

# What is Hindu Dharma?

Understanding Hindu Dharma  
Traditions and the Indosphere

What do you know  
about Ancient  
India?

Have you ever  
heard of the Aryan  
Invasion Theory?

# What is Hindu Dharma?

- Hindu Dharma traditions developed over thousands of years.
- They focus on self-improvement rather than requiring specific beliefs.
- The goal is to help people manage or free themselves from life's repetitive cycles.

These traditions focus on self-improvement and personal growth. They do not require people to follow a specific set of beliefs. Instead, they welcome many different ideas and ways of thinking, embracing diversity and inclusion. There are common methods of debate and discussion to resolve or better understand unresolvable differences of opinion.

# What is the Indosphere?

The Indosphere includes ancient India and culturally related regions in Asia.

- It has been inhabited by different early human species for at least 1.5 million years.
- This region has seen cultural exchanges and diversity for tens of thousands of years.



**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.”**

# Early Human Migration & Cultural Diversity



1.5 million  
years ago

The Indosphere was home  
to Homo erectus



70,000 years  
ago

The Indosphere was home  
to Homo sapiens



Early  
connections

Genetic studies show early  
connections between  
Indians and Europeans.  
Later migration patterns led  
to distinct genetic groups.



Scientists discovered that ancient Indian people shared some DNA with Europeans from at least 40,000 years ago. However, as populations changed over time, only a tiny amount of that early European DNA remains in Indians today. This suggests a distant connection long ago, but most of the genetic material in modern Indians comes from other sources.”

1. Early European scholars misunderstood ancient writings. They came up a flawed idea that a group of light-skinned “Aryans” invaded India and took over.

## **Colonial Misconceptions and the Aryan Invasion Myth**

2. This theory was not based on real evidence. Instead, it was influenced by outdated racial beliefs that tried to rank people by skin color and ancestry.



Colonial-era European scholars made 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 Aryans’ invaded the Indian subcontinent and civilized the darker-skin-colored ‘Dravidians.’”

- Scholars today reject the Aryan Invasion theory and recognize India's diverse cultural history.
- The term Arya was a marker of culture, not race. "American" is a nationality. Similarly, Arya represents a distinct culture shaped by diverse heritages.

## Correcting the Colonial Narrative

Ancient Indian societies included many different groups of people and cultures, and they welcomed diversity. They were not organized by race or skin color, but instead by shared traditions, customs, and ways of life.

# Hindu Dharma Traditions

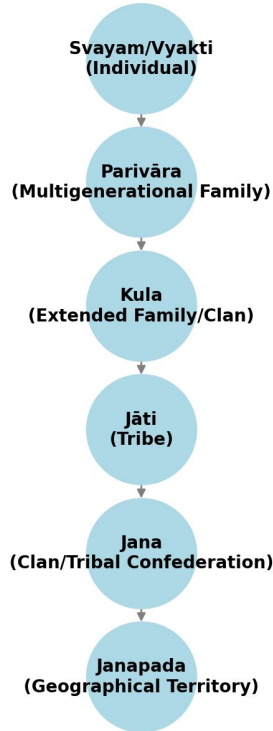
Hindu traditions did not spread through conquest but through cultural exchange and alliances.

Many different spiritual traditions existed together in different regions.

Some Hindu traditions revere one Supreme Being, others a variety of divine beings; still others do not revere any such beings. Hindu concepts of the Supreme Being or divine beings are not quite the same as the Abrahamic concept of "God" or "gods."

# Think-Pair-Share Discussion

## Social Organization in Ancient India



What do you notice about the social organizations found in Ancient India?

# The Lasting Impact of Colonial Narratives

- Colonial misconceptions about Hindu Dharma traditions are still taught in many textbooks.
- These different Hindu traditions were mistaken to be one single religion by colonial scholars who called it Hinduism.

Between the 1700s and 1900s, most Europeans and Americans saw Hindus as outsiders or heathen. However, some Hindu leaders who were educated in European and American schools used the idea of religion to help gain independence from British rule.

# Reflection Questions

What is one thing you learned about Hindu Dharma traditions that surprised you?

Why is it important to challenge historical misconceptions?

How do colonial influences continue to shape how we learn about different cultures today?