

# Major Religious Communities in India

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
28	Major Religious Communities in India	Observe some of the major religious festivals, rituals and practices of various religious groups in your society and write a report on it.

## Summary

India is a land of different religions and all of them have different religious beliefs and practices. Religion like Hinduism is indigenous in origin and Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism emerged out of religious movements on the Indian soil itself. However, some of religions like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam were introduced in India from outside, therefore, exogenous in origin. There is a continuous interaction and exchange among people. It is manifested in the celebration of different festival participated by all of them. Thus, this religious diversity brings harmony and cohesiveness in the society and makes people life more meaningful.

## Hinduism

- ✚ Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions of the world. Presently, about eighty three percent (83%) of India's population is Hindu. It is polytheistic as well as monotheistic. It is pluralistic in its doctrines as it contains contradictory beliefs. Its diverse belief also gets reflected in its vast body of sacred literatures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmashastra, Puranas, Darshanas, Agamas and Tantras etc. The concept of *dharma*, *karma*, and *moksa* are very much central to Hindu religion.
- ✚ Hinduism has undergone lot of institutional and symbolic changes over a period of time. Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj were founded by Raja Rammohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati respectively for the revival of Vedic Hinduism. Other major changes in the practice of Hinduism came up because of various constitutional provisions like ideology of equality and secularization.

## Zoroastrianism

- Zoroastrianism is another oldest and prominent ancient living religion of pre-Islamic, Iran. It originated around 1000 B.C. among eastern Iranian Tribal. Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism) believe in one God- Creator of the Whole Universe .Zoroastrianism is based on the Teachings of Zarathushtra (also called Spitama).
- This religion is known on its founder, Zarathushtra (or Zoroaster). Zoroastrianism's main teachings are coded in texts called '*gathas*'. Earth and fire occupy important place in Zoroastrianism. Followers are Called *Parsis*, and the leading business communities in India.

## **Buddhism**

- ✚ Buddhism was one of the indigenous religious movements that arose in India around the sixth century B.C. It was founded around the teachings of Gautam Buddha. Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are the three cardinal components of Buddhism. Buddhism does not worship Gods and Deities. Gautam Buddha emphasized on the spiritual development of the Human Being rather than following and person.
- ✚ Buddhism has undergone various transformations gradually. Conversion to Buddhism on a mass scale took place after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur (Maharashtra). Along with him, thousands of men of the community called Mahars, were converted to Buddhism. These Buddhists are often known as Buddhists (or Nav Buddhists).

## **Jainism**

- ✚ Jainism was founded by Varadhamana Mahavira, who lived from 540-468 B.C. The principle of non-violence is central to Jainism. Three Jewels, namely, right faith, right knowledge and right conduct are considered essential to attain liberation from the world
- ✚ Jains are divided into two main groups, namely, Digambara (naked) and Svetambar (monks wear white robes). Jains have many caste groups and most of them are traders. Jains have also adopted the characteristics of the area where they have chosen to reside. It has also undergone many reform movements.

## **Christianity**

- ✚ Jesus Christ as the Prophet, the New Testament as the revealed book, and the Church as the religious organization are the foundation stones of Christianity. Christianity spread in India firstly through trade and commerce in the early centuries after Christ and later through mass conversions particularly by Christian missionaries during the British.
- ✚ The three constituents of Christians' religious life include: faith in Jesus Christ as the messenger of God, active service and love to the neighbour. Catholics form the largest Christian group (where) followed by Protestants, Orthodox Christians and others.

## Judaism

- ✚ The Followers of Judaism are known as Jews. They are mainly settled in Cochin (Kerala) and Maharashtra in India. The Hebrew(language) Bible or the Torah is their sacred religious text and their temple is known as Synagogue.
- ✚ Judaism believe in Monotheistic religion and believes in transcendent God. Compared to the Jews of Cochin, those in Maharashtra are large in number. Today, these jews are known as Bene Israel i.e., Sons of Israel.

## Islam

- ✚ Islam simply means surrender to the will of one God, called Allah in Arabic. Quran is the sacred text of Islam and it is supposed to contain the revealed words of God. Haj is the supreme pilgrimage of Islam and is made to the sacred building of Kaba at Mecca. Muslims constitute about 13 percent of the total population of India.
- ✚ The three basic concepts of Islam are: the oneness of God (*al-Tawhid*), the concept of prophethood (*al-Risala*) and the concept of life hereafter (*al-Akhirah*).The idea of Islam is summed up in the idea of 'There is no deity but god'. Muslims in India, as elsewhere, are divided into two major sects, *Shias* and *Sunnis*. In comparison to *Shias*, *Sunnis* are in majority in India.

## Sikhism

- ✚ Sikhism emerged as a devotional sect around the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The *Guru Granth Sahib* is the holy book of Sikhs which contains the hymns composed by the devotional saints as well as the writings of the Sikh gurus. In Sikhism, God is believed to be formless (*nirankara*) and without quality (*nirguna*).
- ✚ Nanak strongly disapproved of ascetism and putting one's body to pain as step towards enlightenment. The institution of 'community kitchens' (*langar*) is central to Sikhism whereby all people, irrespective of their caste and religion, eat together.

## Evaluate Yourself

1. Highlight the salient features of Hinduism,
2. Discuss the three basic concepts of Islam
3. Explain the three constituents of Christians' religious life
4. What you mean by Community Kitchen in Sikhism?