

Hinduism

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Hinduism () is an umbrella term for a range of Indian religious and spiritual traditions (sampradayas) that are unified by adherence to the concept of dharma, a cosmic order maintained by its followers through rituals and righteous living, as expounded in the Vedas. The word Hindu is an exonym, and while Hinduism has been called the oldest surviving religion in the world, it has also been described by the modern term Sanātana Dharma (lit. 'eternal dharma'). Vaidika Dharma (lit. 'Vedic dharma') and Arya dharma are historical endonyms for Hinduism. Hinduism entails diverse systems of thought, marked by a range of shared concepts that discuss theology, mythology, and other topics in textual sources. Hindu texts have been classified into Śruti (lit. 'heard') and Smṛti (lit. 'remembered'). The major Hindu scriptures are the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Mahabharata (including the Bhagavad Gita), the Ramayana, and the Agamas. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include the karma (action, intent and consequences), saṃsāra (the cycle of death and rebirth) and the four Puruṣārthas, proper goals or aims of human life, namely: dharma (ethics/duties), artha (prosperity/work), kama (desires/passions) and moksha (liberation/emancipation from passions and ultimately saṃsāra). Hindu religious practices include devotion (bhakti), worship (puja), sacrificial rites (yajna), and meditation (dhyana) and yoga. Hinduism has no central doctrinal authority and many Hindus do not claim to belong to any denomination. However, scholarly studies notify four major denominations: Shaivism, Shaktism, Smartism, and Vaishnavism. The six śāstika schools of Hindu philosophy that recognise the authority of the Vedas are: Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. While the traditional Itihāsa-Purāṇa and its derived Epic-Puranic chronology present Hinduism as a tradition existing for thousands of years, scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesis of Brahmanical orthopraxy with various Indian cultures, having diverse roots and no specific founder. This Hindu synthesis emerged after the Vedic period, between c. 500 to 200 BCE, and c. 300 CE, in the period of the second urbanisation and the early classical period of Hinduism when the epics and the first Purāṇas were composed. It flourished in the medieval period, with the decline of Buddhism in India. Since the 19th century, modern Hinduism, influenced by western culture, has acquired a great appeal in the West, most notably reflected in the popularisation of yoga and various sects such as Transcendental Meditation and the Hare Krishna movement. Hinduism is the world's third-largest religion, with approximately 1.20 billion followers, or around 15% of the global population, known as Hindus, centered mainly in India, Nepal, Mauritius, and in Bali, Indonesia. Significant numbers of Hindu communities are found in the countries of South Asia, in Southeast Asia, in the Caribbean, Middle East, North America, Europe, Oceania and Africa.