

00:46 Your lecturer is Hayden J. Bellenoit.
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00:54 courses on South Asian history, ranging from the Mughals to
00:58 contemporary Pakistan. He completed his Doctor of
01:01 Philosophy in Modern History at Oxford University, focusing on
01:05 the comparative religious scholarship between Hindu
01:08 reformists and Christian missionary scholars in late
01:11 colonial India. While studying at Oxford, Dr. Bellenoit spent a
01:16 year in India conducting research. He has researched and
01:19 published extensively on modern Indian religious, social, and
01:23 cultural history.
01:29 [music playing]
01:50 India, one of the world's oldest civilizations.
01:54 India has given humanity the fraction, decimals,
01:58 the process of woven cloth for clothing,
02:00 and one of its best known figures, Gandhi.
02:04 Yet between the mid 1700s and 1947,
02:07 this great civilization fell to the rule
02:10 of a seemingly insignificant foggy island
02:13 off the Northwestern Eurasian landmass.
02:15 But British rule profoundly affected
02:18 India's religious traditions, society, and indeed,
02:21 languages spoken.
02:22 It was the single most valuable colony
02:25 for any empire in history.
02:27 So there's a lot to cover in this course.
02:31 And because it's a region of the world with which most people
02:34 aren't familiar, we're going to spend this first lecture
02:37 covering some basics about religion and society.
02:41 This is so we can hit the treadmill running, so to speak.
02:45 So think of this lecture as India 101.
02:49 We're going to look at two major themes here.
02:52 First we're going to examine Hinduism,
02:54 looking at its basic structure and how
02:56 it emerged over hundreds, thousands of years.
03:00 And secondly, we'll look at the traditions of caste
03:03 and how families and societies function in India.
03:06 When we step back, the broader lesson from this lecture
03:10 is first to understand how Indian society functions, what
03:13 Hinduism and caste are, and the impact of Islamic rule in India
03:18 before the British arrived there.
03:21 The story we're going to tell is, of course,
03:23 a very modern one.

03:25 It's about the impact of British colonial rule,
03:28 yet it's also about the adaptability and resilience
03:31 of Indian society and India's cultural, religious,
03:35 and spiritual traditions.
03:36 It's indeed a history of which every Indian
03:39 should be very proud.
03:41 Let's first turn to some of the major geographic regions
03:45 of India.
03:45 And we'll go through each one.
03:48 Now, when studying any new unfamiliar part of the world,
03:52 knowing the lay of the land is a great way
03:54 to understand a region's history, culture, and beliefs.
03:58 First is the Gangetic Plain.
04:01 Located in North India, it's one of the most fertile regions
04:04 of the Indian subcontinent.
04:06 It takes its name from the Ganges River, also known
04:09 as the Ganga, which descends from the Himalaya mountains.
04:13 It's one of the most fertile regions of India in terms
04:15 of harvest and crop yields.
04:19 Moving eastward, we're brought to the Bay of Bengal
04:22 and the Bengal regions.
04:24 With its vast network of marsh waterways,
04:27 its long been a center of maritime commerce
04:29 and exchange with strong links to Southeast Asia and, indeed,
04:33 the broader commercial maritime world.
04:36 It's perhaps no surprise that this
04:38 was the first region of India to fall to British rule.
04:42 Let's now move to the south, to the Deccan Plateau.
04:46 This plateau covers the southern torso
04:48 of the Indian subcontinent.
04:50 Though verdant in some regions, it is mostly dry and harsh.
04:54 Its mountains and riverways have actually historically prevented
04:58 outsiders from fully militarily conquering it from the north.
05:04 Moving up to the western coast of India,
05:06 we get to the Thar Deserts, near the current Indian/Pakistani
05:09 border.
05:10 It looks more like a scene from Arabia, with camels.
05:13 But the people and customs are decidedly Indian.
05:17 Moving up along the western parts of India,
05:19 we get to the Indus River Region, which consists, itself,
05:23 of two sub regions.
05:24 The first is Sindh, at the southern mouth
05:27 of the Indus river.
05:28 Second, and farther north, is the Punjab,

05:31 which comes from the Persian for five waters,
05:34 referring to the five tributaries
05:36 from the Himalayas that enter into the Indus River, which
05:40 then empties into the Arabian sea.
05:44 Moving farther northwest, we get to the famed Khyber Pass,
05:48 a narrow transit route through mountains
05:50 which straddle the border between modern Afghanistan
05:53 and Pakistan.
05:54 The Khyber Pass traditionally has
05:56 been the transit route for invaders, Muslim sultans,
05:59 the Mughals, and Akbar.
06:01 It was the key link between India and the Islamic Middle
06:05 East.
06:06 Now that we've gotten a lay of the land, let's move
06:09 on to an overview of Hinduism.
06:12 Hinduism is one of the world's great religious traditions,
06:16 but it's difficult to define exactly what Hinduism is.
06:20 I could teach a whole course on Hinduism,
06:22 but for the purposes of this course,
06:25 we're going to have to do a more condensed version.
06:29 Hinduism is a religion, philosophy, and cosmology
06:32 all rolled into one.
06:34 It's as much a way of life as it is a religious system.
06:39 Unlike the three Abrahamic religions
06:41 of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,
06:44 Hinduism has no single founder.
06:46 It's the accumulation of various practices,
06:49 adaptations, and local customs wrapped into a broader
06:53 tradition that has been largely located
06:55 in the Indian subcontinent.
06:58 Now, let's go into some of Hinduism's basics.
07:03 We like to think of religions as either monotheistic or
07:06 polytheistic, but Hinduism defies either categorization.
07:12 While it has over 3,000 larger and lesser deities,
07:15 it does believe in a supreme creator.
07:18 So the best description of Hinduism
07:20 would be henotheistic, meaning that there
07:23 is one supreme being or central divinity, but at the same time,
07:28 there are multitudes of other lesser gods and goddesses.
07:32 The understanding is that, since humans
07:34 are limited in their perception of the cosmos and the divine,
07:37 different people who have different ethnicities,
07:40 cultures, and views will all see God in very different ways.
07:46 There's an old allegory that since humans are all

07:48 limited in what we can understand about the divine,
07:51 we're all blindfolded.
07:53 And if we're reaching for the same elephant, for example,
07:56 we're going to see it and feel it differently.
07:59 For example, if you touched the whiskers,
08:01 you might think that the divine is gentle.
08:04 If you get hit by the elephant's heel,
08:07 you'll think God's vengeful.
08:09 If you happen to end up next to the elephant's poo,
08:11 well, you might be a cynical nihilist.
08:14 The allegory is used to illustrate
08:16 how Hinduism views revelation and truth in religion.
08:20 It generally accepts that all paths go
08:22 to the same end, that is, God.
08:25 This logically, to Hinduism, explains the diversity
08:28 of the world's religions.
08:30 Or as an old saying goes, "God is one,
08:34 but wise people know him by many names."
08:38 Now, Hinduism is as much a religion as it is a philosophy.
08:42 And this is unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,
08:46 which have traditionally separated religion and faith
08:49 from philosophy and metaphysics.
08:51 But in Hinduism, religion and philosophy are not separated.
08:55 They are one in the same.
08:57 So partially because of this, Hinduism
08:59 has no real set of rules or doctrine.
09:02 It's not about faith and confession.
09:05 It has no central, textual source of adjudication.
09:09 It usually doesn't say you can't do this, you can't do that.
09:13 If anything, it's somewhat vague on moral guidelines
09:16 and specifics.
09:18 It's more focused on wider holistic understanding
09:21 of existence, life, and duty.
09:26 Hinduism also tolerates evil as a part
09:29 of life and natural existence.
09:31 Now, this doesn't mean that Hindus condone evil behavior,
09:34 quite the opposite.
09:36 But it does mean that there's less of a tendency
09:39 to confront a perceived evil.
09:41 This is very different compared to Islam, Christianity,
09:44 and Judaism.
09:45 In those three traditions, when faced with a perceived evil,
09:48 one is generally compelled, in various ways, to combat it.
09:53 Hinduism also has no real concept of blasphemy.

09:57 It has no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane.
10:01 But this doesn't mean that Hindus
10:03 don't respect religious rite and ritual and sensitivities.
10:06 There's just no doctrinal altar of punishment.
10:11 But Hinduism does have ancient traditions and texts.
10:14 The main one is called the Rigveda.
10:17 Composed between roughly 2000 and 1500 BC,
10:21 it's a collection of hymns in Sanskrit, the oldest
10:23 of the Indo-European languages.
10:26 It contains about 1,023 hymns devoted to everything
10:30 from creation to the gods and the cosmos.
10:34 The origins of the Rigveda and Sanskrit
10:36 lie in the so-called Aryan peoples of Central Asia
10:39 and Southern Russia.
10:40 These semi-nomadic peoples started
10:43 coming into India from the northwest after roughly 2000
10:46 BC.
10:47 They brought with them the sacred language of Sanskrit
10:50 and a pantheon of nature gods, whom they called devas,
10:53 or shining ones.
10:57 Now, the Vedic Pantheon is associated largely
11:00 with forces in nature.
11:02 Some examples include Dyaus Pitar, the sky god;
11:06 Agni, the fire god; and Indra, the warrior god.
11:10 So if we compare it, the Vedic Pantheon
11:13 is actually very similar to those of Greece, Rome,
11:16 and the Nordic peoples.
11:18 And like all ancient Pantheons, the gods demanded sacrifice.
11:22 Hinduism early on acquired what we
11:24 would call a sacrificial cult. And this was crucial.
11:28 Sacrifices had to be made to the gods
11:31 and they usually consisted of animals, fruits, cereals, ghee,
11:34 and milk.
11:36 Now, think about it, why were sacrifices offered?
11:39 Well, of course, to please the gods.
11:42 And the gods, in turn, would maintain order and balance
11:45 in the universe.
11:47 So sacrifices, in a way, were performed to avert chaos.
11:52 Now, these sacrifices, over centuries, developed
11:55 into very complex, elaborate rituals,
11:57 sometimes growing out of control with dozens of priests,
12:01 specifically set rituals, timings, and offerings.
12:05 Yet there were other reasons why sacrifices were made.
12:08 One was otherworldly.

12:10 It was to keep and look after the souls
12:12 of the departed family lineage in the afterlife.
12:16 Pleasing the gods and praying for the departed, it was hoped,
12:20 would gain one's family wealth, health, power, glory,
12:25 and victory over their enemies.
12:28 Now, there are two cosmological and philosophical concepts
12:31 that are crucial to Hinduism.
12:33 They inform both the cosmic worldview,
12:35 but also, as we'll see, the caste system itself.
12:40 The first is called dharma.
12:43 It translates roughly as duty, or what one needs to do.
12:48 Dharma is a loose term to convey the idea
12:51 that doing what is required of you
12:53 is a way not only of maintaining domestic order,
12:56 but also of maintaining the natural order of the universe.
12:59 And dharma can be applied loosely to many things.
13:03 But in India, it mostly relates to family, caste,
13:06 and occupation.
13:09 The second cosmological and philosophical concept
13:12 is karma, or what we would call the ethical law of causality.
13:16 It's the belief that every action has a consequence.
13:20 So if you do something good, you'll be rewarded,
13:23 but if you do something bad, you'll be punished.
13:26 But in Hinduism, it's different.
13:29 It may not be in this world, but more likely in the next world.
13:34 This relates to the third concept called samsara.
13:38 This means, roughly, the migration of the soul.
13:41 The Abrahamic religions all have a sort of one-shot approach
13:45 to life.
13:46 You have one life and you better make the best of it.
13:49 But Hinduism believes in reincarnation
13:51 and that the soul goes through endless lives
13:54 until it attains perfection, when
13:56 it achieves bliss or nirvana.
14:00 Now, let's turn to caste.
14:02 We've all heard of caste.
14:03 What is caste exactly?
14:06 The word caste originally comes from the Portuguese word casta.
14:10 And don't worry, we'll discuss the role of the Portuguese
14:12 before the British later.
14:14 There's no equivalent for this word in any Indian language,
14:19 but the term which best captures what Westerners think of caste
14:23 is the Sanskrit word varna.
14:26 Varna is what we call the fourfold division

14:29 of Indian society, which itself is
14:31 based upon the early passages in the Rigveda.
14:34 The universe is divided into four parts.
14:38 First are Brahmins, associated with the head and with speech.
14:44 They are the priestly caste, who are literate
14:46 and whose duty it is to keep the sacred knowledge of the Vedas
14:50 in Sanskrit.
14:51 They are considered the most ritually and physically pure.
14:55 Next, are Kshatriyas, or the arms.
14:59 They're the warriors and rulers, whose duty
15:02 it is to fight, protect, and administer
15:04 the day-to-day orders of humankind.
15:07 Third are the Vaishyas, or the thighs.
15:11 They are the traders and merchants
15:12 of society, whose duty it is to keep the material
15:15 aspects of life flowing and in regular order.
15:20 Last are the Sudras, or the feet.
15:23 They are the servant class, whose duty
15:25 it is to clean, prune, remove waste, and do menial, often
15:29 unskilled, labor.
15:31 Now, below these four varnas are who we call the untouchables,
15:35 or Dalits.
15:37 They are actually considered avarna, or without caste.
15:41 And they are regarded as filthy and ritually and spiritually
15:45 polluted.
15:46 They are considered, for all intents and purposes,
15:49 beyond the pale of the caste system.
15:51 And this same categorization would
15:53 apply for tribal groups known as Adivasis, who are not
15:57 part of the caste system.
15:58 They are seen as beyond it.
16:02 Now, this whole hierarchy is based
16:04 upon the notion of ritual, purity, and pollution.
16:07 The higher the caste, the more pure ritually, spiritually,
16:11 and physically one is.
16:13 But there's another component to the fourfold caste hierarchy.
16:17 It is called jati.
16:19 Jati means birth.
16:21 It's a subdivision, in a way, within each fourfold varna
16:24 caste.
16:25 It also means family.
16:28 It can refer to region and occupation
16:30 within a varna category.
16:32 In fact, this is the most referenced marker

16:35 of caste identity in India historically.
16:38 So for example, there are Saraswat Brahmins
16:41 who trace their heritage from the Saraswati River.
16:44 And there are also a Chitpavan Brahmins, whose jati name
16:48 means pure of mind.
16:50 Some jatis within a varna are more respected than others.
16:53 And unsurprisingly, some see themselves as better
16:56 than others in their varna peers.
17:00 Now, let's bring karma and dharma back
17:02 into our discussion.
17:04 Both karma and dharma, in a way, provide cosmological incentives
17:08 for caste as a whole hierarchy.
17:10 I mean, think about it, what might happen if you
17:13 don't perform your dharma?
17:15 Say, as a Brahmin you marry an untouchable?
17:18 In this world, you dishonor your family and its ancestry.
17:22 And you might be punished in this life and the next.
17:27 Karma and dharma act as cosmological incentives
17:30 for the caste system.
17:32 Bad behavior means demotion in the system.
17:35 If you do poorly, you may be reborn
17:38 as a lower caste, or worse, a slug.
17:41 But proper dharma can lead to a life
17:44 as a Brahmin or even a King.
17:47 And this whole incentivized system
17:50 informs a general Indian adherence
17:52 to some form of nonviolence or ahimsa,
17:56 which we will later see Gandhi adopted to battle the British.
18:00 Since the soul migrates, the soul
18:02 can end up going up or down.
18:05 The higher up you go, the closer you get to attaining nirvana,
18:08 or bliss.
18:09 But going down means you get thrown down the ladder.
18:12 And getting thrown down the ladder
18:14 means a fly could be, in theory, your uncle.
18:18 You never know.
18:20 So in theory, but not always in practice, as we'll see,
18:23 Hinduism is somewhat averse to the taking of life,
18:26 the needless taking of life.
18:28 But again, this is in theory.
18:30 As we know and we'll see, Hindus are not explicitly
18:33 prohibited from taking life.
18:37 So a lot of caste is about family, honor, and the honor
18:40 of one's ancestors.

18:42 Let's now turn to these caste families
18:44 and see how they were internally organized.
18:48 Indian families are kind of like mini corporations.
18:52 The Indian family is, in theory, organized like a company,
18:55 but only for ownership of property and land.
18:58 Most Indian families were extended,
19:01 with three generations or more, and the eldest male
19:05 is the equivalent of the CEO.
19:07 Now, there are major gender differences within families.
19:11 Males traditionally are the shareholders, women are not.
19:15 Males get property inherited in equal shares, but women don't.
19:20 So this is kind of like a gendered partition
19:22 of inheritance.
19:25 So the Indian family is undoubtedly patriarchal,
19:28 but it has limits.
19:30 The eldest male's authority is not unlimited.
19:33 Unlike in Western Europe, where the eldest male is usually
19:36 the sole inheritor of land and property, in India,
19:39 the property was often divided.
19:41 This meant that eternal family feuds
19:44 over who would get daddy's wealth rarely happened.
19:48 Eldest males couldn't write wills to choose favorites.
19:51 So their seeming dominance of the family
19:54 was, in fact, much more tempered than compared to Europe
19:57 historically.
19:59 But the dominance of males in the family
20:01 is really still seen in marriage.
20:04 Here females are given as gifts to a groom's family.
20:09 Males remain members of their original family.
20:12 It might seem symbolic, but it carries a lot
20:15 of substantial difference.
20:18 Indian women are seen to have a different kind of wealth.
20:22 Since women don't have rights to land,
20:24 they have other forms of wealth that
20:25 become exchanged at a marriage-- saris, clothing, gold, jewelry,
20:31 utensils.
20:33 So you can see, property in India,
20:35 and even Hindu traditions, are strongly gendered.
20:39 Even cattle could be part of the marriage dowry.
20:42 Now, cattle were sometimes worth more than gold.
20:45 In these early days, in fact, they were so valuable
20:48 that one Sanskrit word for warfare
20:50 is gavishti, or the desire for cattle.
20:54 For family's, cattle were the most guarded animals

20:57 and the ultimate stock of wealth.
21:00 Now, to our modern ears we might say, why?
21:03 What can cattle provide?
21:05 Well, think about it, labor and a whole multitude of dairy
21:09 products, like cheese, milk, and yogurt-- all very good for you.
21:14 Now, there's a reason why cattle became
21:17 so crucial to Indian families and eventually
21:19 broader Hindu traditions.
21:22 Horses are not native to India.
21:25 As the north Aryan peoples settled further into India,
21:28 they found that the climate could not
21:29 support the indigenous raising of horses.
21:32 So rather than import horses from Central Asia,
21:36 over centuries they discarded them
21:38 and settled into lifestyles revolving around cattle.
21:41 And this is the distant origin of India's reverence for cattle
21:45 today.
21:48 So think about it, back to marriage,
21:50 what's the purpose of marriage?
21:52 Simple, to continue the male's family lineage through time.
21:56 Marriage is meant to amplify family honor.
21:59 And it has to be done in very particular ways.
22:03 Getting back to caste, first they
22:06 need to be from the same varna.
22:08 Brahmins marry Brahmins, Vaishyas marry Vaishyas,
22:11 and so on.
22:12 But they have to be from a different family, or jati,
22:16 within that broader caste.
22:18 And this is done to avoid inbreeding.
22:20 And they have to have crucially compatible horoscopes, which
22:24 would, of course, be calculated by Brahmin priests.
22:28 Now, because of the need to please your ancestors
22:31 and family honor, marriages were usually
22:33 arranged very early and often before puberty,
22:37 but they wouldn't be consummated until after they became adults.
22:41 And this is something the British never fully understood.
22:46 But marriage in the Indian context
22:48 is not about love, no matter how much Bollywood films
22:51 insist that it is.
22:53 The purposes of marriage were very practical.
22:57 One way the family's honor is maintained
22:59 is by initiating women into religious life.
23:03 And this is done through marriage.
23:05 Because in theory, she needs to be divorced from her ancestors

23:09 in order to be added into a new family.
23:11 And for men, it was the initiation into adulthood
23:14 and the householder male phase of one's natural life cycle.
23:18 So in a way, marriage is a gift of a daughter
23:22 from one family to another.
23:24 Think of it like a cosmic-oriented business
23:27 transaction.
23:30 And because marriage is an owner/business transaction,
23:33 it's a sacrament of religious obligation.
23:36 It's a strict sacrament.
23:37 It's arranged and nearly always cannot be dissolved.
23:43 So as we've seen, family, marriage, ancestor, worship,
23:47 caste, karma, and dharma are all interrelated.
23:50 And they really help us to understand
23:52 how complex Hinduism is, not just as a philosophy, but also
23:56 as a social tradition and regular way of life.
24:00 But it's important to stress that what we've covered
24:03 is very much a high caste Aryan era and Brahmanical ideal.
24:07 And not everyone in India fits this bill.
24:12 Hinduism does contain deviations from this north Indian Vedic
24:16 Aryan norm.
24:18 And these counterpoints and regional differences
24:20 would all become part of Hinduism,
24:22 even if to outsiders it seems inherently contradictory.
24:28 One example would be if we look at low caste families.
24:31 Since low caste families have always
24:32 had less property and wealth, their families
24:35 tended to lean towards the more one
24:37 generation, or nuclear model, and with, maybe,
24:40 two generations living together at most.
24:45 If we go to the southern parts of India,
24:47 families here, historically, tended
24:49 to be slightly more matrilineal.
24:52 And here mothers and daughters were the real shareholders.
24:56 Men were not betrothed, but lived with their own families.
25:00 They visited their wives, rather than residing with them.
25:04 And royal South Indian wives often had multiple husbands.
25:08 In fact, the symbol of a lover visiting an Indian royal wife
25:12 was that the lover left his shield outside as a notice
25:15 to others to stay away.
25:17 And South Indian marriage patterns
25:19 were also different from the north and other ways.
25:22 In the north, first cousins were forbidden from marrying,
25:26 but not in the south-- it was allowed.

25:29 And this was crucial because not only did it
25:32 lessen the distinction between the brides
25:34 and the grooms families, but it allowed
25:36 alliances between families to be perpetuated
25:38 for longer over generations.
25:42 There were also different marriage patterns
25:44 when it came to religion.
25:46 With the arrival of Islam after the 11th century,
25:49 Islamic and Middle Eastern marriage patterns
25:51 were kind of, in a way, injected and adopted
25:54 into Indian tradition.
25:56 This meant, in this tradition, there
25:58 was a preference for patrilineal first cousins
26:00 when arranging marriage.
26:02 So in a way, this was more like South Indian traditions,
26:05 but it is very different from the Vedic Aryan north.
26:10 Now, when it comes to Indian Muslims,
26:12 even they have adopted a modified version of caste,
26:16 but it's not rooted in the concepts of dharma and karma.
26:19 It's not cosmological.
26:21 It's largely based upon dissent and claim to dissent.
26:26 Effectively, the way it works is like this--
26:29 as an Indian Muslim, the more foreign lineage
26:31 you can claim and display, the higher you're generally seen.
26:35 So generally, Sayyids are higher because they claim descent
26:39 from the Prophet Muhammad himself.
26:42 Sheikhs also claim Arab lineage, usually
26:45 from some of the foreign conquerors
26:46 of India over past centuries.
26:49 Ansaris are those who came from outside India
26:52 and are usually considered clean and noble,
26:55 and more so than indigenous Indian converts to Islam.
26:58 Many have claimed to be those who
27:00 helped the prophet and Muslim conquerors of India.
27:04 And there's a real Iranian and Persian residue, too.
27:08 Some very elite Muslim families trace their lineage to Persia
27:12 and their giveaway is in their last names, Shirazi, Esfahani,
27:16 and Tabrizi.
27:18 Before his grandfather moved back to Iran
27:21 in the 1830s, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran,
27:24 his family had lived in India for two centuries.
27:27 In fact, his pen name was Syed Hindi, or the Syed from India.
27:33 Now, given what we know about caste, which Hindus
27:36 do you think were most likely to convert

27:38 to Islam over the centuries?
27:40 That's right, the low caste and untouchables.
27:45 Aside from this caste heritage and hierarchy,
27:47 most Indian Muslims today, probably between 70% and 80%
27:51 of them in South Asia, can trace their lineage--
27:54 if they wanted to-- to being originally from untouchables
27:57 and low caste Hindu families.
27:59 Why?
28:00 Islam offered them a theoretical egalitarianism
28:03 and a way to escape pernicious caste discrimination.
28:09 OK, now that we've covered caste,
28:11 let's talk about society and religion
28:14 and how they shape politics in India.
28:16 Indian empires were historically based
28:18 upon intercepting surplus grains as revenue, taxing revenue.
28:23 This was no different with the British after the 1750s.
28:26 The agrarian wealth of India paid
28:28 for administrations and armies.
28:30 So rulers were always dependent upon the peasants
28:33 and, indeed, the monsoon for their revenues.
28:37 This made rulers sensitive to the well-being
28:40 of Indian farmers and peasants.
28:42 So the largely corporate self-governing villages
28:45 of India are what allowed great Indian empires,
28:48 from Magadha in the 10th century BC,
28:50 to Vijayanagara in the 16th century,
28:53 to the Mughals in the 17th, and to the British into the 19th
28:56 to flourish and rule.
28:59 Now, traditionally, there have been two types of rule
29:02 in India.
29:03 The first was raja, or royal kingship.
29:06 Now, Brahmins have traditionally preferred kingship.
29:09 Why?
29:11 Because it would allow Brahmins to be the advisors,
29:13 to undertake rites to elevate the raja over his enemies,
29:17 and to read horoscopes, and to promote peace and prosperity
29:21 in advice at the court.
29:23 The second type of rule is what we would call sangha.
29:26 Now, sangha means assembly or society.
29:29 And this was kind of a more republican or confederated form
29:33 of government, kind of like the Roman Senate.
29:35 It was for elites who deliberated.
29:38 This was a form of rule that emerged from challenges
29:41 to the priestly power of Brahmins.

29:43 And it emerged in areas where the challenge
29:45 to Brahmin spiritual dominance was most profound, namely
29:49 Eastern India.
29:51 It was no coincidence, therefore,
29:53 that Buddhism emerged in the regions of India
29:56 where sangha forms of rule were somewhat more pronounced.
30:01 Now, there's always been a tussle
30:02 and a pull between these two forms of kingship
30:05 in Indian history.
30:07 But kingship, or raja, has largely won out over centuries.
30:12 Over the eras, kingship emerged as the dominant form
30:16 of political rule in India.
30:18 An Indian kingship traditionally was benign,
30:20 much more so than its equivalent in medieval Europe.
30:23 In India, it never approached the levels of absolutism
30:27 that we saw in 17th and 18th century
30:29 Europe because it was tempered by Brahmins and, crucially,
30:33 the realities of the monsoon season.
30:36 Plus, remember, caste and family units
30:38 were like small corporations.
30:40 Indian society would carry on, whether the King
30:43 was there or not.
30:45 So as a result, rajas, or kings, styled themselves
30:49 kind of as paternal protectors of their people.
30:51 In India, kingship did not always
30:54 equate with exploitation.
30:57 Now, when Muslim rulers came to India,
30:59 they obviously didn't need Brahmanical affirmation
31:02 of their sovereignty.
31:03 It came through conquest.
31:05 And the sultan was answerable, in theory, only to Allah.
31:08 But Muslim rulers largely followed the patterns
31:11 of kingship laid down by Indian tradition.
31:16 So we've covered a great deal already.
31:18 Let's stop for a moment and kind of recap what we've discussed.
31:22 We've looked at Hinduism, its basic structure, its gods,
31:26 and its cosmological precepts of karma, dharma, and samsara.
31:32 We've seen how the traditions of caste, marriage, and family
31:35 are all bound up with paying homage
31:37 to the family's ancestors.
31:39 And we've looked at how dharma and karma and forms
31:41 of political rule were all shaped by these.
31:44 In all, we saw how Hinduism was not so much a strict singular
31:48 religion, as it was the accumulation

31:51 of various social, religious, and cosmological traditions
31:54 over centuries.
31:56 One major change we'll see in this course,
31:58 in fact, is how British rule helped to make Hinduism more
32:02 of a monolithic uniform religion than it ever was in history.
32:08 So we now have a base understanding
32:10 of caste, Hinduism, and Indian society.
32:13 And what we're going to see in this course
32:15 is how these broader aspects of India
32:17 and the lives of millions of its inhabitants
32:20 were affected by the experience of rule
32:22 from a far-off, seemingly insignificant island
32:25 off the coast of Northwestern Europe.