered it's “crown jewel” and the most well-known Hindu scripture around the world

THE BHAGAVAD GITA: “THE SONG OF GOD”

Dialogue between prince Arjuna and his guide/charioteer **Lord Krishna** aka the Supreme God and avatara (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu

- **Ethical dilemma** – moral duty as a warrior to fight vs. morality of killing his evil family who make up the opposing army
 - Krishna ultimately **persuades Arjuna to fulfill his warrior duty and fight in the war**
- Krishna shows him not only his cosmic form, but more importantly, justifies this action by **synthesizing various religious teachings of the time into a new teaching (Karma X Bhakti Yoga)**
 1. **Raja yoga** – “meditation”
 2. **Jñāna yoga** – “knowledge” of Ultimate reality (atman = brahman)
 3. **Karma yoga** - duty/discipline/desire-less action
 - In contrast to the non-action of renunciants and sacrificial tradition of Vedas, Krishna says true sacrifice is giving up the fruits/results of your actions and acting selflessly
 4. **Bhakti yoga** - intense devotion to a personal god
 - In contrast to intellectualism or ritual – God could not be met through books or rites, but only directly and through emotionally intense devotion and love
 - **All actions should be an offering to God**



MAHATMA GANDHI

- **Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948):** born in Gujarat and studied law in London. While there, he **rediscovered the *Bhagavad Gita*** via the Theosophists and subsequently his Hindu identity, which deeply altered his life's path.
- He **went to South Africa for two decades** where he became active in helping Indians and Africans resist the racist laws of the apartheid administration
- After his **return to India in 1915**, he set about organizing farmers and urban laborers to protest against the British occupation and eventually **lead the Indian Independence movement**.
- Gandhi advocated "**Svaraj**" (self-rule) through village-based economics and began a large scale noncooperation movement ("**Quit India**")
 - Urged the use of Indian resources while boycotting British goods, taxes, education and gov't institutions



GANDHI'S RELIGIOUS ETHIC

- Adopted and advocated a simple lifestyle and a **religious orientation influenced by Jain, Buddhist, and Christian** (as interpreted by Leo Tolstoy) views on non-violence (**ahimsa**), **Hinduism** (especially the *Gita*), and **Islam**'s emphasis on "the brotherhood of all men" and rejection of caste/class and discipline



His religious ethic revolved around:

1. Brahmacharya - self-sacrifice, moral discipline, celibacy, fasting, poverty etc. in an effort to transcend the egoic/individual self and cultivate compassion for the other

2. Satyagraha - "insistence on Truth" (*satya* "truth" and *agraha* "holding firmly to"), or "**soul force**" or "truth force"

- Truth was the very nature of the universe (*satya* = *brahman*), and all people shared a common essence

3. Ahimsa – non-violence (adopted from Jainism)

GANDHI & THE GITA

- **Had his own interpretation of the Gita** – which he saw as a symbolic rather than literal text
 - **The battle between good and evil was an internal one** – a battle against selfish desires and passions
 - Argued that the central tenant of the Gita was that all **humans share the same essence (atman)**: therefore enacting violence on another = enacting violence on one's Self.
 - He agreed **war was justified at times** – but rather than violence as the primary means, war should be fought with **non-violent civil disobedience and satyagraha**



The Gita does not decide for us. But if, whenever faced with a moral problem, you give up attachment to the ego and then decide what you should do, you will come to no harm. This is the substance of the argument which Shri Krishna has expanded into the Gita.

— Gandhi

SATYAGRAHA



- Besides violence, he believed rational discussion was also an inadequate method – **satyagraha** aimed instead to penetrate the barriers of prejudice and selfishness in order to reach out to and **activate the soul/heart of the opponent**
 - All humans, however degenerate or dogmatic, he said, had a soul grounded in Truth - therefore **everyone has the capacity for empathy and acknowledging their common humanity.**
 - “The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. **Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.**”