



Distance Learning Programme

UPSC Mains

Indian Heritage & Culture





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INDIAN HERITAGE & CULTURE


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Religion: Philosophies & Movements

10

Chapter

Religion

Religion is an institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices. It shapes the human behaviour and ideology. It includes a set of moral and ethical conduct, which is usually reflected in the sacred texts. Religions emerged in the form of different beliefs that appeared almost simultaneously with the emergence of civilizations.

Buddhism

Buddhism as religion developed from the teachings of Siddharth Gautam. Gautam Buddha or Buddha as commonly known was born in 520 BCE in North East India. Initially the religion had no God as in other religions of that time, but later on the followers developed Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Arhats and Deities as God.

The real goal of Buddhism is to attain Nirvana, which is to free oneself from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. To attain this goal, some sects like Hinayana sect believe in the practice of meditation, whereas Mahayana Buddhist believe that Nirvana can be achieved by practicing mantras, devotion to deities.

Theravada Buddhists believe in attaining nirvana and escaping oneself from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Mahayana Buddhists believe in becoming of Bodhisattva, who help other beings to attain nirvana.

Key religious texts of Buddhism are Tripitaka, a Pali canon; Mahayana Sutra like Lotus Sutra and commentaries written by scholars like Ashvagosh, Nagarjuna etc.

Christianity

Christianity is believed to be based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew from Palestine under Roman rule. He was born in the 4th century BCE. Jesus is believed to be the son messenger of God, who is believed to be sent to earth to lead the commoners from sin and reach God.

Christianity has one God, who is a trinity of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. It also believes in angels, demons and saints. According to the belief system all have sinned and so are separated from God. The primary goal of Christianity is to attain salvation through faith in Christ and some believe in achieving this through following sacraments and doing good works.

The seven Sacraments of Church are Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The Hebrew Bible and New Testament are Holy texts of Christianity.

Hinduism

Hinduism is an indigenous belief system developed from its earliest forms from Vedic religion of 1500 BCE or earlier. Further major developments took place in 1st to the 9th

century CE. It developed as a belief system to lead a moral and ethical life. According to Hinduism there is one Supreme reality, which is Brahman and this supreme reality is manifested in form of many Gods and Goddesses.

According to Hinduism the Brahman is the primary soul which is present in each and every being on earth. Due to ignorance or illusion the being starts to believe self as Supreme and ignores the Supreme reality. This ignorance leads to bondage in the cycle of life, birth, death and rebirth.

The primary goal of Hinduism is to attain freedom from the cycle of bondage. This can be achieved by different methods, as has been discussed in the scriptures, performing devotion through meditation, yoga, worship, pilgrimage and achieve the freedom from goal.

Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, etc are some of the holy texts of Hinduism.

Islam

Islam was founded in 622 CE Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is based on the teachings propagated by Prophet Muhammad. According to Islamic belief system Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of almighty Allah, was tasked to spread the message of Allah to the masses. Islam believes in one God, Allah.

The primary goal of human is to submit to the will of God to gain Paradise after death. It believes in Eternal Paradise and Eternal Hell. Based on the acts, on judgment day each and every individual is blessed or punished.

Basic pillars of Islam are, Faith, Prayer, Alms, Pilgrimage, Fasting; Mosque services on Fridays; Ablutions before prayer; No alcohol or pork; Holidays related to the pilgrimage and fast of Ramadan.

The sacred text of Islam is Qur'an; and Hadith (tradition).

Jainism

Jainism was founded by Mahavira in century 550 BCE in eastern India. Mahavira is believed to be 24th Tirthankar of Jain religion. According to Jainism the universe is eternal and there exists a complex hierarchy among Gods, Humans, and all living things of the phenomenal world.

According to Jainism cycle of life and rebirth is due to accumulated bad Karma by individuals. The primary goal of the individual is to gain liberation by shedding the accumulated old Karma, and not acquiring any new bad Karma.

According to the teachings of Tirthankars, one must practice five vows in life; Non-Violence, Truth, Celibacy, Non-Stealing, Non-Possessiveness. Teachings of Mahavira are presented in various collections.

Confucianism

Confucianism is based on the teachings of Confucius. Confucius was a Chinese philosopher during 551-479 BCE.

Confucius was a moral and ethical philosopher. His teachings are focused more on behavioural aspects of Humans in life and society. Accordingly the primary goal of human



being is to fulfil one's role in society with propriety, honour and loyalty. He has not taught about any God, and has not addressed any practice to achieve freedom from the cycle of rebirth.

The teachings of Confucius are enumerated in the Analects. It includes his ideas, sayings and teachings.

Judaism

Judaism is religion of Abraham, which is believed to have originated around 1500 BCE. It was founded by Moses, whereas according to Jews belief their history backs to Abraham.

Jews believe that there is only one God, Yahweh. According to their belief system, in exchange for all the good that God has done for the Jewish people, Jewish people keep God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. Followers of Judaism obey God's commandments, live ethically and focus more on this life than the next.

Primary practices of Judaism include circumcision at birth, bar/bat mitzvah at adulthood, observing Sabbath, wearing tallit and tefilin, prayer services. Their religious text includes the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh); and the Talmud.

Sikhism

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak in 1500 CE, Punjab, India. Sikhism faith is the belief system of Nirgun Brahman. According to them the Nirgun ultimate reality is Onkaar, one and only one supreme reality.

According to Sikhism, one must overcome the self, align life with the will of God, and become a "saint soldier," fighting for good. The primary cause of reincarnation is bad karma and salvation lies in resolving bad karma and merging with God.

Prayer and meditation on God's name, services at temple (gurdwara), turban and five Ks. Balance work, worship, and charity.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) is the holy text of Sikhism.

Philosophical Systems

Indian philosophy is very rich, ancient and has its roots in the Vedic period. The great rishis or sages of India lived a secluded life in the forests and meditated on the ultimate truth or the nature of reality.

They expressed their revelations in hymns. Gradually, the systematized collection of these hymns led to the compilation of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Indian philosophy is distinctly spiritual in its approach. The Indian philosophy takes a comprehensive view of life and the universe. For an Indian philosopher, philosophy is not merely an intellectual pursuit, but a way of life too. The Indian philosopher tries to apply and exemplify the philosophy in his life. The tenets and teachings of the philosophy are also reflected in the life of the followers of the philosophy.

Thus India witnessed mass following of different philosophies and religions at different points of time. Philosophy has been an integral part of the life of Indians.

Four Purushartha

The Vedic tradition recognizes four basic ends or purusharthas of human life. They are as follows:

- **Dharma:** The word 'dharma', has its origin in the Sanskrit word, 'dhr' which means 'to sustain' or 'to support'. Dharma sustains or maintains life and lays down duties and obligations for man. Dharma is variously translated as duty, faith, righteousness, justice, ethics, morality etc.
- **Artha:** Artha means material wealth and it is considered important for the overall happiness and well-being of an individual. In a broad sense, it refers to man's professional activities, job, business, wealth, property, etc., that are helpful to live a good life.
- **Kama:** 'Kama' in the broad sense means desire. Man has a desire for numerous things and seeks pleasure in various activities and material objects. Man derives pleasure from sexual relation and material objects like food, drink etc.
- **Moksha:** It means liberation or total freedom from the sufferings of life or the cycle of life and death. It is considered as the ultimate goal of life.

Indian Philosophy

The Vedas are the oldest scriptures in the world and the Indian philosophical systems are broadly classified on the basis of their acceptance of the authority of the Vedas. The orthodox systems uphold the authority and supremacy of the Vedas while unorthodox or the heterodox did not believe in the authority of the Vedas.

- **Orthodox Systems:** Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa (Purva-Mimamsa), and Vedanta (Uttar-Mimamsa)
- **Heterodox Systems:** Jainism, Buddhism and Charvakas

Orthodox Philosophical Systems

Samkhya

Founder: Kapila

Basic Idea

It is one of the major orthodox Indian philosophies. The classical formulation of Samkhya philosophy is found in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṅkhya-Kārikā. Samkhya accepts Perception, Inference, and Verbal Testimony as the source of valid knowledge.

The Sāṅkhya analysis of causation is called Satkaryavada according to which the effect is present in its cause. It is normally explained as the view that the effect already exists in its cause prior to its production.

It is an atheistic philosophy. It is also a dualistic philosophy which believes in the existence of two types of entities, i.e., Prakṛti and Puruṣa. Both are eternal and independent of each other. Prakṛti is material and active in nature while puruṣa is conscious and inactive. According to Samkhya, creation comes into being due to the conjunction of the Prakṛti and puruṣa(s). Prakṛti is generally equated with nature or matter, while puruṣa may be equated with the soul or person.



Prakṛti constitutes three guṇas or qualities—sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva (essence) is the principle of light and goodness and produces pleasure. Rajas, is the principle of energy and passion, while Tamas (darkness) appears as inactivity and dullness. An imbalance in the intertwined relationship of these three dispositions causes the world to evolve from Prakṛti. Everything in this world is a manifestation of Prakṛti except Puruṣa. Prakṛti, though material and unconscious in nature, is purposeful and is said to function for the purpose of the individual Puruṣas.

Liberation

According to Samkhya, leaving the cycle of rebirth and transmigration is the way to final emancipation or liberation from suffering. This can be achieved through the realization of the fundamental difference between Prakṛti and Puruṣa. According to Samkhya, ignorance is the root cause of bondage and suffering. The self is eternal and pure consciousness, but due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with the material and physical body and its constituents. Once the self becomes free of this false identification and the material bonds through real knowledge, the salvation is possible. Liberation is the negation of pain in Samkhya and not the manifestation of bliss.

Yoga

Founder: Patanjali

Basic Idea

Patanjali propagated his philosophy of Yoga in his great work – Yoga-Sutra. Yoga is largely based on the Samkhya philosophy. They are two sides of the same coin. Samkhya is a theory while Yoga is the practice to actualize it. Thus, Yoga presents a method of physical and mental discipline.

Samkhya is an atheistic philosophy while Yoga has a theistic tradition and believes in God. Yoga holds that there is one Supreme Puruṣa (God) who is above all puruṣas.

Liberation

The system of Yoga presents a practical path for the realization of the self. Yoga provides a path to release Puruṣa from Prakṛti by means of physical and mental discipline. One can attain salvation through meditation and physical discipline. Physical exercises and various postures called asanas are prescribed to attain salvation.

The important aspect of the Yoga philosophy is the Astanga Yoga, which sets out the eight (aṣṭa) limbs (anga) of the practice of yoga. The eight limbs are:

- **Yama:** Abstention from evil-doing, such as harming others, telling falsehoods, stealing etc.
- **Niyamas:** Cultivation of good habits such as personal hygiene, studying religious texts, observing austere vows and feeling content in life.
- **Asana:** It is a discipline of the body and adopting comfortable postures such as padamasana, virasana etc.
- **Praṇayama:** It is the regulation of breath performed through different ways.
- **Pratyahara:** It refers to the withdrawal of the mind from sense objects.
- **Dharana:** It is a form of concentration in which one fixes one's mind on an object.
- **Dhyana:** It is a form of meditation characterised by the steadfast contemplation of the object without any disturbance.
- **Samadhi:** It is the final step in yoga and there is absorption in the self.



Nyaya

Founder: Gautama or Akspada

Basic Idea

It is important for its analysis of logic, correct thinking and the means of acquiring true knowledge. Its principal text, Nyaya-sutra is attributed to Gautama. Nyaya is allied to the Vaiseshika system. It holds that there are four valid means of knowledge, i.e. perception (pratyaksha), inference (anumana), comparison (upamana), and verbal testimony (shabda). Nyaya holds that the self is an individual substance, eternal and all pervading.

Nyaya's theory of causation is called Asatkaryavada that believes that the effect does not pre-exist in its cause and effect is a new creation. Nyaya recognizes God as the creator, maintainer and destroyer of the world.

Liberation

The ultimate aim of Nyaya is to enable one to bring an end to human suffering, which results from ignorance of reality. Liberation is brought about through right knowledge. According to Nyaya, liberation is the state of pure existence. It is freedom from all pains and pleasures. One can attain liberation through tattva-jnana (true knowledge) of self and all other objects of experience.

Vaiseshika

Founder: Kanada

Basic Idea

The Vaiseshika School gives importance to the discussion of ultimate constituents or elements of the universe. It accepts only perception and inference as the source of valid knowledge. Vaiseshika is a pluralistic realism that explains the nature of the world through seven categories or Padarthas such as Dravya (substance), Guna (quality), Karma (action), Samanya (universal), Vishesha (particular), Smavaya (inherence) and Abhava (non-existence). The substances (Dravya) recognized by Vaiseshika are earth, water, fire, air, akasha, space, time, soul and mind.

Vaiseshika is known for its atomistic theory of creation. According to this theory, the world originates and decays due to association or dissociation of the four atoms, i.e., earth, air, water and fire. However, it is the God that provided motion to these atoms in the creation of this world. Vaiseshika also believes in Asatkaryavada (effect does not pre-exist in its cause) and contends that every effect is a fresh creation or a new beginning. Vaiseshika recognizes God as the supreme, perfect and eternal.

Liberation

Vaiseshika believes that liberation can be attained through true knowledge or tattvajnana.

Mimansa (Purva/Karma Mimansa)

Founder: Jaimini



Basic Idea

Jaimini wrote Mimansa-Sutra around the end of the 2nd century AD. Mimansa is also known as Purva-Mimamsa as it is based on the earlier portion of the Vedas. It is also known as Karma Mimamsa, since it deals with the karmic actions of rituals and sacrifices. The main aim of Mimansa is to provide a methodological interpretation of dharma or duty embodied in the rituals of the Vedas and also provides the ethical justification to the ritualistic doctrines.

Mimansakas accept the Vedas as the eternal source of 'revealed truth'. According to them, the Vedas are eternal, authorless and infallible. Mimansa accepts Vedic testimony as the highest source of valid knowledge. It is also an atheistic philosophy.

Mimansa is a pluralistic realist philosophy and accepts the reality of the world as well as that of the individual souls. The soul is accepted as an eternal and infinite substance. The soul is accepted as distinct from the body, the senses and the mind.

Liberation

This philosophical system has a profound faith in the Vedas and supports the law of karma. Reasoning and logic were used to provide justification for various Vedic rituals and the attainment of liberation is based on their performance.

Vedanta (Uttar Mimamsa)

The word 'Vedanta' means 'end of the Vedas' and is made up of the words-'Veda' and 'ant'. Vedanta usually refers to the Upanishads and in a broad sense, also includes all the commentaries and interpretations associated with the Upanishads.

The great scholar Badarayana for the first time made the efforts to simplify the Upanishadic philosophy and produced one of the most illustrious works on Vedanta. Badarayana's work is known as Brahma-Sutra or Vedanta-Sutra. It is also referred to as Uttar-Mimamsa-Sutra.

A number of commentaries were written to interpret the Brahma Sutra resulting into different schools of Vedanta. The commentaries of Shankaracharya, Ramnujacharya and Madhavacharya are regarded as the most authentic and are held in high view. They are the leading proponents of different schools of Vedanta.

Advaita Vedanta (Non-dualism)

Founder: Shankaracharya

Basic Idea

According to it, Brahman is the only reality; the world is ultimately false and the individual soul is non different from Brahman. Brahman is pure consciousness and is indescribable. It has the nature of sat (existence), chit (consciousness) and ananda (bliss). The world is not independent of Brahman. Advaita accepts God from a practical point of view and not from the transcendental point of view as Brahman is the only ultimate reality according to Advaita of Shankara.

Liberation

Since Brahman is the only ultimate reality, liberation lies in the intuitive realization of this nature of the self. According to Shankara, moksha or liberation can be attained only through knowledge which helps in purifying our mind and destroying our ignorance.



Vishishtadvaita (Qualified Non-dualism)

Founder: Ramanujacharya

Basic Idea

Vishishtadvaita literally means Advaita with uniqueness or qualifications. Ramanuja was one of the Vedantic thinkers who identified personal God with the brahman, or absolute reality of the Upanishads and the Vedanta-sutras. Brahman also contains chit (soul) and achit (matter) as its integral parts. Brahman or Isvara, possesses all the good qualities in a perfect degree and is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. Both soul and matter are totally dependent on God for their existence, as the body is dependent on the soul.

Liberation

According to Vishishtadvaita, Bhakti is the sole means of liberation. Through Bhakti or devotion, a Jiva ascends to the realm of the Brahman or the God, where it continues to delight in his service. One has to surrender to the God as a devotee and realizes one's own state as dependent on, and supported by, and being led by the God.

Dvaitavada (Dualism)

Founder: Madhvacharya

Basic Idea

According to dvaitavada of Madhva, the reality is dual – independent reality (God or brahman) and dependent reality (chit and achit). Madhva's teachings are based on the premise that there is a fundamental difference between Atman (individual soul) and the Brahman (ultimate reality or God). Madhva holds that Vishnu is God, who is also known as Hari, Krishna, Vasudeva etc. Ishvara or God is the only reality and is the cause of the universe. Brahman is the creator of the universe, perfect in knowledge and power and is distinct from souls and matter.

The created universe is the dependent reality and consists of Jiva (individual souls) and Jada (material things). Jivas are sentient and matter is non-sentient.

Liberation

Madhva asserted that liberation is achievable only through the grace of God. Madhva emphasized Bhakti and considered Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga to be insufficient to the path of liberation. The Dvaita School, founded by Madhva, influenced Vaishnavism and the Bhakti movement in medieval India.

Shuddhadvaita Philosophy

Pure non-dualism or Suddha Advait (Shuddhadvait) is the philosophy of Shri Vallabhacharya (1479-1531). Vallabhacharya believes that God (Brahma) is pure and non-dualistic, but at the same time, he strongly believes that the souls and Nature (universe) are not an illusion but real.