



# Ancient Indian Civilizations

## Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

World History | Grades 6-7 | Anneda Nettleton, B.Ed., M.Ed., Ed.S.

### Note to teachers:

This is part 1 in a four-part series of lessons about understanding Ancient Indian civilizations and its ancient religions and societies. There is also a single lesson plan that provides a less in-depth look at the different components if there is minimal time for teaching about this topic.

### Materials:

- Guided Notes (copy for each student)
- What is Hindu Dharma* Google Slideshow presentation
- Sticky notes (1-2 per student)
- Matching Activity

### Direct Instruction:

1. Start with a question using slides 2 and 3 of the Google Slideshow (Engage - 5 min):
  - "What do you know about Ancient India?" (Students write brief responses on sticky notes. If time allows, have students walk around the room and discuss their responses with peers.)
  - "Have you ever heard of the Aryan Invasion Theory?" (See what students say—this helps assess prior knowledge.)
2. Present Key Information (Explain - 20 min):
  - Go through the What is Hindu Dharma slideshow.
  - Direct students to fill out their Guided Notes as you instruct them.
  - Slide 13: Direct students' attention to the graphic organizer.

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- **Think** – Have students individually reflect on what they notice about the graphic organizer. They should record their thoughts in the space provided and be prepared to share/discuss with peers.
- **Pair** – Assign students to partners or small groups to share their answers and discuss perspectives
- **Share** – Call on a few groups to share their insights with the whole class, facilitating a discussion to clarify and expand ideas.

### Sorting Activity (10 min)

- Provide students with a copy of the *Myths vs. Facts* sorting activity. Now that students have the foundation, they can apply their knowledge in the **Myths vs. Facts: Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere**.
  - After students complete the sorting activity, go through the answers together as a class.
  - Ask students to explain their reasoning for one of the statements they sorted.
  - Use this discussion to reinforce key historical concepts and correct any misunderstandings.
- **Alternate Idea - A Myth and A Fact**
  - Each statement is split into two parts: a myth statement and its corresponding fact correction. Write them on separate cards and mix them up.
  - **Instructions:**
    1. Hand out one card to each student.
    2. Students walk around the room to find their matching pair.
      - Example: A student with "The Aryan Invasion Theory is widely accepted by modern scholars" must find the student with "Modern scholars reject the Aryan Invasion Theory due to lack of evidence."
    3. Once paired, students explain their match to the class.

### Reflection (5min)

- Have students complete the Reflection Questions on the *Guided Notes* handout.

### Assessment (15min)

- Have students complete the assessment.

## Direct Quotations to Supplement the Lesson Plan

These quotations were taken directly from the *Hindu Histories* primer produced and written by the Center for Advancing Pluralism. More resources are available at <https://pluralist.org/>. Please note that due to the language and text complexity these quotations may not be beneficial to our students' understanding. Instead they are provided as excerpts to help you better prepare before sharing the content with students.

**Slide 4:** *"These traditions encourage the seeking of betterment, do not require practitioners to espouse any particular beliefs, and have an inclusive, pluralistic approach to the world and its peoples."* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slides 5 & 6:** *"The Indosphere includes the lands of ancient India, and those regions whose peoples display cultural continuities with them in various parts of Asia and the Asian islands."* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slides 7 & 8:** *"There is genetic material in ancient Indian peoples shared with those in Europe from at least 40,000 years ago; however, only a very small proportion of later European mtDNA is found in Indians today."<sup>1</sup>* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slides 9 & 10:** *"Colonial-era European scholars made flawed translations of a select few ancient Indian manuscripts, and found references to the term 'Ārya' which they misinterpreted as a racial group. From this, some European scholars developed a theory that an ancient lighter-skinned race of 'Āryans' invaded the Indian subcontinent and civilized the darker-skin-colored 'Dravidians.'" (Hindu Histories, Center for Advancing Pluralism).*

**Slide 10:** *"Of the over 40 million ancient manuscripts in a variety of Indic languages that are estimated to exist, less than 5% have been translated!"* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slide 11:** *"The most common word used by people of different ethnicities and traditions in ancient India to refer to people as a collective was Ārya, problematizing the colonial connection of the word Ārya with any one specific 'race'.<sup>2</sup>"* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slide 12:** *"Pan-regional people groups, while still indigenous and ancestral, spread and settled beyond their original geographic regions. Some pan-regional Dharmas were monotheist (in the sense of credence in a Supreme Being), some were atheist, and some were nontheist (not specifically theist nor atheist.)"* (*Hindu Histories*, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

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<sup>1</sup> Kivisild, T. et al. "Deep Common Ancestry of Indian and Western-Eurasian Mitochondrial DNA Lineages". *Current Biology*. 9. 22. 1999

[https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(00\)80057-3?\\_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS0960982200800573%3Fshowall%3Dtrue](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(00)80057-3?_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS0960982200800573%3Fshowall%3Dtrue)

<sup>2</sup> Thapar, Romila. "The Theory of Aryan Race in Indian History and Politics". *Social Scientist*. 24.1. 1996. pp. 3-29

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**Slide 13:** *“The actual peoples living in ancient India organized themselves in a variety of ways, with layers of group membership and ways of self-identifying. The methods of organization were agreed by the leaders of the communities in question, and as such cannot be generalized beyond even a single region. There were, nevertheless, some common features. A svayam/vyakti (oneself/individual) was usually part of a parivāra (multigenerational family). A parivāra was usually part of a kula, an extended family or clan with shared ancestry and kinship, whether genetic or otherwise, including relations through marriage. Many parivāras and/or kulas, when they shared some kind of distinguishing social features, might form a jāti (tribe).<sup>3</sup> The shared distinguishing features of a jāti might include origin story, history, worldview, teachings, customs, spiritual traditions, language or dialects, and/or trade or guild affiliation, vocation, profession, etc. Many kulas and/or jātis could ally through treaty or marriage and form a jana, a clan/tribal confederation, usually with a commonly elected leader and council. The geographical territory of a jana was called a janapada.<sup>4</sup>”* (Hindu Histories, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

**Slide 14:** *“Most European and American Protestants in the 1700s-1900s viewed Hindus as heathen. However, a few European and American-educated Hindu spiritual, social, and political leaders sought to gain independence from the British by leveraging the most powerful category in Christian empires: religion.”* (Hindu Histories, Center for Advancing Pluralism).

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<sup>3</sup> Jha, Vivekananda. “Social Stratification in Ancient India: some reflections”. *Social Scientist*. 19.3. 1991, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Parasher, Aloka. “Assimilation Conservation and Expansion – Complex Strategies of Tribal Absorption in the Early Indian Context”. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. 44. 1983

# Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

## Myths vs. Facts: Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

Below are 15 statements about Dharma traditions and the Indosphere. Some of these are myths (false statements), while others are facts (true statements). Your task is to work with your group to sort them into the correct category: Myth or Fact.

1. Dharma traditions require belief in God.
2. The Indosphere includes ancient India and culturally related regions across Asia.
3. The Aryan Invasion Theory is widely accepted by modern scholars.
4. There are over 40 million ancient manuscripts in India, but less than 5% have been translated.
5. Ancient India had only one singular religion, which later became known as Hinduism.
6. The term 'Ārya' was originally a racial classification that divided Indian society.
7. Ancient Indian societies were racially segregated based on the Aryan and Dravidian divide.
8. The Indosphere was isolated and had little interaction with other ancient civilizations.
9. Ancient Indian societies were diverse and organized into tribes, confederations, and self-governing communities.
10. The term 'Hindu' was originally used by Persians and Greeks to describe people living beyond the Sindhu River.
11. Colonial-era scholars misrepresented Dharmic histories by grouping multiple spiritual traditions into one "Hinduism."
12. Dharmic traditions spread through forced conquest and military expansion.
13. Ancient Indian governance structures often included elected councils and advisors, rather than just centralized monarchies.
14. Modern scholars recognize that colonial narratives about Ancient India were often inaccurate and misleading.
15. Dharma traditions remain a key part of global history and continue to influence cultures worldwide.

# Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

## Myths vs. Facts: Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere **ANSWER KEY**

1. Dharma traditions require belief in God. **MYTH**
2. The Indosphere includes ancient India and culturally related regions in Asia. **FACT**
3. The Aryan Invasion Theory is widely accepted by modern scholars. **MYTH**
4. There are over 40 million ancient manuscripts in India, but less than 5% have been translated. **FACT**
5. Ancient India had only one unified religion, which later became known as Hinduism. **MYTH**
6. The term 'Ārya' was originally a racial classification that divided Indian society. **MYTH**
7. Ancient Indian societies were racially segregated based on the Aryan and Dravidian divide. **MYTH**
8. The Indosphere was isolated and had little interaction with other ancient civilizations. **MYTH**
9. Ancient Indian societies were diverse and organized into tribes, confederations, and self-governing communities. **FACT**
10. The term 'Hindu' was originally used by Persians and Greeks to describe people living beyond the Sindhu River. **FACT**
11. Colonial-era scholars misrepresented Dharmic histories by grouping multiple spiritual traditions into one "Hinduism." **FACT**
12. Dharmic traditions spread through forced conquest and military expansion. **MYTH**
13. Ancient Indian governance structures often included elected councils and advisors, rather than just centralized monarchies. **FACT**
14. Modern scholars recognize that colonial narratives about Ancient India were often inaccurate and misleading. **FACT**
15. Dharma traditions remain a key part of global history and continue to influence cultures worldwide. **FACT**

# Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

## Activity: "Find Your Matching Pair" – Myths vs. Facts

### Objective:

Students will walk around the room to find their **matching pair**—one student holds a **myth**, while another holds the **corresponding fact**. This encourages movement, critical thinking, and collaboration.

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### Preparation:

- Print and **cut out** each statement below.
- **Half the class** will receive **myths (false statements)**, and the **other half** will receive **matching facts (true statements)**.
- Students **walk around** and find the correct match.

### Instructions for Students:

1. Each student gets **one card** (either a **myth** or a **fact**).
2. Walk around the room to **find the student holding the matching card**.
3. Once paired, discuss why your two statements go together.
4. Each pair will share their match with the class.

## Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

### Activity: "Find Your Matching Pair" – Myths vs. Facts Handout

<b>Myth (False Statement)</b>	<b>Fact (True Statement - Correction)</b>
Dharma traditions require belief in God.	Some Dharmic traditions revere one Supreme Being, others a variety of divine beings; still others do not revere any such beings. Dharmic concepts of the Supreme Being or divine beings are not quite the same as the Abrahamic concept of "God" or "gods."
The Aryan Invasion Theory is widely accepted by modern scholars.	Modern scholars reject the Aryan Invasion Theory due to lack of evidence.
Ancient India had only one unified religion, which later became known as Hinduism.	Ancient India had many diverse spiritual traditions, later grouped under "Hinduism" by colonial scholars. However, the ancient, diverse spiritual traditions still survive.
The term 'Ārya' was originally a racial classification that divided Indian society.	The term 'Ārya' was a cultural identifier, not a racial classification.
Ancient Indian societies were racially segregated based on the Aryan and Dravidian divide.	Ancient Indian societies were diverse and organized into tribes, confederations, and self-governing communities.
The Indosphere was isolated and had little interaction with other ancient civilizations.	The Indosphere was highly connected through trade, cultural exchanges, and knowledge-sharing.
Dharmic traditions spread through forced conquest and military expansion.	Dharmic traditions spread through trade, cultural exchanges, and intellectual influence, not through conquest.

## Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

### Activity: "Find Your Matching Pair" – Myths vs. Facts

#### Answer Key

#	Myth (False Statement)	Fact (True Statement - Correction)
1	Dharma traditions require belief in God.	Some Dharmic traditions revere one Supreme Being, others a variety of divine beings; still others do not revere any such beings. Dharmic concepts of the Supreme Being or divine beings are not quite the same as the Abrahamic concept of "God" or "gods."
2	The Aryan Invasion Theory is widely accepted by modern scholars.	Modern scholars reject the Aryan Invasion Theory due to lack of evidence.
3	Ancient India had only one unified religion, which later became known as Hinduism.	Ancient India had many diverse spiritual traditions, later grouped under "Hinduism" by colonial scholars. However, the ancient, diverse spiritual traditions still survive.
4	The term 'Ārya' was originally a racial classification that divided Indian society.	The term 'Ārya' was a cultural identifier, not a racial classification.
5	Ancient Indian societies were racially segregated based on the Aryan and Dravidian divide.	Ancient Indian societies were diverse and organized into tribes, confederations, and self-governing communities.
6	The Indosphere was isolated and had little interaction with other ancient civilizations.	The Indosphere was highly connected through trade, cultural exchanges, and knowledge-sharing.
7	Dharmic traditions spread through forced conquest and military expansion.	Dharmic traditions spread through trade, cultural exchanges, and intellectual influence, not through conquest.

## Guided Notes: What is Hindu Dharma?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Section 1: Understanding Hindu Dharma

1. Hindu Dharma is a set of traditions that focus on \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  2. Unlike many religions, Hindu Dharma does not require followers to accept a specific set of \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. These traditions have developed over \_\_\_\_\_ years.
  4. One of the key goals in Hindu Dharma is to free oneself from life's \_\_\_\_\_.
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### Section 2: The Indosphere

5. The Indosphere includes ancient \_\_\_\_\_ and culturally related regions in \_\_\_\_\_.
  6. This region has been inhabited by humans for at least \_\_\_\_\_ million years.
  7. Early genetic connections show shared ancestry between Indians and \_\_\_\_\_.
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### Section 3: Colonial Misconceptions

8. The \_\_\_\_\_ theory falsely claimed that a light-skinned group invaded India and took over.
  9. This theory was based on \_\_\_\_\_ beliefs rather than real historical evidence.
  10. Scholars today recognize that the term Ārya was a marker of \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_.
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### Section 4: Dharma Traditions

11. Some Dharma traditions revere one \_\_\_\_\_, others a variety of divine beings, and still others do not revere any such beings.
12. Unlike some other religious traditions, Dharma traditions spread through \_\_\_\_\_ rather than \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Many different \_\_\_\_\_ traditions coexisted in ancient India.

# Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

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## Think-Pair-Share Discussion

Discuss with a partner and answer below:

14. What do you notice about social organization in ancient India?
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## Reflection Questions

15. Why is it important to challenge historical misconceptions about Dharma traditions?
16. How do colonial influences continue to shape the way we learn about different cultures today?

## Understanding Dharma Traditions and the Indosphere

### Writing Task: Reflection on Myths and Facts About Ancient India

Prompt: In 1-2 paragraphs, explain one myth about Dharma traditions or Ancient India that you learned about today. Describe why this myth is incorrect and how modern scholars have corrected it. Use at least one fact from the lesson to support your explanation.

#### Scoring Rubric (10 Points Total)

Category	Points	Description
Understanding of the Myth (3 pts)	3	Clearly identifies a myth and explains its meaning.
Correction with Supporting Facts (3 pts)	3	Correctly explains why the myth is incorrect and provides accurate facts from the lesson.
Organization & Clarity (2 pts)	2	Writing is structured in logical paragraphs with clear sentences.
Grammar & Mechanics (2 pts)	2	Writing is free from major spelling and grammar errors.