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MAJOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

India is a land of several religious communities. As hordes of people came to India in search of fertile lands, better resources and opportunities, and to escape from cruel regimes, they also brought with them their cultures, a component of which is religion. Broadly speaking, Indian religions may be divided into two categories: first, those which are of local origin, and second, those which were introduced from other parts of the world. Under the first category, we may place Hinduism, and those religious movements that emerged on the Indian soil and later became independent religions, such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Placed under the second category are Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In India, none of them could remain isolated. Rather, continuous interactions took place (and are taking place even now) between the local religious communities and those which came from outside. From these interactions there came up composite culture of India.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the characteristics of different religions in India; and
- discuss the nature of interaction between different religious communities.

28.1 MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS

We shall study the characteristics of each of the religions found in India in a time sequence, i.e., beginning with the oldest religion and moving to those that are relatively younger.

28.1.1 Hinduism

About eighty-three per cent of India's population is Hindu. Besides India, Hindus are found in other countries of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean Islands, Fiji, and the United Kingdom.

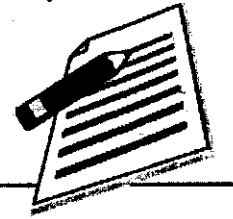
Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions of the world. Its roots can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization, around 3000 B.C. Archaeologists point out that the worship of Shiva and the mother goddess (*shakti*) came into existence in the pre-Aryan period (3000-2000 B.C.). Having such a long history, it is obvious that Hinduism has developed over a period of time and is bound to show a far greater diversity in its thoughts and practices than any other religion.

The doctrines of Hinduism are not contained in any one sacred book. Hinduism does not have a single historical founder. Hindus worship innumerable gods and goddesses. But at the same time, they also have the concept of one God, from whom everything emerges and in whom everything dissolves. At one end, if Hinduism is polytheistic (i.e., consists of many gods and goddesses), at the other, it is monotheistic (i.e., has the concept of one God). It is interesting that one need not believe in the existence of god in order to be a Hindu. Contradictory beliefs are contained in Hinduism. There are no particular beliefs or practices that are common to all Hindus. Hinduism comprises a vast body of sacred literature such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmashastra, Puranas, Darsanas, Agamas and Tantras, etc. These texts deal with the philosophical issues; some of them deal with the performance of rituals in temples and households. As is true of the philosophical matters, in rituals also, there is a great deal of variation.

Hinduism is intimately connected with Hindu society with the result that it is difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. Because of this, some authors say that **Hinduism may be understood as a way of life.** The social basis of Hinduism is found in caste system, which according to Rig Veda has a divine origin. The four social categories, called *varna*, emerged from the body of the *purusa*, the first being who was sacrificed in a ritual. Social categories that at one time were regarded as untouchable were not part of this scheme. This model of caste with four *varnas* is known as the *chaturvarna* system.



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However, in reality, there are not four but innumerable castes that are endogamous, i.e., marry within. They are known as *jatis*. Each of them has a monopoly over an occupation and claims to fall in one or the other *varna*. When Hindu sacred and legal texts speak of caste, it is mostly *varna* that they have in view and very rarely *jati*. The concepts of purity and pollution are central to Hinduism, and thus caste system, although the strictness with which they are observed differs from one caste society to another.

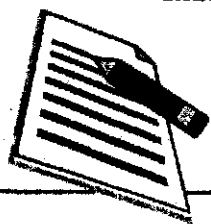
Certain concepts central to Hinduism are *dharma*, *karma*, and *moksa*. The word *dharma* means 'duty', and each individual is advised to live according to the duty laid down for one's caste, sex, and age. The net balance of good and bad deeds in previous births is called *karma*. It determines whether one will be born a human or animal, or will be released forever from the cycle of birth and death. The permanent release from the world is called *moksa* (meaning 'salvation'), which should be the aim of every Hindu. But one should think of one's salvation after having accomplished one's household duties as successfully as possible.

In the course of its history, Hinduism has undergone many changes. Certain Hindu institutions, such as untouchability, *sati* (i.e., a woman following her husband to death), human sacrifice, female infanticide (i.e., killing of female children), were severely criticized by the British. One of the great reformers of the nineteenth century was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who founded a religious society called Brahmo Samaj in 1828. He said a return to Vedic Hinduism would provide an end to many unjust practices that had developed in Hinduism. Dayananda Saraswati, who founded Arya Samaj in 1875, also worked for a revival of Vedic Hinduism. Other changes have come in Hinduism because of secularization, the ideology of equality, and rationality.

28.1.2 Zoroastrianism

With a history of almost three thousand years, Zoroastrianism is one of the most ancient living religions. It is the most important and best known religion of ancient, or pre-Islamic, Iran. The roots of Zoroastrianism can be located in an Eastern Iranian, tribal, and basically pastoral society. The religion originated around 1000 B.C. and developed further under the first Iranian empire.

Zoroastrianism takes its name from that of its founder, Zarathushtra (or Zoroaster), who probably lived around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. The story narrated about his birth in the Zoroastrian texts is that when the world had fallen into the hands of evil people, Mother Earth appeared before the Almighty in the shape of a cow. She requested the Lord to save her from the evil that had spread. Then, the Lord said he would send down a hero named Zarathushtra who would rescue her. Soon after, the story goes, in the city of Rae, in Iran, a son was born to



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Prince Pourushaspa. He was named Spitama, who later became Zarathushtra. Because the Prince suspected that tyrant chiefs might kill the child, he sent him to his mother's father's house, where he grew up. Spitama began to preach at the age of fifteen, and his preaching constitutes the central body of Zoroastrianism.

Another name for Zoroastrianism is Mazdaism. It is derived from the name of Mazda ('Wise') or Ahura Mazda ('Wise God'), who is regarded in Zoroastrianism as the Creator of the whole universe. Zoroastrians believe that there is but one God. They say: 'Everything emanates from Ahura Mazda and merges back to Him at the end.' Ahura Mazda is formless. The characteristics of the Lord and the teachings of Zarathushtra are contained in texts called *gathas*.

The earth has a significant place in Zoroastrianism. She is regarded as the mother who sustains all human beings. During life, the Zoroastrian is in her charge, and after death, he returns to her. Fire (*atar*) is an outward symbol of Zoroastrians. Zarathushtra taught the Iranians to worship fire as the purest and holiest of God's creation. This is the reason why Zoroastrians do not burn their dead, because contact with the dead and decaying body would pollute the holy fire. For the same reason, they neither bury the corpse nor throw it in water. So, they build walled-in platforms of masonry, open to the sky. Known as the Towers of Silence (*dakhmas*), it is in here that the corpse is exposed, which the birds eat away. The bones crumble by the action of sun, rain and wind. The bone-dust is deposited into the large pit in the center of the tower, where all, people of different classes, at last mingle together in the bosom of Mother Earth.

The followers of Zoroastrianism, called Parsis, came to India about the eighth century A.D. They constitute a small community in India, having a population of around one lakh individuals, settled mostly in the western part. Some of their families have attained great industrial success, like that of the Tatas. Most aspects of the Parsi culture, apart from their religious rites, are like that of the other trading communities of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Parsis have been the leaders of India's modernization. Other modernizing groups in their region and elsewhere in the country emulate their example.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 28.1

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What is the approximate population of Hindus in India?
- 2 Where are the Hindus found in the world?
- 3 To which civilization can the roots of Hinduism be traced?

- 4 Name the religion of pre-Islamic Iran.
- 5 Where are the followers of Zoroastrianism found in India?

28.1.3 Buddhism

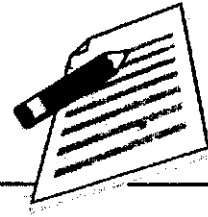
Buddhism acquired a dominant position in India under the rule of Emperor Ashoka (273-236 B.C.). As a consequence of the missionary propaganda, Buddhism spread all over India. Ashoka sent his son and daughter to propagate the teachings of Buddha in different parts of India. Buddhism also embraced several communities outside India, thus becoming a world religion. By the twelfth century A.D., Buddhism was on its way out from India. In northern India, Harshavardhana and the Pala emperors provided a lot of patronage to Buddhism. But the other royal families were staunch adherents of the Brahmanical sects.

At one time, it was believed that once Buddhism had adopted the Tantric practices, it started degenerating. Today, this explanation is not held. The other reason given was that Buddhist communities were peace loving and defenseless. The monasteries were the strongholds of Buddhism. The hordes of Muslim warriors that invaded India destroyed the monasteries, leading to a crumbling of Buddhism. Another explanation is that Hinduism offered a colossal challenge to Buddhism. Many of the Buddhist ideas and practices were absorbed into Hinduism. Not only that Hinduism adopted Buddhist practices and ideology, Buddhism also adopted certain Hindu practices, thus began the process of the Hinduization of Buddhism.

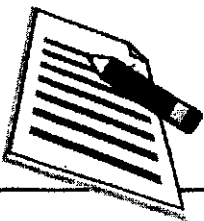
Besides these, there were some internal causes that led to its decline. Buddhism was dependent upon monasteries that did not have broad popular support but relied exclusively on royal patronage. So, when royal support declined, there was a subsequent decline of monasteries. Further, Buddhist monks were more interested in their own salvation, rather than converting people to their faith.

Today, Himalayan Buddhism of direct Indian ancestry remains only in Nepal, where it is fused with Hinduism. Its priests are called Vajracharya, who are Tantric priests, and they are married persons. Because of this, this kind of Buddhism is also known as Vajracharya Buddhism. Buddhism of Tibetan origin survives in Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, and also Nepal. It also survives with Tibetan refugees in India, whose settlements are in different parts.

Certain focused attempts have also been made to revive Buddhism in the subcontinent. A Sinhalese monk, Anagarika Dharmapada, founded in 1891, a society for the revival of Buddhism. The society was called the Mahabodhi Society, and one of its aims was to work towards Buddhist education. It also took the repair of Bodhgaya Temple.



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Conversion to Buddhism on a mass scale took place after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution of India, embraced Buddhism on 14 October, 1956 in Nagpur (Maharashtra). Along with him, thousands of men of the community called Mahars, the community to which Dr. Ambedkar belonged, were also converted to Buddhism. A community of leather-workers in Agra, called Jatavs, also embraced Buddhism a little later. These Buddhists are often known as Neo-Buddhists (or Nav Buddhists). For some inspired Buddhists, Dr. Ambedkar is 'Bodhisattva Ambedkar'. In contemporary India, Buddhists of all types constitute around 0.8 per cent of the total population.

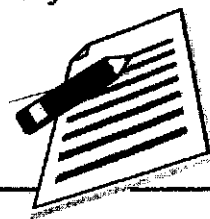
28.1.4 Jainism

The Jains in India are a relatively small section, about one half of one per cent of India's population. They are spread in all parts of India, but their main concentration is in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka. Founded by Vardhamana Mahavira, who lived from 540 to 468 B.C., Jainism has exercised a significant influence on India, and the world's history.

In ancient India, both Buddhism and Brahmanism absorbed the central doctrines of Jainism of 'non-harming' and 'non-violence' (*ahimsa*) and of vegetarianism. As a consequence, both of them became the primary principles of Indian culture. During the medieval period, Jain practices and doctrines also affected the major Hindu sects. In modern India, Jains have played a remarkable role in commercial and political life. Through its indirect effect on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jainism has given the principle of 'non-violence' to the world. Hence, though the followers of Jainism are fewer in number, their impact has been tremendous.

Jains have practiced their faith for more than twenty-five centuries. They have also produced a large scriptural literature. One of the deeds of religious merit for Jain monks is to copy and preserve their manuscripts, and this is one of the reasons of a large number of scriptures that they have. The basic idea of Jainism is that the acts carried out by an individual are important for his salvation. The status one acquires by birth (ascribed status) is unimportant. Jains share a common belief in the concept of 'three jewels' (*triratna*), which are right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. If one follows these 'jewels', then one will be able to attain liberation from the world.

Jains are the members of the four-fold organization (*samgha*), composed of monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen. The monks and nuns observe stricter discipline, but laymen and laywomen try their best to live according to the rules laid down in their scriptures. Jains must abstain from injuring life, making false speech, taking what is not given, leading an impure life, and taking food and drink at night. They also do not eat root vegetables such as potatoes, onions, garlic, or those that have



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a multiplicity of seeds. Although Jains are divided into two main groups, namely Digambara and Svetambara, most of the doctrines are common to them. The basic difference between them is that the Digambara male saints (muri) are 'sky-clad', meaning they remain naked, whereas the Svetambara monks (both men and women) wear white robes. This division of Jains came into existence in 79 A.D.

Jains are divided into numerous castes. Some scholars estimate that there are certainly not less than sixty castes among Jains. Many Jains are tradespersons, but some are in other occupations as well, such as cultivation and service. Jains in South India divide themselves in four groups, headed by those who are temple priests. This priestly caste is like the Brahmin caste among Hindus, with the main exception that even these highest among Jains will inter-dine with all other Jains of their region. Among Hindus, members of different castes do not have inter-dining relations. Jains have also adopted the characteristics of the area where they have chosen to reside. For instance, in Gujarat, some Jain castes have taken up the system of hypergamy (*amuloma*), i.e., taking women from lower castes in marriage rather than giving theirs.

Many reform movements have arisen in the long history of Jainism. They have insisted to revive true Jain traditions and to marry within (i.e., remain endogamous). Jains have long inter-married with counterpart Hindu castes, but these reformers say that inter-marriages be arranged among Jain castes rather than with Hindus. The worship of certain Hindu deities, which has been taken up by some Jain groups, should be abandoned. These movements have been successful in some parts of India.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 28.2

Which of the following statements is true or false? Write T after the statement that is true and F after the statement that is false.

- Harshvardhana and the Pala emperors provided a lot of patronage to Buddhism.
- Some scholars regard Buddhism as peace loving and defenseless.
- Twenty percent population of India is of Buddhists.
- Jains believe in twenty-four *tirthankara*.
- Tibetan refugees in India follow Jainism.



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28.1.5 Christianity

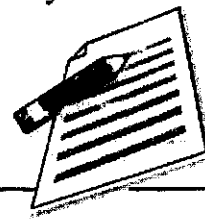
Christianity is a monotheistic faith. Everything in it is related to the acts of mercy accomplished and inspired by Jesus. Christianity is a historical religion. It came out of Judaism. The belief of Christians is that God spoke directly and acted decisively in the life, death, and revival (resurrection) of Jesus, seen as the 'Christ'. Resurrection is a term that Christians use for the event or time when Jesus became alive again three days after his death. Jesus is seen as the chosen one of God. It is with Jesus that the history of Christianity takes its start.

Having a history of more than two thousand years, Christianity has manifested a great variety of expressions in different parts of the world. It continues to be highly heterogeneous, for its adherents are more than a billion people in different countries. In spite of this diversity, some of its principles are commonly held. Christianity believes



that God has told human beings what is good for them. Anyone who comes to God must believe that He exists and He gives rewards to those who search for Him. One of the central beliefs of Christianity is that three things are everlasting: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of all is 'love' for everything that exists in the universe. One should depend upon the Father of Jesus Christ, i.e., God, who is the source of all good in this life and in the life to come.

Christianity is of greater antiquity in India than in any other country in the world except Palestine. It is older in India than in Rome itself. Christianity came to India in two main movements, which are separated by a period of almost one thousand years. The first movement occurred in the early centuries after Christ when Christian travellers, following the trade routes, settled along the coast of Kerala. They converted the local people and established permanent groups of Christians there. The members of the various Churches of the Thomas Christians are convinced that the Apostle Thomas himself founded their church in its original form. There is reliable evidence that churches existed in India from fourth century A.D. These churches maintained their distinctiveness by retaining Syriac as the language of worship and receiving their bishops from Mesopotamia. These Christians are known as Syrian Christians.

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The second movement began in the sixteenth century when Europeans gained political control over trade centers and later, over the entire subcontinent. The Portuguese occupied Goa in 1510. They regarded commerce and conversion as intimately related. Missionaries, who were professionally dedicated to converting local people, carried out the second introduction of Christianity into India.

By the end of the sixteenth century, as a result of the special privileges for Christians, a great majority of population had become Christian, members of the Roman Catholic Church. With the support of the King of Denmark, the Protestants entered the field in 1706. Expansion began in 1858 when the British government took over rule from the East India Company. Today, Christians number about three per cent of India's population.

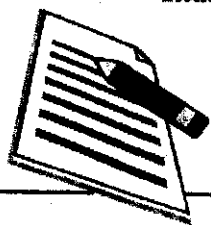
Christian missionaries were generally against the traditional social order, i.e. caste system. However, they were not able to provide feasible alternatives. Converts were made mainly from lower castes, but even after they had embraced Christianity, their social ranking did not change. Higher castes treated them in the same way as they had treated them earlier. Not only were the lower castes converted to Christianity in certain parts, missionary activities were also active in tribal areas, especially of the north-eastern part of India. As a result, qualitative changes have come in the lifestyles of people who had embraced Christianity. The level of education is higher among them. Christian missions also provided legal help to tribals whose land had been forcibly taken away by outsiders. Many tribal languages in the northeastern part found a script in Roman because of the efforts of the missionaries. In other words, Christianity has been a source of long-lasting changes in India.

28.1.6 Judaism

The followers of Judaism are known as Jews. The ancient Indian settlements of Jews are in Cochin and Maharashtra. Both the settlements are small in number having a combined population of not more than twenty thousand individuals.

The Jews of Cochin have firmly maintained their religious identity for at least a millennium. It was around 1020 A.D. that the King of Cochin gave the Jews the right to live and enjoy privileges, such as the right to ride elephants and to go with a state umbrella, etc. Later, the Jews came to be divided into two groups – the White Jews, who were generally lighter in their skin colour and traced their kinship to the original migrants, and the Black Jews, who were dark skinned. There existed no relationship of marriage or eating food together between these two groups.

By comparison to the Jews of Cochin, those in Maharashtra are large in number. Today, these Jews are known as Bene Israel, i.e., the Sons of Israel. They live in



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several Konkani-speaking villages as oil-pressers. Since oil-pressing is not a prestigious occupation, they do not rank high in their villages. As they do not work on Saturdays, they are also known as Saturday Oilmen. They observe Jewish festivals. There is also evidence that they have tried to improve upon their status by purifying their diet and prohibiting the remarriage of widows. Like those in Cochin, these Jews are also divided into White Jews, those who claim pure Jewish ancestry, and Black Jews, who are of mixed origin. The White Jews place themselves above the Black. Some scholars say that these two groups are like the two castes.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 28.3

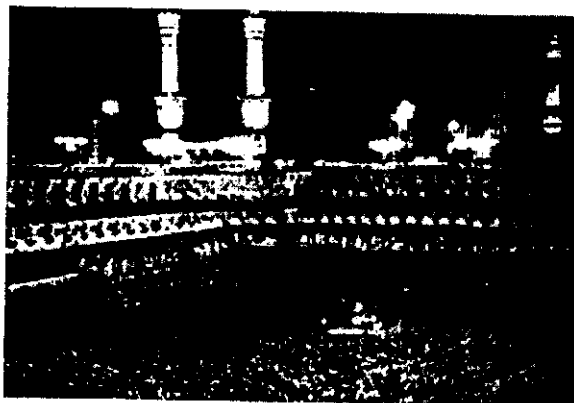
Fill in the blanks.

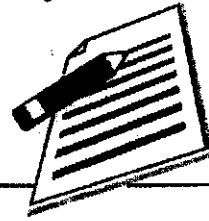
- a. Christianity is a _____ faith.
- b. The followers of Judaism are called _____.
- c. The Jews of Maharashtra are divided into _____ and _____.
- d. _____ is seen as the chosen one of God.
- e. In _____, Portuguese occupied Goa.
- f. Many tribal communities in northeastern part of India have embraced _____.

28.1.7 Islam

In this section, we shall provide an account of the adherents of Islam in India, who number about thirteen per cent of India's population. Besides Indonesia, India has the largest population of Muslims than is the case with any other country.

The root *slm* in Arabic means 'to be in peace, to be an integral whole'. From that comes the word Islam, which means 'to surrender





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to God's law and thus to be an integral whole.' One who so surrenders to God's laws is called Muslim. The followers of Islam believe that God has revealed His message regarding how humankind should live. Through all ages, God has sent His messengers as the guides of human beings. The first Prophet was Adam. He was the first human being as well. The last in the chain of Prophets was Muhammad, the Prophet of the sixth century A.D. Some Prophets received the holy messages from God in the form of scriptures. The last such scripture was the Quran, the revealed book of Muslims.

Throughout the ages, the basic doctrine of Islam has remained the same. It was organized in Arabia in the early seventh century A.D. The three basic concepts of Islam are: the oneness of God (*al-Tawhid*), the concept of Prophethood (*al-Risala*), and the concept of life hereafter (*al-Akhirah*). The idea of Islam is summed up in the idea of 'There is no deity, but God'. It affirms God to be one and only one. God of Quran is transcendent, powerful, and merciful. There are five constituents of the Islamic faith (*iman*), namely belief in God, in angels, in revealed books, in God's messengers, and in the last day, when everything will come to an end. Corresponding to them, a five-fold practical doctrine was formulated. These five aspects constitute the 'pillars' of Islam. They are:

- Bearing witness in public at least once in one's lifetime that 'There is no God but God and Muhammad is His Prophet.' Islam's fundamental ideas are the oneness of God and the finality of the Prophet.
- Praying five times a day (before sunrise, early afternoon, late afternoon, immediately after sunset, and before retiring), while facing the Ka'bah at Mecca.
- Paying welfare tax (*zakat*) for poor.
- Fasting during Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic lunar year) with no eating, drinking, smoking, or sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset.
- Performing the annual pilgrimage to the Ka'bah once in one's adult lifetime provided one can afford the journey and has provision for one's family.

In India, Muslims live both in towns and villages. Some tribal communities also adhere to Islam, such as Gujars. In all social contexts, Muslims are a part of the wider units. In villages, for example, they are regarded and regard themselves as a caste (*jati*). They provide occupational services – of weavers, oilman caste, bangle sellers, waterman caste, etc. – to the other castes. They are a part of the patron-client relations, i.e., *jajmani* system. The fact that there are inter-community relations does not imply that Muslims in villages are not aware of their identity.

Muslims in Indian villages are aware of the distinctiveness of their religion. They

permit cousin marriages. They allow greater inheritance rights to women. Also, their women have stricter rules of seclusion. Often, wherever there is a Muslim settlement, there is a mosque, where all of them, irrespective of their class and occupational differences, assemble to pray. They participate in ceremonies together, such as Id or the Prophet's birthday. Hence, even when there are separate (often endogamous) groups within Muslims, their religion brings them together, to share the same mosque and participate in community festivals. Social differentiation among Muslims has a connotation different from what it has for Hindus.

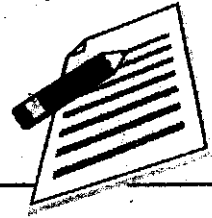
28.1.8 Sikhism

The word Sikh is derived from the Pali word *sikha* and the Sanskrit word *sisya*. Both these words mean 'disciple'. Sikhs are the disciples of ten *gurus* (teachers), beginning with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). A Sikh is one who believes in the ten gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib, a scripture which their fifth guru, Arjun Dev, compiled in 1604. Sikhism was an offshoot of the *bhakti* (devotional) cult of Vaisnava Hinduism. Guru Nanak was the Punjab's chief spokesman of *bhakti* tradition.

Nanak was the son of a revenue official in the village of Talwandi (forty miles from Lahore). He was born in the caste of Khatris, who regarded themselves as Kshatriya. At the age of twenty-nine, he had a mystical experience, as a result of which he pronounced, 'There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim.' He rejected all social distinctions among his followers. He went on various journeys where in each one he spread the message of human equality. People in the villages of Punjab remember him in the following words: 'Guru Nanak, the King of religions, to the Hindus, a guru, to the Muslims, a saint.'

Nanak accepted most of the traditional beliefs of Hinduism, but attacked the practice of untouchability. In his thought, God is the father, lover, master, and the great giver of all gifts. God is formless (*nirankara*) and without quality (*nirguna*). He may be known by different names, such as Rab, Rahim, Govinda, Murari, and Hari. Nanak first called God Aumkara, but later referred to him as Sat Kartar (the 'true creator') or Sat Nam (the 'true name'). In Sikhism, the symbol of God is Om.

In order to create equality at the practical level, Guru Nanak established free community kitchens (*langar*) at which all his believers, irrespective of their caste, ate together. This institution of *langar* is central to Sikhism. Besides this, the institution of guruship is at the core of Nanak's religious system. No one can achieve salvation without the guru, who must be respected and consulted. But the honour given to the guru does not imply that he should be worshipped. Sikhism makes a clear



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distinction between God and guru. The latter is a teacher, not an incarnation of God. Nanak called himself a 'slave and servant of god.' Beginning with him, there is a chain of the nine other gurus, namely Guru Angad (1504-1552), Amar Das (1479-1574), Ram Das (1534-1581), Guru Arjun (1563-1606), Hargobind (1595-1644), Har Rai (1630-1661), Har Kishan (1656-1664), Teg Bahdur (1621-1675), and Gobind Singh. Each one of them made his own distinct contribution to the development of Sikhism.

Nanak strongly disapproved of asceticism and putting one's body to pain as a step towards enlightenment. He propagated the vocation (*asrama*) of the householder (*grahasta*). One should spend one's time in the company of holy men (*sadh sangat*). One should repeat the name (*nam*) of God and participate in devotional song-singing (*kirtan*). Through them, one would succeed in attaining salvation.

Almost two per cent of India's population belongs to Sikhism, mainly concentrated in the Punjab. As the community of Sikhs has been highly enterprising, its members have been able to control business not only in other parts of India but abroad as well. Sikhs maintain matrimonial ties with Hindus, but assert their independent identity. The institutions of community kitchen and guruship sustain it, as we saw earlier. In modern times, Sikhs have also set up political bodies (such as Sri Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Akali Dal) that perform the function of creating a separate identity for them. The studies of Sikh villages point out that they comprise social units, placed in some kind of ranking, which act like castes. The place of worship (*gurudwara*) is open to all Sikhs, irrespective of their social standing, but marriages across them are rarely practiced.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 28.4

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What percentage of India's population follows Islam?

- 2 What is the meaning of the term Islam?

- 3 Are Muslims a part of the *jajmani* system in Indian villages?



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4 What is the meaning of the term Sikh?

5 How many gurus do Sikhs recognize?



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- India is a multi-religious society.
- India is a secular country comprising various religions of the world, which are further divided into several sects and cults. It is not only that there are different world religions represented in India, but also, these religions are divided into several sects and cults.
- Each one of them claims a sizable membership.
- Hinduism contains in its fold hundreds of gods and goddesses, and several dozens of sects and movements.
- Muslims are divided into Shias and Sunnis.
- Digambara and Svetambara are the two groups within Jainism.
- The other religions are also similarly fragmented.
- The local religious movements have begun mainly because of two reasons. Either, they opposed the principle of social organization that Hindus held, namely caste system. Or, they emerged around a religious leader who promised a different path of salvation. The leader did not necessarily attack the caste ideology. We may think of the Osho cult (which Acharya Osho Rajneesh founded) and the cult of transcendental meditation (founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) as examples of the second type.
- By comparison, the indigenous religious movements, which later became distinct religions (like Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism), arose as reactions to caste inequality and the denial of salvation to many groups.
- Religions entering into India (like Christianity and Islam) also attacked caste inequality and they tried to create a society in which all human beings were equal.
- These religions, whether of local or external origin, had to convert the local people for their membership. Many local communities were attracted to them. For instance, Jats were attracted to Sikhism. The members of the merchant

caste (Vaishya) were attracted to Jainism. Lower castes were attracted to Christianity and Islam, the religions in which they saw an alternative to emerge out of caste inequality.

- These religions claimed to provide equality to their members, but the reality was different. The original members avoided any interaction of food and marriage with local converts. The earlier caste relations and practices continued with the converts. So, those who were from upper castes avoided any social intercourse with the converts from lower castes.
- Sufism is an important institution that unites different communities. Both Hindus and Muslims worship Sufi saints. Along with the other saints of the Bhakti movement, they have played a crucial role in creating the composite culture of India.

Notes

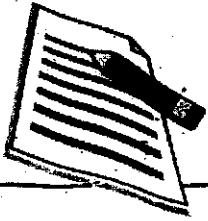
**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

Answer the following questions. in 100-200 words

- 1 Give reasons for the decline of Buddhism.
- 2 What is the central belief of Islam? Give an account of the five 'pillars' of Islam.
- 3 What is the central belief of Jainism?
- 4 Name the sects in which the Jains are divided.
- 5 What are the properties of God according to Sikhs? Describe the idea of the 'community kitchen'?

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

- 28.1
- 1) eighty three per cent
 - 2) Asia, Africa, the Caribbean Islands, Fiji and United Kingdom
 - 3) Indus valley civilization
 - 4) Zoroastrianism
 - 5) Maharashtra and Gujarat

**Notes****28.2** a) T

b) T

c) E

d) T

e) F

28.3 a) monotheistic

b) Jews

c) White Jews and black Jews

d) Jesus

e) christianity

28.4 1) Thirteen percent

2) "To surrender to God's law and thus to be a integral whole."

3) Yes they are

4) It means disciple

5) Ten Gurus