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India's Societies & the Dharma Traditions

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Human Groupings in Ancient India

Ancient Indian societies have traditionally organized themselves through a variety of methods, with layers of ways of self-identifying as well as group membership. The methods of self-organizing were agreed to by the particular people group's elected representatives, and therefore cannot be generalized beyond that particular region or people group (tribe/tribal confederation/nation). There were, nevertheless, some common features.

A **vyakti** (/individual) was usually part of a **parivāra**, which consists of an immediate family and multigenerational blood relations. A **parivāra** was usually part of a **kula** (clan), an extended family or clan with shared ancestry and kinship, whether genetic or otherwise, including relations through marriage. Subclans are often named for any significant individual and their children, or smaller clans that ally with larger clans through treaty or partnership. Many **parivāras** and/or **kulas**, when they shared some kind of distinguishing social features, might form a **jāti** (tribe).¹ The shared distinguishing features of a **jāti** might include any combination of commonly accepted origin stories, histories, worldviews, teachings, customs, spiritual traditions, language or dialects, trade or guild affiliation, occupation, profession, etc. While initially a tribe would have many internal variations due to it being composed from many clans, over time a tribe would trend towards synthesizing a more streamlined set of distinguishing features, while still making provisions for any dearly held clan traits to be accommodated.² Many **kulas** and/or **jātis** would ally through treaty or marriage and form a **jana**, a clan/tribal confederation, usually with a commonly elected leader and a council made up of the leaders of the other clans. The geographical territory of a **jana** was called a **janapada**.³

There were originally sixty-four major **janapadas** in ancient India (c. 1100-600 BCE), in addition to three great Tamil dynasties (the Cheras, Choḷas, and Paṇḍyas). These were mainly formed around cities and connecting trade routes. Thousands of other settlements belonged to tribes that did not join the more expansive confederations.⁴

As **janas** grew and further governance was required, an elder of each family would form an assembly (**samiti**). These assemblies selected a leader (**rājā**) who had a **sabhā**, a small group of advisors consisting of **purohitas**, or chaplains and experts, and the **senāni**, guards.⁵ When a group of **janas** allied through treaty or marriage, their combined **janapada** territories were called a **mahājanapada** or tribal nation. There were sixteen **mahājanapadas** in ancient India (c. 600-400 BCE), each of them containing one or more urbanized areas serving as economic and administrative centers, and

¹ Jha, Vivekananda. "Social Stratification in Ancient India: some reflections". *Social Scientist*. 19.3. 1991, p. 38.

² Clack, Timothy. "Syncretism and Religious Fusion" in Insoll, Timothy (ed.) 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*.

³ Parasher, Aloka. "Assimilation Conservation and Expansion – Complex Strategies of Tribal Absorption in the Early Indian Context". *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*. 44. 1983

⁴ Erdosy, George, ed. (1995). *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity*. Indian Philology and South Asian Studies, Vol. 1. Berlin: De Gruyter.

⁵ Gupta, R.K. "Law & Order Administration in Ancient India". *The Indian Journal of Political Science*. 2004

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numerous villages or forest settlements wherein resided both Āryas (originally referring to 172 multiethnic tribes, a few of which formed confederations that led to influential *janapadas* and then the *mahājanapadas*) and those tribes and confederations choosing to remain independent from Ārya societies.⁶

The forests, whether beyond or within the *mahājanapadas*' boundaries, were left autonomous if there were independent clans living there.⁷ These independent clans and clan federations maintained their own ancient territories, societies, and traditions.⁸ Beyond the *mahājanapadas* were many non-Ārya ancient Indian cultures. One of these, known as the Indus Valley Civilization, has been the focus of much discussion due to a plethora of archaeological studies conducted into their regions. There were, however, approximately 4,000 other people groups and their territories that have been routinely left out of the history of ancient India. This has led to a false dichotomization of ancient Indian history into that of the Āryas and a supposed homogenous Dravidian civilization of which the Indus Valley was an example. In fact, the *mahājanapadas* and the numerous kingdoms, territories, and realms of various tribal confederations, nations, and indeed civilizations like that of the Indus Valley should all be considered when discussing societies of ancient India.

As trade between societies increased, those that developed into prosperous cities (*nagara*) required administration.⁹ This led to oligarchic republics (*gaṇasaṅgha*) like the Vṛji and Malla republics. If based around a major city with a trading network, occasionally several *mahājanapadas* would ally through treaty or marriage and form a *sāmrājya*, a nation state or empire. Otherwise, if needs were met with limited trade or if a *kula*, *jaṭi*, or *jana* was self-sufficient, they could opt to function independently in the rural areas, forests, or hills they inhabited, away from the urban cities that were founded mainly on coastal lowlands or on the banks of navigable rivers. If these independent clans, tribes or their respective confederations were situated near or on trade routes or infrastructure such as ports, they would negotiate relationships with their more powerful neighbors. Otherwise the *janapadas/mahājanapadas* and other kingdoms respected those independent people groups' decision to enter into trade agreements, or maintain total autonomy.¹⁰ This structure lent itself to a broad, pluralistic society with great diversity within larger unified groups of people. It is also the reason for the survival (until West Asian and European colonial times) of distinct clan and tribe

⁶ Mallesham, N. "Emergence of Mahajanapadas: Asmaka Janapada" *Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices*. 2023

⁷ The network-model map has gained sufficient scholarly treatment given that its conclusions are being corroborated by anthropological and genetic studies. A good discussion is found in Kulke & Rotherman. 2004. *A History of India*. Penguin. p. 364.

⁸ Smith, Monica L. "Networks, Territories and the Cartography of Ancient States" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 95.4. 2005. p.842-844

⁹ Heitzman, James, *The City in South Asia*. New York: Routledge, 2008

¹⁰ Smith, Monica L. "Networks, Territories and the Cartography of Ancient States" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 95.4. 2005. p.838

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confederations which were later classified as and designated Backward or Criminal Castes and Tribes by the British Imperial administrators.¹¹

Gender and Sexuality

The ancient indigenous Indian medical science of Āyurveda, observed that although biological bodies are male, female, or intersex, the polar masculine and feminine heterosexuality is not the only sexual orientation possible. This variety is known as “third nature” (*tṛtīyā prakṛti*) and includes over forty-three different observed gender identities and sexual orientations. Various Hindu societies therefore evolved with men, women, and third nature scholars, soldiers, rulers, spiritual leaders, artists, tradespersons, workers, etc. Most Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and, later, Sikh societies mainstreamed heteronormativity while accepting those of a third nature, while some were specifically operated by and for third nature communities – these were mostly from the Hindu Dharma traditions.

Household, Marriage & Family

A household consisted either of a self-reliant individual, or a unit. A householder unit generally was formed by people who were related either through blood or partnership. Common since ancient times, though less common today, independent households functioned similar to homesteaders in the US, in that they gained the majority of their necessities from the land they lived on and bartered for/purchased specialized items they could not produce. This self-reliance was a high ideal as it was labor-intensive and so the meeting of needs was not always guaranteed. Households participating in the broader society with their clan, tribe, or nation achieved self-reliance through their own land or an industry for which they acquired skills. In order to receive the benefits of living within a broader society, there was a common and ancient understanding that a portion of their commodities or income should be given to the administrators to finance projects and services that benefited that society.

The majority of ancient Indian societies considered two people who professed a loving connection to be partnered. Regulations only applied when children were born to a specific partnership, and the parental responsibilities shared by the parents. Some Indian societies were matriarchal, others patriarchal, others non-binary led, and others a negotiated or balanced combination. In all cases, as a society, each discussed and decided their own norms regarding households. Households could be formed by self-reliant individuals, a partnered pair or group, or the family resultant of a specific partnership.

In the entirety of Hindu history, marriage in a formal sense was typically the preserve of kings, queens, and administrators, as their offspring could become the next rulers and inheritance was of national consequence. Thus, the vast majority of Hindus (and Buddhists and Jains) in ancient India instead formed relationships or unions on the basis of personal choice, sometimes informed by

¹¹ Phillips, Coretta et. al., “People are trapped in history and history is trapped inside them’: Exploring Britain’s Racialized Colonial Legacies in Criminological Research”. *The British Journal of Criminology*. 63.4. 2023. pp.811-827

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parents' guidance. These were also unions that would be blessed by the spiritual traditions. The later colonial requirement to have marriages that looked like Muslim and then Christian weddings, with a religious officiant and a contract, was imposed onto the royal Hindu weddings. These requirements were then forced upon the rest of Hindus, which made all legally recognized Hindu and Sikh weddings more of an arranged family affair rather than the formerly most common types of unions, and those advocated for by Hindu sources of knowledge, which were based on personal preference and liking.¹² Since Indian Independence, many Hindu and Sikh communities have moved away from arranged marriages, which occurred with or without the couple's full consent, to approaches which reaffirm their individual choice in marriage, such as arranged introductions or pure self-choice marriages. Arranged introductions in some ways mirror more ancient Dharmic approaches to finding a partner if unable to do so oneself. Interestingly, those contemporary Hindus who reject even arranged introductions as being too "traditional" often do so without the knowledge of the colonial history of how arranged marriages came to be.

Occupations, Crafts, Trades, and Professions

Householders would generally become self-reliant and even prosperous through an occupation, craft or trade, profession, or any combination of these. An occupation refers to any work a person engages in to earn a living. A craft or trade typically involves skilled labor and requires specialized training. A profession requires extensive education, training, and adherence to certain agreed-upon standards. They may also involve apprenticeships or on-the-job training.

The occupation one engaged in played a vital role in shaping the lives of people, influencing not only their work but also their social interactions, family dynamics, and migration patterns. These occupations could also determine social roles within communities, depending on the priorities and needs of the society or surrounding geography.

Work skills were usually acquired through the household or through apprenticeships. Some apprenticeships involved different levels of schooling in the craft or trade, while others involved learning on the job. Skills in a profession were also usually acquired through the household (if a family profession), or through formal schooling. If a professional teacher was instructing on a particular craft, trade, or profession, they would likely have firsthand knowledge of that work before or concurrently to acquiring professional teaching capabilities. Many crafts and trades became regarded as professions over time due to increasing complexity of the work or their value to a given society. The boundaries of these categories were context sensitive to a degree. Examples of occupations include agriculture, custodial work, or hospitality services. Crafts included pottery, textiles, or woodworking for example. Trades included metal work, carpentry, or stonework. Professions included doctor, administrator, tenured/commissioned artist, spiritual teacher, educator, researcher, etc.

¹² See, for example, this video by OddCompass: <https://youtu.be/Wmv9IIsUIU>

Work, Trade, and Society

In every society, a division of labor develops as skills are passed on from one generation to the next. People groups develop specialization based on the needs of their society, the quality of available resources, and their skills in transforming resources into specific goods and services. Over time, they may become known for these goods and services as the complexity of production increases. This took place in the Indosphere as it did throughout the world. Access to a resource or product that was specific to the territory of a clan or tribe could also be negotiated through treaties and alliances. With the passage of time, trade increased within and between groups, though some remained more isolated and self-sufficient, either not prioritizing or not needing specialization or more demarcated divisions of labor.

In ancient India, for example, certain clans or tribes living closer to the mountains may have developed skills for mining Himalayan salt. As demand would grow, more people would be trained at mining to keep up with supplying it. As a specialized good or service became more lucrative, some clans and tribes would join that particular specialized trade, while others would choose to continue with their own work or specialized trades.

As groups grew and interacted and specific goods and services became more renowned through trade networks, supply chains, alliances, treaties, and even marriages between rulers/administrators developed and grew. With growing trade networks and alliances, more planning, execution, delegation, specialization, and analysis also became necessary to ensure efficient and effective interaction, cooperation, innovation, exchange of goods and services, logistics, governance, defense, etc. within and amongst groups.¹³

In the ancient Indosphere (as in other societies across the globe), as clans and tribes formed confederate nations and trade networks grew even more, the nations' councils and leaders leveraged trade and the specialization of each clan and/or tribe for the benefit of the collective. The most prosperous trade-based clans and tribal nations generally developed ways of streamlining things, including developing raw materials (primary), manufacturing (secondary), services (tertiary), and education and training (quaternary) sectors of industry that were grouped in a variety of ways. People in these sectors (described by Vedic people as the *varṇas* - laborers, traders, defense and administrators, and scholars) shared best practices, training, human resources, evaluations, etc. This happened across similar industries. As a result, guilds in these various sectors developed naturally in these societies. Their relationship to the nation – taxation, logistics, infrastructure projects, etc. - was decided by the council of leaders/experts. These developments led to greater complexities and a need for a new group of intermediaries, such as administrative and compliance guilds.

Only in those Hindu societies that consisted of a large population, usually from different tribes with their own spiritual traditions and cultures, did guilds play an important role. These guilds tended to be

¹³ Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar. 2000. "Mahajanapada States of Early Historic India" in *A Comparative Study of City-state Cultures: an investigation*. Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. p. 387

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more restrictive and represented specific professions, e.g. doctors to administrators. They also looked at admission – just like a doctor trained in the Australian medical system must undergo extra training before being deemed competent in the American context, so too, guilds would determine how the skills of a doctor from a tribe that came from a humid region could apply in the common settlement in a dry region. This point is especially important considering that Hindus were trading across the whole of Asia and well into Europe and Africa from ancient to modern times.¹⁴

The alternative method of integrating societies was through the spiritual traditions and developing a common framework which held space for the individuality of the tribe/clan.¹⁵ These could not be scaled in the manner that guilds were, but this alternative was more prevalent in Asia. The urbanized nations, as such, tended to prefer guilds, as the administration's directives and taxation were easier to implement.

Only one task was and is sex specific: though a male is involved in conception, females give birth and have the ability to breastfeed children. This does not mean, however, that the plethora of tasks or work that exists (or existed) is not performed by women. There simply may be a period of time in some women's lives when doing those other tasks may not be possible or preferred. Age and ability may also influence one's ability to perform certain work. Very young, elderly, and differently-abled people may not necessarily be able to do some tasks with the same efficiency of able-bodied, trained people. Though, with assistance, they could be supported to do so. Similarly, in ancient India and the Indosphere, age and gender were natural limiters of certain work. Additionally, a young person could be fit and healthy, but not yet have the skills required for the job, so the duration of training and education were also times when a person could not be a fully productive member of the society - yet

¹⁴ Dalrymple, William. 2024, *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*. Bloomsbury.

¹⁵ For an early modern example of this: "Caste in early modern India should be contextualised within the complex relationships between state and society rather than reduced to either the socio-religious value proposed by Dumont or a political ideology of kingship in the neo-Hocartian sense. The most notable feature of early modern Khurda is the incorporation of the local communities of fort areas into the state apparatus as military and administrative centres that established compatible relationships with the vibrant market and trade. As localities were inducted into the redistributive structure of the state and the administrative technology of accounting was introduced, the localities came to be part of a wider network of market exchange. This transformation of the locality brings us to the emergence of a sense of patriotism in early modern Orissa, revolving around the Jagannātha cult and Gajapati kingship. People's affection for the land, embedded in the organic connection between their body-personhood and the mother goddess of the locality, was mediated through the institution of kingship to the cult of Jagannātha, the real ruler of Orissa. The Gajapati king, the representative of Jagannātha on earth, had established himself as the central sacrificer... Therefore, the duties assigned in the local system of entitlements now came to be redefined as sacrificial service for not only the local goddess but also the king and Jagannātha. The dutiful were allowed to maintain their way of life as long as it was offered as service for the country and god. It was through such a mechanism that early modern Khurda managed integration through difference." - Tanabe, Akio 2021. "Local society and kingship: reconsidering 'caste', 'community' and 'state'". *Caste and Equality in India*, Routledge, p. 82.

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this was understood to be a good investment of time and resources, as through education they would become skilled members of society rather than unskilled laborers.

As clans and/or tribes came together, spiritual and cultural experts also naturally tended to coalesce together. Additionally, people who provided manual labor for either the industries or the spiritual and cultural enterprises also naturally grouped themselves together. Furthermore, as trades became specialized, defense of the clan became delegated to specialists who were physically and mentally best suited to this task.

Each clan and/or tribal nation in ancient India and Asia in general had their own organizational models. Many insular tribes have governance (elders), spiritual and cultural leaders or guides, defense, and manual labor groups, with people sometimes taking on multiple responsibilities.¹⁶ Some nations in ancient India simply allowed for the proliferation of different groups of people. Others, especially those that became *sāmrājyas*, needed to coordinate these groups over vast distances and a variety of clan and/or tribe cultures. Such *sāmrājyas*, particularly those nations that were based on a particular culture, deliberated on how their societies would be organized in line with the needs of the day.

The majority of ancient Āryan *sāmrājyas* (Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu, c. 300 BCE to 11th century CE), tribal confederations, and settlements of isolated clans, generally adopted a model in which those that governed were supported by the laborers, industries, defense guilds, and the spiritual and cultural experts per the needs of the people. People could move around in these various sectors on the grounds of their callings and talents (*guṇa-karma*). Clan identity did not tie a person to a specific sector, though given that much industrial training was passed on from parents to children or through apprenticeships, it was common for clans to become adept in a certain sector.

The *sāmrājyas* that were intent on either expanding in trade or territory, however, required more thought behind their organization. A few among the original sixteen *mahājanapadas* – not all – decided to codify regulation of their social sectors in order to augment their efficiency, and evidently, especially augment the ability to collect taxes and enact government initiatives easily. They assigned a chief skill or product to a given clan and organized them in groups known as *jātis*. While they may have originally been egalitarian in their approach, ubiquitously humans do develop possessiveness and prejudices based on the groups to which one belongs. Additionally, some of these codes, in reaction to the realities of the day, were very specific about how each sector and even clan should interact, reminiscent of Christian feudalism or the Muslim Arab land-ownership birth-based hierarchy. The chief type of Āryan culture that preferred this model of *jāti*-based social organization was that based on the Mīmāṃsaka spiritual tradition.

In sum, Hindu societies could be:

- Isolated settlements of a particular household, clan, tribe, or tribal confederations and thus specific to a particular region.

¹⁶ Trautmann, Thomas R. 1997. *Aryans and British Indians*. University of California Press. p. 56.

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- Connected settlements of a variety of clans, tribes, tribal confederations who have limited their reach to a particular region in view of their self-reliance.
- Connected settlements of a variety of clans, tribes, tribal confederations who are pan-regional owing to their networks of trade. Some settled a natural geographic limit for their shared societies, all of which had pluralism embedded to respect the tribal confederation, tribe, clan, and even household-level diversity of culture or spiritual tradition.¹⁷ Others, particularly Mīmāṃsaka and Buddhist-ruled kingdoms, developed into empires and implemented a centrally codified, locally administered universal code.

Spiritual Functionaries

Hindus would turn to their parents or elders for life advice. If they were able to answer or guide the person, then they would, but if not, the person would be referred to experts. In the realm of spiritual issues, which for Hindus incorporate emotional, mental, intellectual factors as well, a person would be referred to the family's *guru* if they had one, or in the absence of one, an expert (*paṇḍita*) on spiritual teachings who would serve as a sort of navigator to direct the person to a *guru* that was best placed to assist.

Types of Hindu spiritual functionaries include:

- *Paṇḍita* - would be expected to have spent at least twelve years in general studies on topics ranging from history to philosophy and additional 2-3 years in discipline-specific studies (*śāstrī*) in subjects like mathematics, spirituality, and a wide variety of subjects. Though today *paṇḍita* refers to a spiritual expert, traditionally it was used to describe a person that had a post-*śāstrī* level expertise in any given discipline.
- *Ācārya* is a person who has done post-*śāstrī* further studies for at least another 2-3 years, and will likely be adept at related disciplines. *Ācāryas* are expected to have deep insight into the discipline they have studied. In the case of *ācāryas* of a spiritual tradition, they function as representatives of the traditions. They would also be expected to be or have qualifications similar to that of a *guru* (see below), while also knowing the gamut of traditional teachings and having expertise in the practices.
- *Guru* - spiritual guides consulted by many Hindus for mentorship and guidance in accordance with the specific spiritual tradition to which the *guru* belongs. Additionally, they may triage spiritual issues with the seeker, providing advice or answers to spiritual questions. The qualifications for a *guru* differ according to each tradition. In most traditions, the *guru* is adept in both the philosophy and practice of the tradition, and is capable at mentoring and counseling seekers on the path. This eligibility is authorized by their own spiritual guide, and can require formal training (having *paṇḍita*-level knowledge and over eight years of mentored practice), or acquiring similar proficiency through self-cultivation. Additionally, in some traditions the *guru* transmits the potential for spiritual development handed down by their tradition to the seeker.

¹⁷ Dirks, Nicholas B. 1992. *Castes of Mind*. Representations, no. 37, p. 59–60.

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- *Purohita* - literally, 'one who works for the betterment of the city'. Usually trained to a *śāstrī* level, they are competent in ceremonial observances for families and their homes, such as weddings, housewarmings, etc. They will have trained in the ceremonies of a shrine also, and can sometimes be found working in temples in the U.S., as temples here serve as cultural, learning, and spiritual centers for the community of a specific area in a way that Indian temples may not. Some *purohitas* may also be trained in spiritual care provision, similar to chaplains, and assist with spiritual care for issues that city residents may face.
- *Arcaka/Pūjārī* - these are specialists in caring for a shrine in accordance with the teachings of a given tradition, performing all shrine-based ceremonies with precision. Usually they would undergo at least *śāstrī*-level training in a traditional school, and are recognized by their own spiritual teacher, which recognition is then ratified/accepted by a council of elders or scholars of their particular tradition. The course of study varies somewhat between different Hindu traditions - Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, etc. Temples in the U.S. will usually have such functionaries, but where retaining a position is not possible, they may rely on visiting *pūjārīs* or even lay volunteers who have been given at least an initial training on the requirements of a specific temple or shrine.
- *Jyotiṣī* - in some Hindu Dharma traditions, astrology is a significant part of spiritual care provision. Aside from this, all Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist Dharma traditions calculate their festivals based on a variety of calendars, the chief of which is the lunisolar calendar, and will consult with *jyotiṣīs* who have had at least a *śāstrī*-level training in a given subdiscipline of astrology.
- *Vaidya* - these are *śāstrī*-level educated and mentored traditional medicine doctors. A variety of ancient medical sciences have survived till today through passed down formal practitioners and healers, home remedies, and because of their recognition by allopathic medicine as successful in complementary therapies and, in some cases, as management for chronic ailments. Āyurveda is well regarded, but therapies according to Uzhichil systems and others developed to treat injuries in martial training like Kalaripayattu are seeing a resurgence.
- *Jhāṅkrī/Dhāmī*/etc. - known by many other names, these are oracles, mediums, and healers that have very ancient roots and have survived centuries of persecution in colonial regimes and remained somewhat intact. They are very common in ancient regional/tribal Hindu and Buddhist Dharma traditions and are consulted regularly to intercede or channel on behalf of individuals or whole communities. Even the Dalai Lama in Vajrayāna Tibetan Buddha Dharma tradition relies on the counsel not only of the scholars but also of the recognized oracles. Typically, in addition to being recognized as possessing the gift of mediumship from a young age, they would be guided by a mentor for over seven years in practices to increase and hone their abilities and skills. Many Hindu and Jain Dharma traditions place a lot more emphasis on philosophical explanations, and prefer practitioners to focus on self-cultivation, but some do respect the explanations and work of the oracles and mediums.
- *Sādhu, Sannyāsī, Bhikṣu, Vairāgī, Muni, Svāmī* - these are people who decide to engage in full-time spiritual pursuit and give up their material lives in order to do so. After years of being a *brahmacārin* - a trainee under instruction and mentorship of a reputed teacher

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of a given lineage in a Dharma tradition - a person who desires to renounce worldly life may do so if deemed qualified and be admitted as a recognized full-time renunciate of that order of a given Dharma tradition. After this point, they live and practice in accordance with the guidelines of their tradition. There are many modes of living as a renunciate. Broadly, there are renunciates that live in hermitages, or solitary renunciates who are itinerant or of fixed residence; there are renunciates who teach others and those who engage solely in personal spiritual practice, etc. They are generally unmarried, and the only Hindu category of functionaries that are celibate. Buddhist and Jain Dharma traditions primarily function with these as the spiritual experts and the rest of society referred to as lay practitioners. Hindu Dharma traditions have place for *sādhus* etc., but not all of them.

- *Sādhaka* - simply, one who has undertaken to perform a spiritual practice, or series thereof under the guidance of their guru.
- *Śiṣya* - these are people who have pledged to follow the systematic teachings and practices of a specific Dharma tradition under the guidance of a qualified *guru*. *Sādhakas* generally focus on performing spiritual practices diligently, whilst a *śiṣya* may also focus on gaining more philosophical knowledge. They can be part-time or full-time practitioners. The majority are normal people who elect to take a specific spiritual teacher as their guru for guidance in life. The Sikh Dharma tradition/Sikhī takes its name from this phenomenon; Sikh is the Panjabi derivative of the Sanskrit word *śiṣya*, students of the 10 *gurus* of Sikhī.

Especially in Hindu traditions, any of these functionaries could (and may) be women, men, or non-binary, and can hail from South Asia or other countries. In Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain tradition, it is more common for their spiritual leaders to be men with a few traditions permitting women leaders also. Though Hindu *gurus* and *paṇḍitas* may be seen clothed predominantly in white, yellow or saffron-colored traditional clothing, this depends on the tradition and can include blue, green, black, and other colors. They often wear ceremonial markings on their forehead and body.

Example of an Ancient Indian Society: Mīmāṃsa-based

Ancient Indian societies generally organized in accordance with the advice derived from a shared consensus of the experts in society. Societies with rulers would usually form a formal council of experts to advise the administration. Experts derived their expertise from a variety of occupational and professional sources, including spiritual sources of knowledge. As these societies grew, some rulers likely observed that the Mīmāṃsā's central authority of the Vedas and development of legal codes could be a powerful aid in assisting cohesion, and so in the period of the Second Urbanization (6th c. BCE) onwards, when new city-states were being created, they similarly had their administration author codes of conduct for their societies.

A few ancient Indian societies became more powerful and expanded into famous Indian empires - the Cheras, Choḷas, Paṇḍyas, Nandās, Mauryas, Guptas, etc. Most depended on legal codes that were authored or amended by each ruler's administration, such as those contained in Ashoka's edicts. Some found it convenient to have legal experts from the Mīmāṃsa tradition compose legal

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codes (the Dharmaśāstras), as the codes were simply handed on from ruler to ruler and did not get significantly updated.

Some legal codes set very defined social models along the lines of the different tribes. Endogamy, for example, was prescribed as a kind of immigration policy, in an effort to ensure that the values and agreements of the original tribal alliance were not overruled by those of incoming tribes. In reality, endogamy was, in essence, a suggested model, and not necessarily enforced.¹⁸ It was an ideal seen as a means of ensuring the survival of the tribe's unique cultural identity without too much dilution (a modern, though nuanced, example may be the discussions on Syrian refugees in Germany).

Legal codes that rulers of Mīmāṃsaka kingdoms had authored are known as Dharmaśāstras. Of the hundreds that existed, twenty are still known, and only four survive intact. The *Manusmṛti*, one of the later Dharmaśāstras, advocated for each clan/tribe to be assigned a fixed, hierarchical position in the formerly general and fluid *varṇa* classification of ancient Vedic society. A social model based on identifying a person by the occupation/profession of their tribe (*jāti*) and viewing the broader sectors of these occupations/professions hierarchically was evidently easier to govern. But over time inequalities were leveraged to fulfill the consumerism-driven economies of that specific empire, much in the way that western capitalism operates today. Social status in societies based on the *Manusmṛti* tied a given tribe to a specific professional/occupational guild, and placed them in specific social groupings that had restrictions in terms of endogamy, access to education, gender equality, etc. all of which bolstered the economic capability of the empire.

However, the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, a code which was ignored by the British empire scholars, was much more prevalent in a variety of kingdoms in ancient India, attested by its frequent citation in legal documents that survive. It focuses on a merit-based social organization system and therefore a much more fluid society, providing a contemporary contradistinction to the endogamous system of the *Manusmṛti*.

Degrees of fluidity existed in some Mīmāṃsā-based societies, especially if a person developed skills in a profession or occupation that was within the purview of a different sector or class to that of their family, or was of a *jāti* that was not assigned a fixed place.¹⁹ Societies that, for a few centuries, used the *Manusmṛti* and codes similar to it focused on a capital-driven empire, and thus hereditary occupation/profession was the chief arbiter of one's place in society. Accordingly, as occupation/profession depended on one's age/life-stage, gender, and familiarity with a given occupation/profession (usually as learned through one's tribe), all of these became highly regulated in the *Manusmṛti* and other societal codes. Compare wealthy modern nation-states: they tend to have the strictest immigration policies and high discrimination and inequality in their societies no matter how egalitarian the constitution is. It is a reality of capital-based economies.

¹⁸ Samarendra, Padmanabh, 2016. *Concept of Caste and Practices of Jati: Exploring Roots of Incomparability*. Contemporary Readings in Marxism: A Critical Introduction, p. 345-6.

¹⁹ Quigley, Declan, 2002. *Is a Theory of Caste Still Possible?* Social Evolution & History, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 147.

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As these Dharmaśāstra-based societies developed, other Hindu societies doubled down on their own independent and distinct societal models prioritizing different goals than outright expansion and consumerism. Deep thought on the purpose of human life beyond being a part in the materialist machine led to expanded teachings on the *puruṣārthas*, the goals of human life, and played a big role in further deepening the spiritual teachings in a manner that is still applicable in modern consumerist societies today.

Harmful Misconceptions of Ancient Indian Societies

Most of the calls for rethinking hierarchical and inhumane practices and rampant consumerism came straight from the ancient Hindu spiritual teachers – many of whom from the Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava Dharma traditions publicly disagreed with their Mīmāṃsaka counterparts. These critiques and disagreements are recorded in the annals of Indian history, but seldom paid any attention.

Instead, Europeans theorized that the whole of Hindu/Indian society was organized as a four-fold “caste system” plus a class of “untouchable” outcastes outside the main four. This system was supposedly created and enforced by a small and ostensibly oppressive Hindu priestly class of the false religions of India with seemingly little to no opposition from the masses for millennia.²⁰ This was an absolutely fabricated presumption based on their own European religious history.²¹ This idea was especially pushed by Christian missionaries and has a very deeply Protestant bent to it.^{22, 23, 24} These colonial-era scholars were hyper-focused on a few Indian literary sources that looked to them like legal codes.²⁵ They presumed, without evidence, that these codes were enforced and followed by every non-Muslim (as Muslims followed Sharia) in the British Raj.²⁶ However, it is clear that they neither were able to nor had a desire to understand what the reality was. Instead, they categorized the entirety of the British Raj according to their presumptions, including that there existed one rigid, stagnant caste system of all followers of something called “Hinduism”.²⁷

²⁰ Keppens, Marianne and De Roover, Jakob, 2020. *The Brahmin, the Aryan, and the Powers of the Priestly Class: Puzzles in the Study of Indian Religion*. Religions 2020, 11, 181, p. 2, p. 9.

²¹ Ibid, p. 9-13.

²² Gelders, Raf & Derde, Willem, 2003. *Mantras of Anti-Brahmanism: Colonial Experience of Indian Intellectuals*. Economic and Political Weekly, p. 4611.

²³ Keppens, Marianne and De Roover, Jakob, 2020. *The Brahmin, the Aryan, and the Powers of the Priestly Class: Puzzles in the Study of Indian Religion*. Religions 2020, 11, 181, p. 8.

²⁴ De Roover, Jakob and Claerhout, Sarah, 2015. *The Caste Connection. On the Sacred Foundations of Social Hierarchy*. Theatrum Historiae, (17), 9–36., p. 18, 21, 25-29, 32.

²⁵ Dirks, Nicholas B., 2002. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press, chapter 5: The Textualization of Tradition: Biography of an Archive, p. 81-106.

²⁶ De Roover, Jakob and Claerhout, Sarah, 2015. *The Caste Connection. On the Sacred Foundations of Social Hierarchy*. Theatrum Historiae, (17), 9–36., p. 32

²⁷ Ibid, p. 22.

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This false and harmful presumption is still by far the most common description of “Hinduism” given to this day in introductory works, encyclopedia entries, school textbooks, and other sources.²⁸ In reality, terms like “Hindu religion” or “Hinduism” and “the caste system” do not refer to any institutions or entities which are or have ever been present in Indian society until that point, but only to concepts in the Western cultural perception and (mis)understanding of India. While there certainly existed (and exist) a wide variety of spiritual traditions and communities in India, the conceptions of “Hinduism” and “the caste system” are not factual descriptions of these societies, but rather descriptions of how Europeans systematically made sense of their experiences of Indian society.^{29, 30}

What was Indian society in reality? Like any other society on the planet: complex and ever-changing. Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Zoroastrians, as ancient traditions, have had many different models upon which their variously distinct societies operated.³¹ In some, particularly those of the Mīmāṃsakas, binding restrictions were ascribed to their social models in order to make a society easier for the rulers and administrators to manage, and ostensibly manipulate. However, to presume that this was the case for all Hindus is to erase the histories of the numerous non-Mīmāṃsaka societies and knowingly ignore history;³² even in Mīmāṃsa-based ancient Hindu societies, there

²⁸ Keppens, Marianne and De Roover, Jakob, 2020. *The Brahmin, the Aryan, and the Powers of the Priestly Class: Puzzles in the Study of Indian Religion*. Religions 2020, 11, 181, p. 2, p. 9.

²⁹ Balagangadhara, S. N., 2012. *Reconceptualizing Indian Studies*, Delhi, p. 34-59.

³⁰ “The notion of a caste hierarchy with certain distinct properties came into being in a process of... observations about Indian society reported by Europeans. By drawing on common-sense ideas that circulated in... Europe, scholars created a... pattern in their descriptions of Indian culture and society. They translated texts and terms along the lines of this conceptual pattern and fit in the facts reported by their fellow Europeans. In the process, they also ignored or distorted many other textual passages and empirical findings that refuted their account. Thus, the conceptual pattern of ‘the caste system’ could emerge. However, this pattern is not present in the way Indians experience their own society and practices. In this sense, ‘the caste system’ is an experiential entity internal to the cultural world of the West. British colonials and European travellers acted as though this entity exists and they also taught Indians to talk and sometimes act in this way. Of course, this does not mean that injustice, violence, or discrimination between and among different jatis did not exist in Indian society before missionaries and colonial officials began to talk about the caste system. But it does imply that these phenomena did not embody the form and pattern attributed to them by the dominant conception of ‘the caste hierarchy’. The caste system never existed (and still does not exist) as an actual social structure or system in the social world of the Indian subcontinent. Instead, it is a conceptual and experiential entity present in the Western culture’s discourse about India.” - De Roover, Jakob and Claerhout, Sarah, 2015. “The Caste Connection. On the Sacred Foundations of Social Hierarchy”. *Theatrum Historiae*, (17), 9–36., p. 19.

³¹ Quigley, Declan, 2002. “Is a Theory of Caste Still Possible?” *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 140.

³² De Roover, Jakob and Claerhout, Sarah, 2015. “The Caste Connection. On the Sacred Foundations of Social Hierarchy”. *Theatrum Historiae*, (17), 9–36., p. 14.

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were changing social models and structures and significant opportunities for social mobility.³³ Modern sources that perpetuate such colonial-era stereotypes, whether foreign or South Asian, should be questioned in view of the fuller history of all South, Southeast and broader Asian Hindu societies - not just the ones that education systems have made the most familiar since colonial times.

All of the social models possible that evolved in Indian societies throughout ancient history, from the first human settlements until the arrival of the British Raj's administration, were invalidated and replaced by the British's imposition of a singular law in 1862, which they then policed and enforced as "Hindu tradition" and "custom" although they themselves had largely invented it.³⁴ At this time they enumerated the "castes" through census exercises and instituted a rigid caste system which was forced onto Hindu populations however poorly it fit their former social organization and practices, using anthropology as a direct tool of colonial rule rather than impartial scholarship.³⁵

This was significantly exacerbated by the British's imposition of the surname system on India around the same time. Prior to this point, from ancient times up until the mid-19th century, the majority of Indians did not have surnames, only personal names; individual personal identity was far more emphasized than family-based identity. The British fundamentally altered this, requiring all Indians to declare their "caste", "sub-caste", etc. (despite these not having previously been concepts known to Indians at all, or at best being very poor and inconsistently applied translations of highly diverse and fluid Indian concepts) and legally fixing these as their surnames, which were thereafter hereditary, thus administratively tying Indians to inflexible caste-based identities in a wholly new, non-indigenous manner. This was required and enforced through taxation records, police files, school enrollments,

³³ "At an organisational level, some community servants, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, potters and barbers were reproduced through the endogamous institution of jāti. On the other hand, foot soldiers, accountants and even chiefs were competitively recruited from the peasant and pastoralist population rather than only being ascribed by caste in the narrow sense (Kolf 1990, 2004). Because the border and political relationships of polities... often changed as a result of warfare, there were always new opportunities for military, administrative and other posts to be obtained in newly acquired forts. Candidates for military and administrative posts had to prove their ability through deeds, rather than by mere caste ascription. Yet, once a post was attained, its owners were entitled to look upon it as their hereditary and ascribed occupation or office. Therefore, it was not the caste system in the sense of hierarchically ascribed status that was crucial for defining people's identity... Rather, caste, in the sense of roles and positions in a complementary sociopolitical whole, was determined by the integrative structure of the system of entitlements, which was open to both achievement and hereditary succession." - Tanabe, Akio 2021. "Local society and kingship: reconsidering 'caste', 'community' and 'state'". *Caste and Equality in India*, Routledge, p. 46.

³⁴ Dirks, Nicholas B., 2002. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press, chapter 8: The Policing of Tradition: Colonial Anthropology and the Invention of Custom, p. 149-172.

³⁵ Ibid, chapter 10: The Enumeration of Caste: Anthropology as Colonial Rule, p. 198-228.

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census documents, land records, and ration cards.³⁶ So foreign was the concept of surnames to Indians that they often used their village as a surname, or their job, their region, or even the names of important trees that grew nearby. Some surnames were simply the name of that person's parent, and when frozen in time, it suddenly became the surname for all of their descendants. All of the indigenous context of how Indian people operated in the society of their kingdom, nation, or territory was arbitrarily reorganized at an Empire-based level and artificially tied onto history in a new, static system.

The Dharma traditions do not necessarily define prosperity in terms of monetary wealth and assets. Prosperity is contentment and satisfaction that is self-sustainable. A person could therefore be prosperous though living in a simple, temporary dwelling as a homesteader. Regional Hindu societies that did not produce many commodities or have permanent infrastructure were still regarded as prosperous. Pan-regional Hindu societies tended to create many commodities and permanent infrastructure, and over time, commodities and permanent infrastructure survives even if that society does not. The archaeological and literary record in Asia is therefore only representative of part of the story of Asians³⁷; oral tradition contains the rest of the story of these societies, which can now be backed up by genetics, linguistics, climatology, human migration science, sociology, anthropology, etc. Western history had not, especially at the time that foundational survey materials were written about Ancient India during the British Raj, evolved many methods to understand anything but the artifacts and the writings that survive. Accordingly, western history presumes that all of Asia should be considered to be represented by the writings and artifacts that survive. Even if various museums highlight the significant differences of the finds, and the literature points to differences of peoples, most information in the West lumps all South Asians together, or depending on political ideology, splits them along arbitrary lines that were formerly useful only to colonial administrators.³⁸

Though some professions and occupations garner a natural respect or aversion in some people, such as that of a doctor or a grave-digger, most Hindu societies, especially those in the monotheistic, pan-regional Hindu Dharmas, promoted equitable meritocracy. However, the expansion-minded Mīmāṃsaka rulers and administrations used these feelings of aversion or respect to organize their societies in a manner that cemented the ease of governance. Sadly, this also allowed them to be easily manipulated by relying on what in today's terms would be considered restrictive, discriminatory practices. There were a sizable majority of Hindus that did not adopt such social models. However, the insufficient research methods of colonial scholars means that today it is commonly presumed that all Hindu societies followed one social model – the one that was most prosperous and left more in the archaeological record due to their wealth.

³⁶

<https://swarajyamag.com/politics/british-imposed-indian-surnames-the-colonial-construct-in-personal-id-entity>

³⁷ Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi 2019. *Archiving the British Raj: History of the Archival Policy of the Government of India, with Selected Documents, 1858-1947* Archiving the British Raj: History of the Archival Policy of the Government of India, with Selected Documents, 1858-1947. Oxford University Press, p. 1-7.

³⁸ Mandair, Arvind-Pal S. 2009, *Religion and the Specter of the West Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*. Columbia University Press

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When one thinks of the issues between England and Scotland, Northern Ireland/Ireland and Wales – even in the U.K. a singular social model did not work; from distinct British societies, they were consolidated and ruled according to England's social model. Yet these same nations, composed of different, ancient tribal confederations, argued for greater autonomy based on their culture, language, and heritages. Why then can the West value and uplift societal uniqueness so long as it is in Britain (multigenerational family businesses, Scottish clans, etc.) and even the US (e.g. Midwestern Evangelical vs. Northeastern Catholic), while everyone in Asia must 'become unified' in order to be deemed 'civil' or 'proper'? Why should the inaccurate colonial presumptions of ~150 years be allowed to replace the entirety of human history in India and Asia broadly speaking – whether by westernized Asians or the West itself?

Mīmāṃsā is only one of the Vedic philosophical traditions (the six being Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, pūrva-Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta) upon which societies were founded in ancient India and related areas in Asia. Regional-ancestral Hindu Dharmas, Śākta, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Kaumāram, Saura, Gāṇapatya, and other regional and pan-regional monotheist Hindu Dharmas (and Sikhī/Sikh Dharma tradition after the 1400s), plus Buddha, Jaina, Cārvāka, and other pan-regional non-theist Dharmas: all of them had commentary on the social models adopted by rulers that adhered to these traditions which changed and evolved with each ruler and the times. To claim that all of these different people groups only followed one strict religious law since the time of the Vedas is to take the histories and frameworks of Abrahamic religions and impose them on top of all the variety of indigenous social models of Asia – whether the claimant is a westerner or a westernized Asian, be they Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian or Tribal. This is especially problematic, as claiming this invalidates all of the indigenous social models which were written out of existence by British colonizers, but still survive as teachings, practices, and culture in most Dharma traditions.

Anachronistically reading caste into history is not only a failure of scholarship, but is a technique that was weaponized by imperialist colonial officers and missionaries to subjugate Indians and vilify Hindus in particular.³⁹ For comparison, to accuse all Hindus of being casteist or to allege that caste oppression is inherent to Hinduism is similar to accusing all Muslims of being violent *jihadis*. As the world only studies "Hinduism" and not the Hindu Dharma traditions in their variety, many people are goaded to believe that there is no Hindu alternative to the Mīmāṃsā-based social model but that they can only find equality in other, historically and contemporarily discriminatory, world religions.

Stereotypes of Hindus as casteist and bigoted have further harmful consequences, in schools, in workplaces, in media and social media, and in society broadly.⁴⁰ In Western schools, lesson plans on

³⁹ Balagangadhara, S.N., 'Chapter 4 Colonialism and Colonial Consciousness', *Reconceptualizing India Studies* (Delhi, 2012; online edn, Oxford Academic, 20 Sept. 2012)

⁴⁰ De Roover, Jakob and Claerhout, Sarah, 2015. "The Caste Connection. On the Sacred Foundations of Social Hierarchy". *Theatrum Historiae*, (17), 9–36., p. 23-24, 33.

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Hinduism frequently (more than 60% of the time according to survey data⁴¹) associate it with “the caste system” in a way that leads to inaccurate and negative misconceptions of Hindus and bullying of Hindu students in schools. Side by side, content standards will discuss “Chinese religions and civilizations”, but instead of an equitable “Indian religions and civilizations” often it will be something along the lines of “Hinduism and the caste system,” which promotes fundamental and major misconceptions.⁴² One survey on bullying and bias in American schools⁴³ found that a full half of Hindu students report social isolation because of their religious beliefs, and one-third outright bullying. One quarter of Hindu students say that the teacher put them on the spot or singled them out when the section on Hinduism was discussed, and one Hindu student in eight said their teachers made sarcastic remarks about Hinduism in front of the class. This study also found a close correlation between a curriculum’s focus on caste and perceptions of bullying.

Research has also shown that inaccurate associations of caste with Hinduism in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) trainings generate broad prejudices against the Hindu American community in people who undergo the trainings, causing a 47.5% increase in the belief that Hindus are racist and a heightened willingness to punish Hindus for such perceived slights, and promoting hostile attribution biases toward Hindus that negatively distort perceptions of interpersonal interactions and promote intergroup hostilities. Furthermore, such trainings cause shocking increases in agreement with adapted quotes by Adolf Hitler, replacing “Jew” with “Brahmin” (the scholars and teachers; an important part of Hindu societies), such as agreeing that Brahmins are “parasites” (+35.4% agreement), “viruses” (+33.8%), and “the devil personified” (+27.1%). Thus associating caste with “Hinduism” directly leads to demonization and scapegoating of Hindus.⁴⁴ This echoes usage by actual white supremacist communities as well as radical left activist circles, who reuse formerly Antisemitic tropes against Hindus through dog whistles like “Brahmin Occupied Government,” a variation of the Antisemitic “Zionist Occupied Government.”⁴⁵

Other common misconceptions about so-called “Hinduism” include that it practices “idol worship” or “idolatry,” that it consists of disconnected beliefs without coherence, that it is polytheistic, that it is inherently misogynistic and/or Islamophobic/Sikhphobic, or otherwise oppressive and regressive.⁴⁶ Often treatments of “Hinduism” are hyper-focused on practices perceived as “weird” or exotic, or slander Hinduism as “heathen.”⁴⁷

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https://www.hinduamerican.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/HAFN_16_008-BullyingReport_final_RGB_r2.pdf

⁴² <https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/sscore2.pdf>

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Finkelstein, J. et al, 2022. *Instructing Animosity: how DEI pedagogy produces the hostile attribution bias*. Rutgers: Social Perception Lab.

⁴⁵ Finkelstein, J. et al. 2022. *Anti-Hindu Disinformation: a case study of Hinduphobia on social media*. Rutgers: NCRI p. 11.

⁴⁶ Long, J. D., 2017. *Reflections on Hinduphobia: A perspective from a scholar-practitioner*. Prabuddha Bharata, 122(12), p. 797–804.

⁴⁷ Altman, Michael J., 2017. *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893*. Oxford University Press, p. xvii.

Persecution of Indians in the Modern World

Anti-Indian sentiments, bias and prejudice (particularly fueled by misconceptions about Hindus) have led to severe persecutions of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, non-Sunni Indian Muslims, and Regional/Tribal Dharma traditions many times in various societies throughout history. Just a few examples from the 20th and 21st centuries include:

In South Asia:

- In the 1947 Partition of India about a million Hindus were killed⁴⁸, seven million Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Christians, and Sikhs lost their homes⁴⁹, and over 100,000 women and girls were kidnapped and raped.⁵⁰ The partition of India led to the demographic decline of Hindus from 15% to 1.6% in West Pakistan and from 31% to less than 9% in East Pakistan (Bangladesh).⁵¹
- In the 1971 Bangladesh genocide, about ten million Hindus lost their homes, approximately three million were killed, and more than 200,000 were raped.⁵²⁵³⁵⁴ The Pakistani military was engaged in “mass killing of unarmed civilians, the systematic elimination of the intelligentsia and the annihilation of the Hindu population,” according to U.S. Consul General Archer Blood.⁵⁵⁵⁶
- In the 1990 ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindus (who even the Sikh *gurus* had fought the Mughals to protect in history), about 350,000 Hindus were displaced^{57 58}, more than

⁴⁸ Bhalla, Guneeta Singh, 2022. *The Story of the 1947 Partition as Told by the People Who Were There*. Humanities, Summer 2022, Volume 43, Number 3.

<https://www.neh.gov/article/story-1947-partition-told-people-who-were-there>

⁴⁹ Perkins, C. Ryan, 1947 *Partition of India & Pakistan*. Stanford University.

<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/1947-partition/about/1947-partition-of-india-pakistan>

⁵⁰ Lata, Kusum, 2018. *The Partition of India During 1947 and the Women*. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, Volume 6, Issue 2 April 2018, p. 1434-37.

⁵¹ Minorities at Risk Project, 2006. University of Maryland.

<http://www.mar.umd.edu/assessment.asp?groupId=77102#:~:text=The%20Hindus%20have%20resided%20in,by%20West%20Pakistani%20military%20personnel>

⁵² https://www.hinduamerican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SIL-CR-Stmt-on-BHG_03.23.21.pdf

⁵³ https://www.hinduamerican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Chu-CR-Stmt-BHG_03.26.21.pdf

⁵⁴

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/worldviews/2013/02/13/the-female-factor-bangladesh-protests-break-boundaries/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/1430/text>

⁵⁶ Bass, Gary J., 2014. *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide*. Vintage.

⁵⁷ Ramachandran, S., 2020. “Can Kashmir’s Pandits Ever Return Home?” *The Diplomat*.

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/can-kashmirs-pandits-ever-return-home/>

⁵⁸ Rao, S, 2019. “Imran Khan Says India is Planning Ethnic Cleansing in Kashmir. But Pakistan has Actually Committed it.” *Haaretz*.

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium-imran-khan-says-india-is-ethnic-cleansing-in-kashmir-but-pakistan-committed-it-1.7686207>

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35,400 Hindu businesses, homes, and temples were destroyed⁵⁹, and about 1,100 Hindus were killed.⁶⁰ This was the seventh forced exodus suffered by Kashmiri Hindus since 1389. Since then, Pakistani-government backed terrorist groups have continued to carry out attacks on religious and civilian infrastructure in India, and murder people on the basis of religion (such as in the Pahalgam Terrorist Attack of May, 2025).

In the US:

- In 1907, over a hundred Sikhs and Hindus were attacked by violent mobs and driven out of the city of Bellingham, Washington, forced to abandon their homes.⁶¹
- In 1987, the Dotbusters hate gang targeted Hindus in New Jersey, committing murder and many assaults.⁶²
- After 9/11/2001, dozens of hate crimes were committed against Sikhs, Hindus and Indians.
- In an alarming recent trend, across the country there has been a sudden rise in temple desecration/vandalism and attacks on Hindu individuals committed by non-Hindu people of Indian origin. The California Civil Rights Department reported in 2024 that of religion-motivated hate incidents, anti-Hindu are the second-most common category at 23%, after only anti-Jewish incidents at 37%.⁶³

Summary

In ancient Indian societies, knowledge was often passed down through families or apprenticeships, shaping social roles and economic structures. Division of labor developed naturally within families, guilds, and trade networks. Specialization emerged based on resources, geography, and demand, influencing trade, governance, and social organization. Large Indian nations coordinated trade and industry through structured councils, leading to guild-based governance models. Ancient Indian societies were pluralistic, and operated under diverse organizational models -- many merit-based and socially mobile, while some were codified and more rigid for the purported purpose of efficiency in governance and taxation. The rigid "caste system" often associated with "Hinduism" was largely a colonial-era construct, based on European misunderstandings and governance strategies.

Pre-colonial Hindu societies were diverse and adaptable, with fluctuating social models rather than a single, static caste hierarchy. British administration in 1862 rigidified and policed a caste system that did not previously exist, and has been included in the constitution of the modern state of India in order to offer quotas to castes that were disadvantaged and discriminated against during the British Raj.

⁵⁹ State Times, 2015. *975 Temples, 428 Hindu Religious Places Crying for Protection: PNBMT*. State Times. <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/19/a-conversation-with-journalist-and-author-rahul-pandita/>

⁶⁰ Kashmir News Network. (n.d.). Political history of Kashmir: Islamic terrorism and genocide of Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandit Network. <http://ikashmir.net/history/genocide.html>

⁶¹ <https://www.saada.org/tides/article/legacies-of-the-1965-immigration-act>

⁶² <https://www.aaldef.org/news/the-juggernaut-the-dotbusters-were-not-a-joke/>

⁶³ <https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2024/05/2024.05-CA-vs-Hate-Factsheet.pdf>