



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF **Hinduism**



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birth and rebirth but remains alive. Most Shaivite traditions, and the VEDANTA of SHANKARA, accept the possibility of *jivanmukti* (living liberation). Other Hindu traditions, such as VAISHNAVISM, do not accept the concept; they insist that full liberation occurs only at death. Neither Jains nor Sikhs believe in *jivanmukti*.

Historically, many of the earlier philosophies of India, such as SAMKHYA, had no place for the idea. A strict reading of YOGA SUTRA would not allow for it either.

Further reading: Andrew O. Fort, *Jivanmukti in Transformation: Embodied Liberation in Advaita and Neo-Vedanta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

jivatman See VEDANTA.

jnana

Jnana (from the root *jna*, “to know”) literally means “knowledge” but is better translated as “gnosis” or “realization.” Specifically, it is the knowledge of the unity between the highest reality, or BRAHMAN, and the individual self, or JIVATMAN. The role of *jnana* is developed in the philosophy of the UPANISHADS and most clearly outlined in the ADVAITA (non-dualist) philosophy of SHANKARA.

Much thought and writing have focused on the nature of *jnana* in Indian tradition. Some see it as a cognitive function: once one understands the truth of the unity of *brahman* and the self intellectually, that is enough. Others require a realization of a mystic sort. VEDANTA has often been characterized as interested only in gaining *jnana*, but it has many paths that stress BHAKTI or devotion as the first step on the path toward the ultimate. *Jnana yoga* is one of the three major yogas mentioned in the BHAGAVAD GITA.

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vols. 1 and 2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

Jnanasambanthar See SAMBANTHAR.

jnana yoga See BHAGAVAD GITA.

jnanedriya See SAMKHYA.

Jnaneshvara (1275–1296) poet-saint

Jnaneshvara was a Vaishnavite (see VAISHNAVISM) poet-saint from Maharashtra, who wrote hymns of praise to VITHOBA and RUKMINI, the Maharashtra forms of KRISHNA and RADHA who are worshipped at Pandharpur. He is most famous for his commentary on the BHAGAVAD GITA written in old Marathi, a beloved and revered text in Maharashtra. It is said that Jnaneshvara died at the age of 22, at Alandi on the Krishna River. This is now an important pilgrimage site; his shrine is visited there at the time of the poet’s death in November.

Further reading: P. V. Bobde, trans., *Garland of Divine Flowers: Selected Devotional Lyrics of Saint Jnaneshvara* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987); Manu Subedar, trans., *Gita, the Mother: Commentary by Dhyaneswar Maharaj* (New Delhi: Kalyani, 1972).

Jyoti, Swami Amar (1928–2001) Indian guru and ashram founder

Swami Amar Jyoti was a humanitarian activist, who founded Jyoti Ashram, Sacred Mountain Ashram, the Desert Ashram, and the Truth Consciousness movement. Born in northwest India on May 6, 1928, in a small town close to the banks of the Indus River, Swami Amar Jyoti was named Rama by his parents. As a child he was interested in science, math, writing, cycling, drama, and sports. The partition of India in 1947 interrupted his college education, causing him to transfer to a university in Bombay (Mumbai). Just a few months prior to his graduation he left

school in order to obtain the remainder of his education from the world itself. At 19, without money or a destination, he took a train to Calcutta (Kolkata).

Political tensions and mass violence had broken out in India at the time, and refugees were flooding into West Bengal by the thousands. During this time Rama worked for an aviation company in Calcutta; when offered a partnership in the company, he decided to leave and instead volunteer his services to help the refugees. During this time he lived on a railway platform somewhere close to the border of India and East Bengal (now Bangladesh). He soon became the leader of the entire volunteer effort, working more than 20 hours per day. A year later, as the inflow of refugees began to subside, Rama moved back to Calcutta. Here he turned down a government position in order to work for the rehabilitation of refugees.

Rama chose to live alone on the fringes of Calcutta in an ASHRAM, where he learned classical music, sitar, religious studies, and prayer. In the contemplative atmosphere he began to have visions. His MEDITATION, YOGA, and PUJA practices increased, and soon he knew where his life's work was leading him. He lived in silence for close to a decade, focused on the goal of God realization. In those years he made many pilgrimages throughout India, but his "awakening" is attributed to the time he spent in a temple village near the source of the GANGES River.

In 1958, Rama was initiated into Vidyut Sannyas (lightninglike monasticism) in BADRINATH in the HIMALAYAS and given the name Swami Amar Jyoti (eternal light). Now he was ready to communicate to the world. He founded his first center, Jyoti Ashram, in Pune, in the state of Maharashtra close to his mother's home. In 1961 he was invited to the United States by a devotee; on this trip he gained a degree of popularity. In 1974, he set up the Sacred Mountain Ashram near Boulder,

Colorado. A few years later he established the Desert Ashram in Tucson, Arizona, under Truth Consciousness, a nonprofit organization created to disseminate Swami Amar Jyoti's teachings. He continued to travel and teach until his death on June 13, 2001.

Jyoti Ashram is a pilgrimage site. It contains a memorial temple housing the remains of the swami.

Further reading: Swami Amar Jyoti, *Immortal Light: The Blissful Life and Wisdom of Swami Amar Jyoti* (Boulder, Colo.: Truth Consciousness, 2004);——, *Spirit of Himalaya: The Story of a Truth Seeker* (Boulder, Colo.: Truth Consciousness, 2001).

Jyotipriya See TYBERG, JUDITH M.

Jyotirmayananda Saraswati, Swami (1931–) *advaita teacher and educator*

Swami Jyotirmayananda Saraswati founded the Yoga Research Foundation.

Born in Dumari Buzurg on February 3, 1931, in the state of Bihar, the boy who would become Swami Jyotirmayananda was a calm, reflective, and successful student. He studied at the Science College of Patna, where he first met Swami SIVANANDA of Rishikesh. He traveled to the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, where his GURU, Sivananda, put him to work teaching others. In February 1953, he took the vow of SANNYAS (renunciation) from Sivananda and began to teach at the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy as a professor of religion. He became the editor of the Hindi journal of the Divine Life Society, *Yoga-Vedanta*.

In 1962, after many requests, he traveled to the West, staying two years in Puerto Rico, where he founded the Sanatan Dharma Mandir. In 1969 he opened his center in Miami, Florida, where he

set up a publishing center and the Yoga Research Foundation. Branches of this organization now exist throughout the world. In 1985, he founded an ashram near New Delhi that offers yoga classes, publishes the Hindi journal *Yoganjali*, and assists the needy through a medical clinic. The ashram also runs a school for children, the Bal Divya Jyoti Public School.

Jyotirmayananda teaches and lectures on integral yoga and sponsors a monthly magazine, *International Yoga Guide*.

Further reading: Swami Jyotirmayananda Saraswati, *Meditate the Tantric Yoga Way* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973); ———, *The Art of Positive Thinking* (Miami: Yoga Research Foundation, 1988).

K



Kabir (c. 15th century) *medieval Hindi saint-poet*
Kabir, a poor, illiterate man, was one of the great saint-poets of northern India. He is revered by Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, although his work includes much social and religious criticism of Islam and Hinduism.

The poet was born in BENARES (Varanasi) into a weaver family who had recently converted to Islam. As with other poet-saints such as RAMPRASAD and TUKARAM, the actual details of his life are not known for certain; it is not even known which of the poems attributed to him were authentically his. Indian poet-saints, particularly those who relied upon song to communicate, very quickly became legendary figures, the possessions of everyone. More important than the concrete details of these people's lives or the verses that may be authentically theirs is the collective imagination of them, which makes them part of the cultural consciousness and makes their writings a collective possession.

It is understood from his verses that Kabir was illiterate, but in India this is less important than in the bibliophilic West. Real Indian tradition, the culture that occupied the center of Indian consciousness, was always oral and aural first. Written texts were the abode of scholars and

pundits but less important for the transmission of tradition.

Kabir was the disciple of the GURU Ramananda, a famous c. 15th-century teacher. A story tells how Kabir, a convert to Islam, tricked this orthodox Hindu into accepting him as a student. Kabir is said to have lain upon the steps that the guru always took in the morning to do his bathing and ablutions in the river. Tripping in the dark over the supine Kabir, the guru in fear uttered, "Ram! Ram!" This is, in fact, a MANTRA in and of itself, and so the crafty Kabir insisted he must be accepted as a disciple since he had heard the guru's mantra. (It should be added that Kabir's understanding of the mantra RAMA is not an orthodox one. For him the word did not designate the AVATAR of VISHNU of that name, but was a divine "name" that leads one to an undifferentiated ADVAITA (non-dual) consciousness.)

There exists a story, probably apocryphal and invented by Hindus, that Kabir was actually born of a BRAHMIN woman and set afloat in a basket on a pond to be found by a Muslim couple. Both Hindus and Muslims still claim Kabir as their own (while his words are included in the sacred books of the Sikhs, the Guru GRANTH SAHIB.) It is said that when Kabir died, Muslims and Hindus

confronted each other, each wanting to take the body for their own rituals. Before they could come to blows, however, they pulled up the shroud only to find there a heap of flowers, which they happily divided in half.

There is hardly a person who grew up in North India over the last 400 years who has not been able to recite many verses of “Kabir” by heart. His work is deeply ingrained in the culture of North India. This said, his poetry combines highly esoteric NATH YOGI symbolism, highly mystical non-dual devotion that envisions a “divinity” beyond any form or description, a deep criticism of the orthodoxy of both Muslims and Hindus, and a strong social critique of the hierarchy of Hindu society. In his poetry he again and again evokes the watchword *Ram* without any sectarian content. It is a mantric word used to point toward the highest consciousness that sees beyond the veil or *MAYA* of this world.

Kabir’s poems are found in the Guru Granth Sahib of the Sikhs (see [SIKHISM](#)); in the Panchvani, a compilation of sayings of five northern saints; and in the *Bijak*, an anthology attributed to Kabir alone. All of these were first published around the 17th century, although the Guru Granth Sahib in its formative stages may have contained these poems earlier.

Further reading: P. D. Barthwal, *The Nirgun School of Hindi Poetry* (Benares: The Indian Bookshop, 1936); Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh, trans., *The Bijak of Kabir* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983); David Lorenzen, *Kabir Legends and Ananda-Das’s Kabir Parachai* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Karine Schomer and W. H. McCleod, eds., *The Sant Tradition of India* (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987); Charlotte Vaudeville, trans., *Kabir*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

Kailasanatha Temple See [ELLORA](#).

Kailash, Mount (Mount Kailas or Mount Kailasha)

Kailash (from *kelasa*, crystal) is the name of a mountain peak about 18,000 feet up in the HIMALAYAS. It is sacred to both Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists. In Indian mythology it is seen as the abode of the Lord SHIVA and of KUBERA, the god of wealth and of the northern direction. Mythology places it to the south of Mount MERU. Kailash is sometimes also said to be the source of the GANGES River. Throughout history it has been an important Hindu pilgrimage site.

Further reading: Bhagavan Hamsa, *The Holy Mountain, Mansarovar, and Mount Kailas: Being the Story of a Pilgrimage to Lake Marias and of Initiation on Mount Kailas* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934); Veena Sharma, *Kailash Mansarovar: A Sacred Journey* (New Delhi: Lotus Collection, Roli Books, 2004).

kaivalya

Kaivalya (from SANSKRIT *kevala*, sole or only) literally means “isolation” and refers to the liberated state of the self, when it is “isolated” completely from the pulls and distortions of *PRAKRITI*, or natural reality. The term originated in the ancient SAMKHYA tradition and is important in the yoga tradition of PATANJALI. Both living and dead persons may be in the state of *kaivalya*. It is a unique state where one becomes absorbed in the root-consciousness of the Self (*purusha*) alone. Bliss is not an element of traditional *kaivalya*.

Further reading: M. N. Parthasarathi, *Journey to Aloneness: Commentaries on the Kaivalya Upanishad* (Mumbai: Eeshwar, 2001); Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darsana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Kali

The name Kali has two derivations. In the sense of “she who is black” it is from *kala* (black). In the

sense of “she who is the ruler of time” it derives from *kala* (time, spelled slightly differently in SANSKRIT letters).

Kali is the most frightening of the goddesses and the most misunderstood by non-Hindus. Mythologically, she originates in the fury of the goddess DURGA and emerges physically from that goddess’s forehead. She has a terrible, frightening appearance. She is originally very black (though in modern depictions she is often lighter), usually naked, emaciated, with long disheveled hair. She wears a skirt of severed arms, earrings made of the corpses of children, and a necklace of human skulls. In one hand she holds a cutting instrument, in another the severed head of a man. She has long sharp fangs, bloody lips, and a bloody lolling tongue.

In iconography Kali is often depicted as standing upon the chest of the supine corpse of SHIVA, her nominal husband. She is known to frequent the burning grounds where burned and unburned corpses abound, where she is always accompanied by female jackals. She, as does DURGA, likes liquor, meat, and blood.

There is little doubt that Kali is a fierce autochthonous non-Aryan goddess who has been absorbed into the larger Brahminized pantheon of Hinduism. Kali first appears in developed literary form in the *Devibhagavatam* of the 11th to 12th centuries, where she is seen to be PARVATI, wife of Shiva, who becomes completely black out of fury when battling the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha. She also appears in the 16th-century *Devimahatmya*, part of the *Markandeya Purana*; this is the source of the story that Kali emerged from the enraged Durga.

Kali is most associated with eastern India, particularly Bengal. Her devotional literature and cultic followings began to proliferate as early as the 13th and 14th centuries. Bengal is the only state to worship Kali during the all-India festival of DIVALI. The medieval Bengali poet Ram Prasad is best known for his Bengali hymns in devotion to “Mother Kali,” and the



The temple to the goddess Kali, in Dakshineswar, Bengal, where Sri Ramakrishna served as a priest
(Constance A. Jones)

modern Bengali Saint RAMAKRISHNA, who had perhaps the greatest influence in the West of any Indian spiritual figure, was known as a devotee of Kali alone.

Devotion to Kali requires the utmost surrender and the ability to see that her chaotic and fearsome visage is only a barrier placed before the devotee, who must have the courage to seek the inner depths of her compassion and the SHAKTI or universal power she represents. When one has accomplished this step, one can learn to *become* Kali, as Sri Ramakrishna so clearly demonstrates. When one has learned to be her truth, then one’s consciousness and being are completely transformed

and one can live in her endless bliss for longer and longer periods.

Kali has been associated with tantric religious forms. TANTRISM in this context focuses on the cremation ground; normative elements and practices are frowned upon or forbidden. When one realizes the divinity within even the lowest realities, within the rotting corpse, within the dark of the cremation ground, then one has learned to find the limit of time and one can begin to see the secrets buried in the depths of reality. Then one can begin to experience Kali as the sweet, compassionate, nurturing mother that she is.

Iconographically it is understood that Kali's nakedness symbolizes the stripping away of illusion; the severed head is a symbol of her cutting away of the ignorance that binds one to the cycle of birth and rebirth. Kali's lolling tongue is most often taken to indicate her anger, but some in India have taken it to be a gesture, like "biting the tongue" in shame.

Further reading: David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); ———, *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds., *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, In the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Kalidasa (circa fourth or fifth century C.E.)

Sanskrit poet

Kalidasa is considered one of the greatest SANSKRIT dramatists and poets.

Little is known for certain about the life of the poet and dramatist Kalidasa. He appears to have lived in the time of the imperial GUPTAS, perhaps in central India, in what is now called Madhyapradesh. Three dramas are attributed to him: *Malvikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvasi*, and *Shakuntala*.

Malvikagnimitra begins as a story of political alliances toward the end of the Mauryan dynasty, but the political aspect is eventually equaled or overshadowed by the love affair between the princess Malvika and the prince Agnimitra. The drama *Vikramorvasi* tells how one of the celestial nymphs, or *ASPARAS*, Urvashi goes to live with her lover Pururavas thanks to his prowess or *vikrama*. It has been called a drama of "luster and brilliance" with no plot or real action. In the skeleton story the celestial nymph Urvashi falls in love with an earthly king, Pururavas. She loses her celestial status but is allowed to live with him. The play is graced with nature description, beautiful poetry, and supernatural effects.

Abhijnanasakuntalam sometimes abbreviated to *Shakuntala*, is recognized as its author's masterpiece. The heroine Shakuntala is the daughter of the celestial nymph Menaka and the sage Vishvamitra. She is abandoned by her parents and is raised by the caring sage Kanva in his forest hermitage. The king Dushyanta finds the hermitage and falls in love with the beautiful, simple maiden. In Kanva's absence the lovers consummate a permitted "love marriage." The king has to leave but gives Shakuntala his signet ring and promises to send someone for her in a few days.

Shakuntala soon realizes that she is pregnant. While Shakuntala daydreams about her lover, the irascible sage DURVASAS visits; enraged at being ignored, the sage curses her that her lover will forget her. Shakuntala loses the king's signet ring, her only proof of their meeting. She visits the king in her pregnancy, but he swears he has never seen her. Finally the ring is discovered in the belly of a fish and is taken to the king, who then remembers. Eventually the king flies back to the hermitage in a celestial chariot provided by INDRA and sees a boy playing there who he recognizes must be his son. The drama ends happily.

Among Kalidasa's great poems is *Raghuvamsha*, a look back at the dynasty of RAMA, the hero of the RAMAYANA. The poem describes the lives of all of the ancient progenitors of his line. He also wrote *Kuma-*

rasambhava, a consummate masterpiece about SHIVA and PARVATI and their young son, Kumara. Another of his great works is *Meghaduta* (Cloud messenger), a charming poem about the God Kubera's sending a message of consolation to his lover far away by means of a cloud messenger. Nature here is beautifully described. Finally, *Ritusamhara*, a short lyric uncertainly ascribed to Kalidasa, includes a beautiful description of the four seasons and the amorous moods appropriate to each.

Further reading: Chittenoer Kuhan Raja, *Survey of Sanskrit Literature* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962); Moriz Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964–67).

Kali Yuga

All of the YUGAS or ages in the Indian tradition refer to throws in an ancient game of dice. *Kali* (spelled differently in Sanskrit from the goddess of that name) is the “four,” the worst throw of the dice, comparable to “craps” in the Western dice game. Our age is understood to be the Kali Yuga, in which TAMAS, the worst aspect of nature, predominates. Trickery, envy, and even the murder of holy persons are the norm in this era, as are fatal disease, fatal hunger, fear, and instability.

Kings in the Kali Yuga are angry and debauched. People are short-lived and short in stature. Money, power, pleasure, and falsehood reign. BRAHMA, VISHNU, RUDRA, and the Sun are all worshipped in the Kali Yuga.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kalki Avatar

Indian tradition speaks of YUGAS or ages of history. Today we are in the KALI YUGA, or Iron Age,

a period of decline. It was preceded by the ages of gold, silver, and bronze. After the end of the KALI YUGA and a short hiatus, a new age will begin: the age of truth (KRITA YUGA), when all the wickedness, strife, and dissension of this era will be replaced by righteousness. It is understood that this age will be ushered in by Kalki, the future incarnation or AVATAR of VISHNU, riding on a magnificent white horse.

Further reading: Shakti M. Gupta, *Vishnu and His Incarnations* (Bombay: Somaiya, 1993); Pandrimalai Swamigal, *The Ten Incarnations: Dasavatara* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982).

kalpa

A *kalpa* is a traditional Indian eon or unit of time, an eon. Sources differ as to its exact length, but a common measure is that a *kalpa* is made up of 1,000 MAHAYUGAS, or 4,320,000,000 years. This is considered to be a day in the life of the god BRAHMA.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

kama See ENDS OF LIFE, FOUR.

Kamadeva (Kama)

Kamadeva or Kama is the Indian cupid, the god of love. He is found in the VEDAS as a divinity, but his character was developed in the Indian epics and PURANAS. Most famously Kamadeva is known to have been burned to ashes by the third eye of Lord SHIVA. In that tale, Shiva was in a state of MEDITATION and ascetic withdrawal. The gods desperately wanted him to marry and have progeny, because they knew that his offspring would be

able to defeat the demon Taraka who was plaguing them. They sent the god of love to awaken sexual desire by shooting him with his flower arrows. Shiva became angry at Kamadeva for his presumption and he incinerated him with his third eye. Upon the mournful request of Kamadeva's wife, RATI, Shiva relented and restored the god of love to life, but without a body. This is why he is invisible. In other versions of the story, Kama is not revived, but rather reborn as Pradyumna, the son of KRISHNA.

Further reading: Catherine Benton, *God of Desire: Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

Kamakhya

Situated near the top of Nilachal Hill in Guwahati, overlooking the majestic Brahmaputra River, Kamakhya Temple is a famous pilgrimage site. It is the most important of the *SHAKTI PITHAS*, or centers of devotion for the GODDESS. According to Hindu mythology, when SHIVA carried the body of his wife, SATI, her *YONI* fell to Earth, where the Kamakhya Temple stands today. According to local mythology, it is here that Shiva descends to unite with the goddess's *yonis*. Thus, Nilachal Hill is the symbolic site of Shiva and the goddess's eternal sexual union and is the primordial or original seat of the goddess.

This association points to Kamakhya Temple's strong tantric tradition (see [TANTRISM](#)). It remains one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in India for tantra practitioners, who associate it with the powerful creative force of the mother goddess. It is a center of tantric worship and transmission of tantric traditions by devotees, adepts, and GURUS.

The image of the goddess Kamakhya (also called *Kamarupa*, the shape or form of desire) at the shrine is actually a stone, the *matri yoni* or "Mother's mound of Venus." Steep stone steps lead from the entrance of the temple to a cave deep in the earth, where Ma Kamakhya sits alongside stones of *Matangi* (SARASVATI) and Kamala (LAKSHMI).

Kamakhya herself is a form of Shodashi, or Tripura-Sundari, one of the DASHA MAHAVIDYAS, each of whom has a dedicated temple on the hill. Kamakhya is also associated through various Hindu and tantric traditions with SRI LALITA and PARVATI.

In June, during the height of monsoon season, the spring that flows inside the cave is said to turn to menstrual blood, signifying the start of one of the holiest festivals in India. In fact, the water that washes over the stone at this time of year has a reddish color due to its chemical components. During AMBUVACHI (Ameti) Festival, the temple is closed for three days, as are all the temples in the area; then it is believed to be inauspicious to start new ventures, cook food, study scripture, plant seeds, or till the earth. On the fourth day, the doors open to tens of thousands of scarlet-clad pilgrims, who carry flowers, sweets, and other offerings. The goddess's blessing is given in the form of *angadhak (ritu)*, the water that is the menstrual blood of the goddess, and *angabastra*, a piece of the red sari draped over the stone during its menstruation.

The origins of the first temple on this site are shrouded in mystery. Some say it was built by the demon Narakasura, whom KRISHNA fought when he tried to marry the beautiful goddess Kamakhya (she foiled his plans by outwitting him). The original temple was destroyed in the 16th century by Mughal invaders and then rebuilt in 1665 by King Nara Narayana. This temple has a beehivelike structure, surrounded by carved panels picturing figures such as GANESHA, CHAMUNDA, temple dancers, animals, and women menstruating and giving birth. Harkening back to its origins as an

ancient sacrificial site, goats are sacrificed to the goddess daily, particularly during the height of festival seasons.

Further reading: Subhendugopal Bagchi, *Eminent Indian Sakta Centres in Eastern India: An Interdisciplinary Study in the Background of the Pithas of Kalighata, Vakresvara, and Kamakhya* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1980); David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Kama Sutra

The *Kama Sutra* (Aphorisms on love) by Vatsyayana, probably the most widely known of Indian texts, was written around the second century C.E. It consists of 1,250 verses. It is divided into seven parts, divided into 36 chapters, and further divided into 64 paragraphs.

Legend says that the author Nandi originally wrote the *Kama Sutra* in 1,000 chapters, later abbreviated to 500 chapters by the poet Shveta-ketu. Babhravya, a descendent of the Panchalas (whose homeland is south of Delhi), abridged it still further to 150 chapters under seven heads or parts: Desire or Kama as a part of life; Sexual Intercourse; Acquisition of a Wife; the Wife; Wives of Other People; Courtesans and Prostitutes; the Arts of Seduction. The sixth of these parts was expounded by Dattaka at the request of the prostitutes of Pataliputra (Patna); the other parts were explained by Charayana (first part), Suvarnanabha (second part); Ghotakamukha (third part); Gonardiya (fourth part); Gonikaputra (fifth part); and Kuchumara (seventh part). Given this confusion of authors, and the length and difficulty of the original material, Vatsyayana decided to compose his own work as a sort of condensation of all the previous efforts.

A quote from the introduction to the *Kama Sutra* says that “this treatise was composed, according to the precepts of the VEDAS, for the benefit of the world, by Vatsyayana, while leading

the life of a religious student at BENARES [Varanasi], and wholly engaged in the contemplation of the Deity. This work is not to be used merely as an instrument for satisfying our desires. A person acquainted with the true principles of this science, who preserves his DHARMA [virtue or religious merit], his *artha* [worldly wealth] and his *kama* [pleasure or sensual gratification], and who has regard to the customs of the people, is sure to obtain mastery over his senses. In short, an intelligent and knowing person attending to dharma and *artha* and also to *kama*, without becoming the slave of his passions, will obtain success in everything that he may do.”

The *Kama Sutra*'s audience is clearly male and it is oriented toward the fulfillment of male desires, particularly the sexual. Even the chapter on courtesans is intended to guide them on how males are best pleased. Parts of the book give details on how men might increase women's sexual pleasure, but even this is framed in a male-centered way.

A brief summary of the seven parts of Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra* is as follows: In Part I, Vatsyayana justifies the study of Kama, desire, against those who feel that it is not appropriate. They may argue, for instance, that the pursuit of prosperity, another of the sanctioned goals of life, requires giving up the pursuit of pleasure. Vatsyayana argues that pleasure is necessary for the natural maintenance of the body, although he adds that it must be sought in moderation. Part one also tells of 64 arts relating to pleasure that a young woman (and a wise man) should know; gives a detailed account of the pleasures and amusements of a citizen, such as gambling; and tells men what sort of women are appropriate for sexual intercourse.

Part II gives all the details of sexual intercourse and its elements, such as kissing, biting, and role playing. Part III discusses courtship and marriage. Part IV prescribes the conduct of a wife in her husband's absence and how she should act toward his other wives. Part V describes how a man might

gain the confidence of and seduce women other than his own wife. Part VI discusses the duties and activities of courtesans and prostitutes and advises them on how to earn more money; it also discusses the different classifications of prostitutes. Part VII discusses additional methods of seduction, including aphrodisiacs.

There are two well-known commentaries on the *Kama Sutra*. *Jayamangala* or *Sutrabhasya* was written between the 10th and 13th centuries; *Sutravritti* was written somewhat later.

Further reading: Haran Chandra Chakladar, *Social Life in Ancient India: Studies in Vatsyanana's Kama Sutra* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990); Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, trans., *Kamasutra of Vatsyayana Mallanaga: A New, Complete English Translation of the Sanskrit Text with Excerpts from the Sanskrit Jayamangala Commentary of Yashodhara Indrapada and the Hindi Jaya Commentary of Devadatta Shastri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Kamban (c. ninth to 12th century) *classical Tamil author*

Kamban is the author of the Tamil language *Iramavataram* (The Avatar of Rama), perhaps the most ornate and aesthetically pleasing of all the many versions of the RAMAYANA written in the regional languages of India.

The details of Kamban's life, as those of many other classical Indian authors, are uncertain. Even his name, which is not his given name, can be interpreted in different ways. The traditional account has him the son of Adita, a resident of Muvalur village in Tanjore District of Tamil Nadu. He belonged to either the drummer CASTE or the caste of hereditary priests in the KALI temples. He mentions his patron, Sataiyan, in his verses. A contemporary Chola king is said to have given him the fief of a place called Kambanatu (a possible source for his name) and the title of "king of poets." Some believe that the poet was murdered by the Chola king himself out of jealousy for his fame.

The extant manuscripts of the *Iramavataram*, varying from 10,000 to 12,000 verses in length, probably include interpolations. From the very beginning of the poem RAMA is presented as the AVATAR of VISHNU; he is referred to by Vishnu's epithets throughout. This is quite different from the SANSKRIT version of VALMIKI, in which Rama is clearly associated with Vishnu only in the first and last chapters.

In other ways, the story as told by Kamban is very much along the lines of Valmiki; in many places it is clear that the author is familiar with the Sanskrit version. Among the noticeable variations is that Kamban omits the entire final chapter of the Sanskrit version (the Uttarakanda) of the Ramayana, which recounts a tale of Rama's children and the history of the demon king RAVANA. When Kamban's Ramayana ends Rama and SITA live happily in the ideal kingdom.

Also, although Kamban relates Sita's abduction by Ravana, in his version Ravana cannot touch Sita, who is protected by a deadly curse. Finally, in the story of AHALYA, the maiden who was turned to stone on account of her dalliance with INDRA, the curse that was put upon Indra varies between the two versions: in the Sanskrit tale he is cursed with the testicles of a goat; in the Tamil version he is cursed with 1,000 vaginas (which he begs the gods to transform into eyes—thus his epithet "the one with 1,000 eyes.")

Further reading: George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz, trans., *The Forest Book of the Ramayana of Kampan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Kamil V. Zvelibil, *Tamil Literature*. Vol. 10, Fascile 1, *A History of Indian Literature*. Edited by Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974).

Kamsa See KRISHNA.

Kanada (c. 600 B.C.E.) See NYAYA-VAISHESHKA.

Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram, located about 40 miles southwest of Madras (Chennai), is one of the seven sacred cities of India. It has been an important South Indian religious and cultural center since well before the Pallava dynasty of the sixth to eighth centuries, when it served as the capital city. It also served as one of the Chola capitals in the ninth to 13th centuries and as a secondary Pandyan capital around 1000.

The city has been influenced by VAISHNAVISM, SHAIIVISM, and JAINISM. Between the fourth and seventh centuries Kanchipuram was also known as one of the great centers for Buddhism, and there are still vestiges there of the Buddhist presence. SHANKARA (c. seventh century) established one of his five original Mathas or site for monks in Kanchipuram. The city has a sizable Jain population today concentrated in an area known as Jain Kanchi, where there are many Jain shrines and a few quite remarkable ancient Jain temples.

The oldest Hindu temples in Kanchipuram, dating from the seventh and eighth centuries, are the Kailasanatha temple devoted to SHIVA, and the VAIKUNTHA Perumal temple devoted to VISHNU, both built by the Pallavas. Additionally, the Kamakshi Temple, dedicated to the goddess Kamakshi, dates from the same period. Notable also are two temples in the later VIJAYANAGARA style (circa 14th through 16th centuries): one of them dedicated to Varadara-*raja* (Vaishnavite) and also to Shiva in LINGAM form, and the other known as the Ekambaranatha temple, which has an ancient mango tree on its grounds. Kanchipuram is also famous for its beautiful saris.

Further reading: T. V. Mahalingam, *Kanchipuram in Early South Indian History* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1969).

Kanya Kumari

Kanya Kumari (Virgin maiden) is a town of approximately 200,000 people at the tip of India at the meeting place of the Arabian Sea, the Indian

Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. The local goddess Kanya Kumari is considered by some to be a form of DURGA.

The story goes that the god of Suchindram, a nearby town, was going to marry the goddess. The gods did not like this—if she married she would lose her powers to fight demonic forces. They asked the *RISHI* NARADA to solve the problem. When Suchindram was on the way to the ceremony, Narada made the call of a rooster. Thinking that he had departed too late for the ceremony Suchindram returned home and left the goddess in her virgin state. Because of this she was able to kill the demon Bana and protect her land.

The seashore temple of Kanya Kumari is one of the most visited PILGRIMAGE sites in India today. Offshore, a newer temple to memorialize Swami VIVEKANANDA has also been created. The town has been a pilgrimage site since very ancient times, since it is mentioned in the *aranyaka parvan* of the MAHABHARATA, which took its current form by the second century C.E. (with some sections going back to perhaps the fifth century B.C.E.).

Further reading: Francis X. Clooney, *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddess and the Virgin Mary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Kapila (c. 100 C.E.) *philosopher*

The sage Kapila is the legendary founder of SAMKHYA tradition, and thus a key figure in the history of yoga. He is said to have passed on his knowledge to Asuri, who in turn passed it on to Panchashikha. According to the oldest commentary on the *samkhya karika*, a later text, Kapila was a “wise ascetic, . . . born of heaven, . . . and innately endowed with the four fundamental dispositions of virtue, knowledge, renunciation, and supernatural power.”

The story is told that Kapila, out of pity for suffering humanity, selected a BRAHMIN householder, Asuri, as an appropriate person to whom to reveal

the knowledge of Samkhya. Kapila approached him as he was performing sacrifices (as he had been doing for thousands of years). Asuri would not listen. Only after being approached two more times did he relent and become Kapila's student.

Some sources say Kapila is the son of Svambhuva's daughter, MANU, and PRAJAPATI'S son, Kardama. Other sources say that he may be an incarnation of VISHNU who learned his wisdom directly from SHIVA; as such he would then be known as HIRANYA-GARBHA, or lord of the world. There are numerous references to Kapila in the epics and later texts, which give him various powers and statuses.

Further reading: John Davies, *Hindu Philosophy: An Exposition of the System of Kapila* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1981).

karma

In ancient VEDIC tradition karma (action) simply referred to the Vedic rites. Indian philosophy often contrasts the *karma kanda* (action aspect) of tradition with its *jnana kanda* (knowledge aspect). Later, the term *karma* came to refer to the "law of action." According to this ethical concept, the actions or karmas of individuals in their current births shape their lives in their next births. Finally, in the context of the BHAGAVAD GITA, karma yoga refers to a YOGA of action in the world without regard to its fruits. Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI made the term *karma yoga* well known, as his political actions were all undertaken under this name. The Indian traditions of Hinduism, JAINISM, Buddhism, and SIKHISM all accept the notion of karma.

Further reading: C. F. Keyes and E. Valentine Daniel, *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, ed., *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

karmendriyas See SAMKHYA.

Karttikeya

Karttikeya is the younger son of SHIVA and PARVATI; GANESHA is the elder son. There are many versions of his life story, as is usual in Hindu tradition. In the best known version, from the PURANAS, Shiva accidentally spills his semen into fire (AGNI). The fire is distressed because of the semen's incredible power and asks the GANGES River for help. She agrees and the semen is thrown into her cool waters.

The Ganges waits 5,000 years for the seed to gestate and produce a child, but none comes forth. She goes to BRAHMA to ask for advice. He tells her to leave the seed in a vast grove of reeds for 10,000 more years. After that long period a child is indeed born in the reeds. As he cries out, the six *krittika* goddesses (the Pleiades) vie with each other to be the first to nurse him. Because of their quarreling he develops six faces around his head to look at all of them at once. As he is reared by these six goddesses, he receives the name Karttikeya, from their names.

Once the word spreads that this child is born, the god of fire suddenly renews his interest and wants to claim him. The Ganges also wants him. They go to Shiva and Parvati to settle the dispute, but this only creates complications, as the couple also want the child. They all agree to ask the child and to accept his choice. The boy, loving them all, becomes four versions of himself. The one named Karttikeya became son of Shiva, the one named Kumara becomes son of the Ganges, the one named Skanda becomes son of Parvati, and the one named Guha becomes the son of fire.

Karttikeya is depicted iconographically with a peacock vehicle, some sort of weapon in his hand, and a rooster on his banner. At times he is considered unmarried, while other stories give him a wife named Devasena; in South India he has a second wife, Valli. Karttikeya is very popular in South India, where he takes the name Murugan along with his other traditional names.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kashi Church Foundation See [JAYA SATI BHAGAVATI, MA.](#)

Kashmiri Shaivism (est. ninth century)

Kashmiri SHIVAISM includes the philosophies and practices of the *ADVAITA* (non-dual) Shaivite traditions that flourished in Kashmir from approximately the ninth to the 13th centuries C.E. Kashmiri Shaivism describes ultimate reality as Paramashiva, or supreme Shiva, and teaches that nothing exists that is not one with Paramashiva. All of reality, with all of its diversity and fluctuation, is the play of this single principle. The two aspects of this single reality are inseparably united: SHIVA and SHAKTI. Shiva is the self-luminous, static consciousness, and Shakti is the dynamic, blissful power of awareness. Through their union, the universe is constantly established, sustained, and withdrawn.

Kashmiri Shaivism also teaches that Paramashiva is the true nature and Self of every human being. Through self-effort and divine grace individuals can know both their Self and the world around them as supreme Shiva. A being who lives with the constant experience of this is *jivanmukta*, liberated in this lifetime.

Within Kashmiri Shaivism, the most crucial element of this journey to liberation is the relationship between the GURU and the disciple. The disciple receives *SHAKTIPAT*, the descent of divine grace or power, from the guru. This essential initiation awakens the dormant spiritual energy within the individual called KUNDALINI Shakti, and ultimately leads to the realization of Paramashiva.

The earliest texts of Kashmiri Shaivism have no known human authors and are considered revealed sacred texts. According to tradition, in the ninth century C.E. Shiva revealed to Vasugupta the Shiva Sutra, a text composed of aphorisms that presents the early teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism. The Spanda Karika, whose authorship is attributed to either Vasugupta himself or his disciple Kalatabhata, expands upon the teachings in the Shiva Sutra. In particular, the Spanda Karika describes the nature of Paramashiva as spanda, the divine pulsation or vibration. Paramashiva's nature is to expand and contract, and thereby to emanate and withdraw the universe on both a cosmic and a mundane level. A disciple can thus realize Shiva as his or her own nature by perceiving vibration as part of his or her own experience.

Somananda and his disciple Utpaladeva developed Kashmiri Shaivism further by establishing the teaching of *pratyabhijna*, the recognition of Shiva as one's own Self. They describe the experience of liberation as this recognition. Somananda first introduced this teaching in his work *Soma Drishti*, and Utpaladeva systematically presented it in his writings, including the *Pratyabhijnakarika*.

Kashmiri Shaivism reached its creative climax with the teachings of ABHINAVAGUPTA and his disciple Kshemaraja in the 10th and 11th centuries. In his magnum opus, *Tantraloka*, Abhinavagupta encompasses almost every aspect of Kashmiri Shaivism and gives the most sophisticated and comprehensive expression of its teachings. Kshemaraja continued his work and made Kashmiri Shaivism more accessible to wider audiences through commentaries and digests.

Kashmiri Shaivism has continued to influence and inspire people in India and throughout the world. Leading modern exponents include Swami LAKSHMANJOO (1907–91), who was raised and taught in the oral tradition of Kashmir, and Swami MUKTANANDA (1908–82), who traveled throughout the world sharing the teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism.

Further reading: J. C. Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Mark Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

Kathakali

Kathakali (*katha*, story, *kali*, performance) is a special type of Indian dance-drama. It originated in the state of Kerala in South India more than 500 years ago. It combines drama, dance, music, and ritual. Characters with vividly painted faces and elaborate costumes reenact stories from the epics MAHABHARATA and RAMAYANA and the Puranas. The most popular stories enacted are “The Death of DURYODHANA,” “The Story of Nala,” “The Fight between ARJUNA and SHIVA,” and “The Story of Devayani and Kacha.”

As has happened for centuries new stories are added to the Kathakali repertoire from time to time when they become sufficiently popular. In recent times stories from the Bible or Shakespeare have been added to appeal to modern audiences.

The dramatic form is based, somewhat as opera is, on the notion that the audience is fully familiar with the stories being told. In the play the elaborately costumed actors (all male, even for female roles) do not speak; they pantomime the dialogue, while accompanists sing the lyrics. The language is an amalgam of Malayalam and SANSKRIT. The traditional Kathakali show begins at night and lasts till dawn; in the modern urban context in India and abroad the plays last only several hours.

The actors in Kathakali are always accompanied by drummers and singers; the lead singer controls the entire show with a special rhythm instrument. The story is conveyed purely through hand gestures (MUDRAS), facial expressions, and body movements. Complete control over facial muscles is a prerequisite for this demanding dramatic art form. It takes a minimum of eight

to 10 years for a Kathakali dancer to become fully trained. The training is very demanding and includes the study of one of the traditional martial arts of Kerala to create stamina, concentration, and physical flexibility. It also, not incidentally, prepares the actors for the many dramatic fight scenes in the epics. There are 24 main mudras in Kathakali and a number of less commonly used ones.

Kathakali uses a set “color code” for the makeup of the characters. Noble characters such as ARJUNA have their faces painted green. Evil characters who have heroic roles will have green makeup with red marks on the cheeks. Very angry or very evil characters will have red makeup and a red beard. Women and mendicants have yellow painted faces. Hunters and forest dwellers have primarily black painted faces. As in most other classical Indian forms, such as BHARATA NATYAM, facial expressions for Kathakali actors accord with the nine RASAS (sentiments): love, humor, compassion, fear, disgust, anger, wonder, valor, and tranquility.

With elaborate costumes projecting larger-than-life images, loud music with a heavy percussive element, and very vigorous dance steps that require great stamina and balance, the Kathakali is the most powerful of dramatic instruments: the audience is left not merely enthralled but often completely mesmerized. This art form had its roots in shamanic costumed possessions that were taken up by Sanskritic culture and adapted to the Sanskrit language and sensibility. The primordial element, surviving from traditional pre-ARYAN Kerala culture, is quite palpable in these performances.

Further reading: David Bolland, *A Guide to Kathakali* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1980); Clifford R. Jones and Betty True Jones, *Kathakali: An Introduction to the Dance-Drama of Kerala* (San Francisco: American Society of Eastern Arts, 1970); Phillip Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex: Actor, Performance and Structure* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1984).

Kathasaritsagara

The *Kathasaritsagara*, *The Ocean of the Rivers of Story*, by the Kashmiri writer Somadeva (c. 11th century), is one of the most important collections of tales deriving from the lost *BRIHATKATHA* of GUNADHYA. The work is the source for dozens of stories that have since been repeated over and over in various forms and versions within the Indian literary tradition, both in Sanskrit and in the vernacular languages.

The work itself consists of 22,000 verses, more than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, divided into 18 books. The first section tells stories about how the collection itself was created—for example, the story of Gunadhya and the story of king Satavahana. Among the many popular tales in the later sections are the story of Indra and King Shibi, the story of Urvashi and Pururavas (see *APSARAS*), the story of AHALYA (which appears in another form in the *RAMAYANA*), and the story of the BRAHMIN and the mongoose. Still other tales include the story of Udayana, the story of Kadambari, and the story of the 10 princes (*Dasakumaracarita*).

In the collection are stories of animals such as *The Mouse Merchant*; *The Ichneuman, the Owl, the Cat and the Mouse, the Crane and the Crocodile, the Lion and the Hare*; *The Parrot Who Was Taught Virtue by the King of the Parrots*; and *The Ass in the Panther's Skin*. Many of these stories closely resemble Aesop's fables in their structure and moral objectives. However, a large proportion of the hundreds of stories in this work are dedicated to the lives and adventures of kings, some of whom may have been historical, such as Satavahana and Vikramaditya.

Further reading: Aparna Chattopadhyay, *Studies in the Kathasaritsagara* (Varanasi: A. Chattopadhyay, 1993); N. M. Penzer, ed., *The Ocean of Story: Being C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Katha Sarit Sagara (or Ocean of Streams of Story)*, 10 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968–84); J. S. Speyer, *Studies about the Kathasaritsagara* (Wiesbaden: M. Sandig, 1968); C. H. Tawney, trans., *Stories of Vikramaditya* (Bombay:

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963–64); ———, *Vetala-panchavimsati: Twenty-five stories of a Vampire from Somadeva* (Bombay: Jaico, 1956).

Katha Upanishad

The *Katha Upanishad* is part of the Black YAJUR VEDA. It is based on an ancient story of a young man, NACHIKETAS, who is mistakenly sent to hell by his father after he questions his father's generosity. When the boy reaches the realm of the god of death (YAMA), he finds no one at home. Since he, as a guest, is kept waiting, Yama offers the young, but very wise, boy three boons.

The story of the three boons of the god of death forms the narrative core of this *Upanishad*. The first boon the boy asks for is that he be returned to the upper world to live with his father. The second boon he asks for is the secret of preserving good works. His final request is to learn the secret of overcoming continuous rebirth. Death gladly assents to the first two requests, giving the boy the Nachiketas fire, named for him, to fulfill the second wish. When asked for the secret of ending rebirth, however, Death tries to dissuade the boy with offers of wealth and other boons. When Nachiketas persists he is given the secret of Ultimate Reality or the *BRAHMAN*.

Further reading: Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Upanishads* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1975); S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1994).

kaula

Kaula is a tantric practice (see *TANTRISM*) that seeks unity with the *kula*, an esoteric term best understood to signify SHIVA (but often the menstrual blood of the goddess), sometimes focusing on Shiva as the ultimate and sometimes on SHAKTI. It includes a variety of different acts and has no definitive boundaries. It is known to make use of practices such as the *PANCHA MAKARA* or Five M's,

which involve practicing sexual rituals, eating beef, and drinking alcohol. It focuses on raising the KUNDALINI serpent at the base of the spine up through the CHAKRAS toward the place above the head where it meets its lover Shiva to create ADVAITA (non-dual) consciousness and bliss.

Further reading: J. C. Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Mark Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

Kauravas

The 100 Kauravas (descendants of KURU) are the chief villains in the great Indian epic the MAHABHARATA. They also descend from the ancient king Bharata. These sons of the blind king Dhritarashtra, led by Duryodhana, the eldest, conspire to steal the throne of the land from its rightful heirs, their cousins the PANDAVAS. Kaurava is only a convenient designation, as the Pandavas are also descendants of King Kuru via Pandu, Dhritarashtra's brother.

The story tells that Dhritarashtra's wife, Gandhari, receives a boon that she will bear 100 sons. She is pregnant for two years, when she hears that Kunti, wife of Pandu, has given birth. She then aborts herself, yielding a hard ball of flesh. The ball is sprinkled with water and severed into 101 parts, which are incubated and put into separate pots. From these come forth the 100 sons of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra, plus one daughter named Duhshala. (Dhritarashtra also incidentally has one bastard son, Yuyutsu.)

After his older brother Pandu dies, Dhritarashtra becomes regent and his sons (always called "the 100" although in actuality 101), led by Duryodhana, begin plotting to destroy their cousins, the five Pandavas. The story of the epic revolves around the struggle for the kingdom between these sets of brothers, culminating in the "Mahabharata" war, in which the Pandavas are triumphant, but with frightening losses.

Further reading: Peter Brook, director, *The Mahabharata* (videorecording), produced by Michael Proppe (Chatsworth, Calif.: Image Entertainment, 2002); William Buck, trans., *The Mahabharata* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahabharata*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); P. C. Roy, trans., *The Mahabharata*, 12 vols. (Bombay: Bharata Karyalaya, 1888–1896).

Kautilya (Chanakya) (c. 300 B.C.E.) See [ARTHASHASTRA](#).

Kaveri River See [CAUVERY RIVER](#).

Kedarnath

Kedarnath is a famous Shaivite (see [SHAIVISM](#)) PILGRIMAGE site in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh; one of India's *svamyambhu*, or "Self-generated" LINGAMS is located there. As in Amarnath the focus is upon an ice lingam. Pilgrimage can take place only during the middle of the summer, because of the inaccessibility of the mountainous location.

Kedarnath has been a pilgrimage site at least since the 12th century; it is listed in the eighth chapter of the text *Krityakalpataru* of Bhatta Lakshmidhara, a chief minister to King Govindachandra of the Gahadvala dynasty of Kanauj. It is usually said that there are four abodes of sanctity in all of India: BADRINATH, Puri (see [JAGANNATH TEMPLE, PURI](#)), RAMESHVARAM, and DWARAKA. In North India alone Kedarnath is considered one of the additional three abodes of sanctity; the other two are Yamnotri and Gangotri.

Further reading: Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Subhadra Sen Gupta, *Badrinath and Kedarnath, the Dhaams in the Himalayas* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2002).

Kena Upanishad

The Kena Upanishad or “By Whom [*Kena*] Upanishad,” takes its name from its first words, which ask the question, Who impels mind, breath and speech? Its subsidiary name, the Talavakara Upanishad, is from the *Talavakara* BRAHMANA of the SAMA VEDA, in which this Upanishad is sometimes found. The answer to the initial question is found in the second stanza: “That which is the hearing of the ear, the thought of the mind, the voice of speech and also the breathing of breath, and the sight of the eye” is the thing by which everything comes about.

This short Upanishad, with about 34 stanzas, tells a story (vss. 14–28) about the gods’ first encounter with the BRAHMAN. They approached the unknown being to see whether they could overpower it, but all were defeated. INDRA himself could not overcome it, but on his way back the goddess Uma told him that the being was brahman. He passed on this information to the rest of the gods, and was recognized as the greatest of the gods because of this knowledge. Uma somehow does not get the credit.

Further reading: Sri Aurobindo, *Kena Upanishad* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952); S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1994).

Keshavadas, Sant (1934–1997) advaita

Vedanta teacher

A prolific writer, composer, and international teacher, Sant Keshavadas founded the Temple of Cosmic Religion to advance his belief in the mystical unity of all religions.

Sant Keshavadas was born on July 22, 1934, on the Hindu holy day of Ekadashi, in Bhadrageri, a small village near Mysore in southern India. He was named Radha-Krishna by his parents, Venkataramana Pai and Rukmini Bai. At his birth, a priest cast his horoscope and predicted that the child would spread the devotion of God around

the world. At age 11, he received a mystical vision of Lord VISHNU, which inspired him to sing the word of God wherever he went in order to spread *sanatana DHARMA* “the eternal way”—a synonym for Hinduism—across the world.

In 1956, Radha-Krishna earned a B.A. from Mahatma Gandhi Memorial College, and two years later he received an L.L.B. at the Udipi Law College. After graduation he married Srimathi Rama Mataji, who joined him in his mission and helped him establish an ashram in Bangalore,



Sant Keshavadas (1934–1997), prominent teacher of Vedanta philosophy and yoga, known for his entrancing music and storytelling (Courtesy Temple of Cosmic Religion, Oakland)

Karnataka, in the 1960s. Between 1959 and 1966, Keshavadas made 47 pilgrimage tours of India, singing and speaking about his teaching.

In 1966, at the KUMBHA MELA festival in Allahabad, Keshavadas met the immortal BABAJI, who encouraged Keshavadas to go to the West to establish a following for the cosmic religion. Keshavadas and his wife (called Guru Mata) took this advice and traveled that year to Germany, England, and New York City to spread the message of *sanatana dharma*. Their message was received enthusiastically in the West and Keshavadas continued to make frequent trips across the world over the next 30 years. He established several ashrams in India, including his headquarters at the Vishwa Shanti Ashram in Bangalore, an ashram in Trinidad, and one in Oakland, California.

Keshavadas taught that mysticism or direct experience of God is the future of religion. On the basis of this belief he established the Temple of Cosmic Religion. He believed that humanity is preparing itself for cosmic consciousness, but that the ego prevents each person from reaching transformation to a higher consciousness. His main teaching focused on overcoming doctrinal differences by emphasizing unity among all religions. He offered many different approaches to unity but taught that the path to enlightenment requires repetition of God's holy name. His teachings include BHAKTI, deity worship, JNANA YOGA and VEDANTA as understood through Swami VIVEKANANDA.

Keshavadas was an accomplished composer who wrote and recorded over 6,000 songs. He often used music, storytelling, philosophy, and humor in his teachings. He spoke eight languages and lectured widely to audiences in the East and West. He also authored over 50 books including *The Bhagavad Gita and the Bible*, a work that explores the teachings of love and wisdom in Hinduism and Christianity. During the 1980s he organized construction of the Bhagavad-Gita Mandir (temple) near his Bangalore ashram. All

700 stanzas of the Bhagavad Gita are carved in black marble there, in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Kannada.

On December 4, 1997, at the age of 63, Keshavadas passed away while on a lecture circuit in Visakhapatnam. His work of unity and peace is continued by Guru Mata, who assumed responsibility for her husband's mission.

Further reading: Satguru Sant Keshavadas, *Essence of Bhagavad-Gita and Bible* (Oakland, Calif.: Temple of Cosmic Religion, 1982); ———, *Life and Teachings of Sadguru Sant Keshavadas* (Southfield, Mich.: Temple of Cosmic Religion, 1977); ———, *Mystic Christ* (Bangalore: Dasashrama Research, 1972); ———, *Self Realization* (Southfield, Mich.: Temple of Cosmic Religion, 1976); Mukundadas (Michael Allan Makowsky), *Minstrel of Love: A Biography of Satguru Sant Keshavadas* (Nevada City, Calif.: Hansa, 1980).

kevalin See JAINISM.

Khajuraho

Khajuraho is a small village near Jhansi in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Some 22 temples are located around the village; they are considered the finest of the medieval period and are known for their erotic art.

The temples were constructed between 950 and 1050 C.E. under the Chandel empire. They show murals and a profusion of sculptures that depict explicit scenes from the *KAMA SUTRA*. Some have explained their frank depiction of myriad sexual positions as being tantric in origin, as TANTRISM is known to stress sexual ritual.

One legend gives a more personal explanation of the erotic artwork. The mother of the king who built the temple had been seduced by the Moon god and became a social outcast. When the boy grew up to become king, he had a dream visitation from his mother; she asked him to show all the passions of love in order that people would learn the goodness

of sexuality and not condemn it. The temples of Khajuraho above all celebrate the feminine form. Women in every pose and posture, sexual and otherwise, are depicted with great care and art.

Though the temples are variously dedicated as Vaishnavite, Shaivite, GODDESS, and Jain (see [JAINISM](#)), they all appear quite similar; on the exterior one sees only women and men in sexual postures, and the sectarian identities are not apparent. Carvings and pictures in these temples show a dizzying profusion; every wall and ceiling is covered with painting and sculpture.

Further reading: Devagana Desai, *Khajuraho* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1990).

khalsa See [SIKHISM](#).

Kirpal Light Satsang See [RADHASOAMI MOVEMENT](#).

kirtans

Kirtans are songs to the glories of a god. They are usually sung in groups of people, accompanied by an accordionlike instrument called the harmonium. Percussive instruments are sometimes used as well. *Kirtan* singing may be the most common form of collective devotional worship in India. Both men and women participate. Singing alternatively slows down and speeds up until the singers are in a trance, ideally experiencing the presence of, or even union, with the divinity. Both *kirtans* and *BHAJANS* are songs of worship sung in devotion.

Further reading: Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Indian Classical Music and Sikh Kirtan* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Borgo Press, 1985); Hansadutta Swami, *Kirtan: Ancient Medicine for Modern Man* (Hopland, Calif.: Hansa Books, 1984).

Klein, Jean (c. 1916–1998) *Western teacher of yoga and advaita Vedanta*

Jean Klein was an important 20th-century teacher of non-dual VEDANTA, who focused on the direct experience of the Self rather than the gradual, progressive method of enlightenment.

Klein was born around 1916 into a family that loved music, painting, and art. He describes the family as “harmonious.” His childhood was spent in Brno (Czechoslovakia), Prague, and Vienna. He studied music and medicine in Vienna and Berlin, where he explored the relationships among thought, feeling, and muscle function.

He became a physician, and undertook the study of Eastern philosophies, particularly the works of Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI, Lao Tse, Chuang Tsu, Tagore, Coomaraswamy, J. KRISHNAMURTI, and Sri Aurobindo. After reading Gandhi, he became a vegetarian. He also read Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and the Western Sufi René Guénon. Guénon’s writing on cosmology and tradition proved a turning point in Klein’s life. What struck him was the distinction Guénon made between traditional and tradition—the principle transmitted from teacher to disciple through initiation: “This awoke in me the feeling that it was actually humanly possible to become fully integrated and awake in the whole.”

He left Germany in 1933 and spent World War II in France secretly helping thousands escape from Germany. After the war, he left Europe for India seeking an environment that would welcome self-inquiry. There he met a Pandit, a professor of SANSKRIT in Bangalore, Atmananda Krishna Menon, who became his teacher and who initiated him into the wisdom of ADVAITA (non-dual) VEDANTA. He also deepened his long study of YOGA by spending several months with Krishnamacharya, the famous hatha yoga teacher of South India. Although Klein could do ASANAS (postures) quite well, he was not attracted to yoga of the physical body. He wanted to understand how the body can become more subtle, more energized, more expanded; he began to see that the real body is

energy and light, not the bone-muscle structure that we assume to be the body. As Klein taught asanas and yoga, he always gave the energy body priority, stressing that all postures could be done independently of the physical body. After he had lived intensely with this understanding, one day the teaching became a lively reality, a bright and integrated truth.

Klein's teaching sprang from his insight into the nature of being and existence. He is regarded as a prominent teacher of *advaita* in the 20th century and an embodiment of the non-dual awareness he taught. His teaching is "direct," cutting through all experiences, states, and paths of purification that depend upon progressive or sequential methods. He encourages students to experience existence directly. According to Klein, the progressive way may produce many delightful experiences, but all these are support for the ego, which is thus kept alive in a more and more subtle way. Klein's direct approach says that our real nature cannot be known or experienced as an object. When this is clearly understood there is a letting go, a giving up of trying to achieve, to become, to find, or to understand. This letting go is the beginning of real maturity and openness to our true nature.

For 40 years, Dr. Klein responded to invitations from all over the world to share his knowledge. He lived in Europe and the United States and died in February 1998 in Santa Barbara, California. He is the author of several books in English and other languages.

Klein created the nonprofit Jean Klein Foundation in 1989 to help in the process of disseminating his teaching. Based in Santa Barbara, the foundation holds meetings that are open to the public and continues to publish newsletters. It has published Klein's journal *Listening* and plans to publish several books and dialogues of Klein's.

Further reading: Jean Klein, *Be Who You Are* (Longmead, England: Element, 1989); ———, *The Ease of Being* (Durham, N.C.: Acorn Press, 1984); ———,

Transmission of the Flame (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Third Millennium, 1990).

Klemp, Harold See [ECKANKAR](#).

Konarak

Konarak in the state of Orissa is the site of the largest temple to the sun god in India. It was built around the 13th century C.E. The main building represents the sun god's chariot, which in mythology was pulled across the sky each day by fiery-maned horses. The chariot has 24 massive wheels. Pulling the chariot are seven carved horses. The



Temple to the sun god, with the god's chariot, in Konarak, Orissa (Constance A. Jones)

temple was decorated with erotic sculpture resembling that at KHAJURAHO. Its tower appears to have fallen but is said to have been 200 feet high.

Further reading: A. Boner, S. R. Sarma, and R. P. Das, *New Light on the Sun Temple of Konarka: Four Unpublished Manuscripts Relating to the Construction History and Ritual of the Temple* (Varanasi: Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series Office, 1972).

Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health

See [DESAI, AMRIT](#).

Kripalu Yoga

Kripalu Yoga is a form of HATHA YOGA originally developed by Amrit DESAI (b. 1932) in the United States. The Indian-born Desai had been teaching yoga in the United States through the 1960s. However, in 1970, a significant development occurred in his work. Immediately after a visit to his teacher, Swami KRIPALVANANDA (1913–81), and while engaged in his regular practice, he experienced a spontaneous flow of yoga postures. He attributed this occurrence to the intelligence of the life force, which performed the postures without willful direction. He studied his experience and discovered the means of leading others into the same experience. As he began to teach this technique to others, he named it in honor of his guru, Sri Kripalvananda.

Kripalu Yoga begins with the eight aspects of Ashtanga Yoga derived from Patanjali's YOGA SUTRA. The postures (ASANAS) are learned in a three-step progress. One first learns the asanas consciously and practices them until some mastery of the positions is gained. In the second stage, as the practitioner holds each position, she or he withdraws attention from the outward world (in this case, the posture) and focuses attention inward on the accompanying body sensations. At this stage, one generally encounters a variety of psychological barriers and works to release all blockages on

physical, mental, and spiritual levels. In the third stage, one learns to participate in "meditation in motion," allowing the wisdom of the body to move itself into the postures apart from any conscious willing. Though simply described in three stages, each stage requires a significant amount of both physical and psychological work.

Desai began teaching his new variation on yoga in 1972 through the Kripalu Yoga Fellowship, in Somnertown, Pennsylvania, which he founded. The fellowship trained and commissioned many teachers of Kripalu Yoga. In 1994, after the discovery that Desai had had sexual relations with several of his students, the board of the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Lenox, Massachusetts, the showcase center of the fellowship, asked him to leave. Subsequently, the fellowship became organized as an educational institute without a focus on one teacher.

The Kripalu Center hosts a variety of programs, including yoga retreats, healing arts training, leadership instruction, and yoga teacher certification.

Further reading: Stephen Cope, *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* (New York: Bantam, 2000); Amrit Desai, *Kripalu Yoga: Meditation in Motion* (Lenox, Mass.: Kripalu Yoga Fellowship, 1981); Richard Faulds, *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice on and off the Mat* (New York: Bantam, 2005); Deva Parnell, "Kripalu Yoga: Theory and Practice." Available online. URL: <http://www.discoveryyoga.com/KYTheory.htm>. Accessed August 17, 2005.

Kripalvananda, Swami Sri (1913–1981)

Popular Gujarati yogi and inspiration for kriya yoga

His Holiness Swami Sri Kripalvananda, whose teachings inspired the popular form of HATHA YOGA known as KRIPALU YOGA, was born in 1913 in Gujarat, India. His childhood was marked by several attempts to commit suicide, but after his last attempt, he met his GURU, known affectionately as Dadaji, in a visionary experience. He later learned

that Dadaji was Lakulish, the 28th incarnation of Lord SHIVA.

The vision transformed his life and, after eight months, he took initiation into *sannyas*, renunciation, from Dadaji and was guided by Dadaji for the rest of his life. Dadaji then disappeared until 1952, when Kripalvanandji saw him as a young man. In his later appearances he encouraged Kripalvananda to develop and continue intense 10-hour-a-day practice of KUNDALINI meditation that he continued for the rest of his life.

At Kayavarohan, Gujarat, Kripalvananda was inspired to build a temple to Lord Lakulish and to reestablish the town of Kayavarohan as a center of spiritual culture and learning.

As his own practice matured, Kripalvananda became the guru of two brothers, SHANTI and AMRIT DESAI (b. 1932), both of whom would later go to America and begin organizations teaching the type of kundalini and hatha yoga that inspired Kripalvananda. In 1977, Amrit Desai invited Kripalvananda to go to America, where he would stay for more than three years. In those years he was a significant influence on the emerging community of KRIYA YOGA in the United States. He returned to India shortly before his death at the end of 1981.

Further reading: Yogi Amrit Desai and Shri Kripalvananda, *The Passion of Christ: A Discourse* (Lenox, Mass.: Kripalu, 1983); Shri Kripalvanandiji, *Kripalupanisad* (St. Helena, Calif.: Sanatana Publication Society, 1979); ———, *Pilgrimage of Love*, Books 1–3 (Lenox, Mass.: Kripalu, 1992); ———, *The Stages of Kundalini Yoga* (Lenox, Mass.: Kripalu, 1976); Swami Rajarshi Muni, *Infinite Grace: The Story of My Spiritual Lineage* (Vadodara: Life Mission Publications, 2002).

Krishna

The god Krishna is understood to be an incarnation of VISHNU. None of the other incarnations of Vishnu has attracted as passionate and widespread a devotion in India as Krishna. There is some evidence that Krishna was originally a historical fig-

ure. Krishna is technically the black god, since the Sanskrit word *krishna* means “black.” However, he is generally depicted with blue skin.

Krishna appears in the MAHABHARATA epic as a friend to the PANDAVA brothers. In that epic Krishna is rarely referred to with divine epithet, or as a divinity. It is only in the BHAGAVAD GITA, the famous text that recounts the teaching of Krishna to ARJUNA just before the battle, that the divinity of Krishna is clearly detailed. Some have suggested that the worship of Krishna in this context may constitute a form of euhemerism, or the deification of a famous warrior.

A second role of Krishna is as the divine lover, dancing at midnight with the cowherd maidens (GOPIS), who are drawn to his beauty, his beautiful music, and the magic of his divine presence. According to tradition he eventually favors Radha among the gopis; the passionate love of Radha for her furtive, often unavailable lover becomes the paradigm for Krishna devotionism. Finally, Krishna appears as a child and youth, mischievous, naughty, and beloved of every mother who lays eyes upon him.

The god was born in Mathura, where his father, VASUDEVA, was minister to the evil king Kamsa. Kamsa discovered that Vasudeva’s wife, DEVAKI, was to give birth to a son who would eventually kill him. Therefore, he kept Vasudeva and Devaki under guard and killed their first six children. The seventh child, BALARAMA, was miraculously transferred to the womb of Vasudeva’s other wife, Rohini. When the eighth child, Krishna, was born, a profound slumber fell upon Vasudeva’s guards and the father was able secretly to take the child across the YAMUNA River to BRINDAVAN and consign him to the cowherd Nanda and his wife, YASHODA, who became Krishna’s foster mother.

As a child, Krishna was extremely mischievous, stealing milk and butter (one of his epithets is “butter thief”), overturning wagons, and felling trees with strength far beyond that of an ordinary child. Once Yashoda tied him to a huge mortar used for grinding things. Krishna, even though



Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, with consort Radha (Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California)

a baby, dragged it out of the house and used it to fell two trees.

Once when Yashoda caught him eating mud, she forced him to open his mouth; within, she saw the entire universe. Krishna's magic made her forget this incident, lest she not be able to treat him as an ordinary child.

In two stories of his childhood he outwits evil forces. Putana, a witch, was sent by the evil king Kamsa to kill the infant by suckling him with poisonous milk. Krishna was completely unharmed, but he sucked so ferociously at her breast that the

demon's innards were sucked out and she died. In a later incident the snake demon Kaliya poisoned the drinking water in the Yamuna River, threatening the lives of the cowherds and the cows. Krishna found the pool where Kaliya was hiding and danced a furious dance upon him until he was killed.

In another tale the young Krishna asked people to worship the mountain Govardhana, rather than the great king of the gods Indra. Indra, learning this, sent terrible rain storms to wash away the cowherds who had defied him. Krishna with his

divine strength lifted up the mountain, Govardhana, to use as an umbrella to protect the people and thus defeated Indra himself.

As a young man, Krishna began to attract the interest of the cowherd women as he played his magical flute day and night. He would flirt with them and play tricks on them. Once when the cowherd girls were bathing he took all their clothes and put them up into a big tree. When the women left the water and begged him for their garments, he bent the tree down and let them retrieve their clothes.

Particularly at night Krishna would work his divine magic. The women would yearn to see him and could not find him. They would begin to think of all his magical deeds and praise him. When they finally found him, they began to dance with him; he became many Krishnas, pairing with each woman as though she were the only one. This is referred to as the Rasalila dance and is the metaphor for the way that god is intimate with each soul while it is only one. Finally, in the stories of later times (c. 10th century) one cowherd woman alone, named RADHA, becomes Krishna's favorite. Her passionate love for him, her yearning when he does not appear at their assigned spot, and their loveplay are all celebrated in the passionate liturgy of Krishna worship, where the devotee sees himself or herself as Radha seeking passionate union with god.

After the death of Kamsa, Krishna becomes an ally of the Pandavas. He assists them in every way fair and foul and helps them triumph; the BHAGAVAD GITA makes clear that this was divine aid.

We are left here with the mystery of Krishna, a divinity who is mischievous and naughty as a child, naughty as a young man—playing games with the hearts of many women—and who in war does not hesitate to use stratagems that the SHASTRAS the authoritative texts, might find inappropriate for a warrior. Krishna effects his LILA, his divine game, in ways that humans cannot grasp, except through complete devotion. Krishna must eventually die, as must all the other AVATARS of

Vishnu. While in the forest doing YOGA then, he is accidentally pierced in the foot with a spear by a hunter who mistook his foot for a deer's foot. He blesses the man who threw the spear that will take him to heaven.

Many devotional Vaishnavite movements in India focus on worship of Krishna only. Most famous of these are the followers of Saint CHAITANYA of Bengal, whose Goswamis, or followers of Chaitanya's tradition, moved to Brindavan to be closer to the place where Krishna lived. The followers of Chaitanya include Sri Swami Prabhupada BHAKTIVEDANTA, who traveled to the United States to found the Hare Krishna movement. As do many Krishnaites, they worship in ecstatic devotion, while chanting MANTRAS to their god.

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Krishna, Gopi (1903–1984) *master of Kundalini Yoga*

Gopi Krishna was an influential teacher whose impact depended on conveying his own transformative KUNDALINI YOGA experiences. He was known for his clear exposition of the awakening of kundalini. However, he never had his own spiritual teacher, was not initiated into any spiritual lineage, and did not himself train disciples.

Gopi Krishna was born in Kashmir in 1903 as an only son. In his childhood, his father renounced the world to lead a religious life and left his wife to care for three children. Since he was the only son,

he bore responsibility for his family's welfare. He did not attend university because he did not pass a major examination. In reaction to his father's decision to leave the world, he vowed to live as a householder. And in shame over his failure at examination, he took on a practice of MEDITATION in order to refine his concentration.

While employed by the Indian government, he practiced meditation for 17 years and developed the ability to sit for hours in concentration without discomfort. In 1937, while meditating and imagining a lotus at the crown of the head, he felt a roar like a waterfall and felt a stream of liquid light entering the brain through the spinal cord. This was his first experience of the serpent power of kundalini, a power said to reside as a latent force at the base of the spine that can be awakened so that it travels through and opens the seven CHAKRAS (energy centers along the spine). His report of this episode, for which he was totally unprepared, described a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of happiness impossible to describe.

Shortly after the initial experience, he experienced a continuous "luminous glow" around his head. He began to have a variety of psychological and physiological problems and even thought he was becoming mad. Although he read accounts of this phenomenon, he found no one who could help him through this difficult period. The mental and emotional destabilization lasted for several years. Aware that a fundamental change had taken place in him, he believed that his entire nervous system would be slowly reorganized and transformed. He viewed this energy, once activated, as an intelligent force over which one has little control.

His autobiography records this experience and its aftermath in one of the most detailed accounts of the unleashing of a psychospiritual power and spiritual transformation. He describes the difficulties and dangers of the spiritual path and the pressure that it can exert on the physical body.

However unbalanced his experience, he maintained in all of his subsequent writings that the awakening of kundalini is the means of spiritual evolution for humanity.

Gopi Krishna was not a GURU in the classical sense of one who has disciples. He did not found a movement or a sect but remained a seeker who later became a teacher. He documented his experiences in a number of books that attempted to teach the reality of the kundalini experience and to help others who encounter this extraordinary phenomenon. He died on July 31, 1984.

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Krishnabai, Mother (1903–1989) teacher *who embodied the love of service*

The child who later became known as Mother Krishnabai was born in 1903, although little else is known of her childhood. The first years of her life were turbulent. When she was 10 her father died. At age 13 she married K. Laxman Rao, who passed away seven years later, in 1926, leaving her a young widow.

In 1928 she encountered Swami RAMDAS, who provided uplift from her sorrows. Krishnabai became a devoted disciple and attained self-realization by strictly following the swami's teaching. As the foremost disciple and successor of Swami Ramdas, she embodied the love of service and provided for the spiritual and material needs of the poor. Under Swami Ramdas's guidance she helped to establish Anandashram in Kerala, South India. She worked with her beloved teacher there, becoming a mother to all who went to the ashram. In 1963, upon the death of Swami Ramdas, she assumed leadership of Anandashram. In spite

of poor health she propagated Swami Ramdas's teachings and served the poor until her death on February 12, 1989.

Further reading: Mother Krishnabai, *Guru's Grace* (Kahnangad: Anandashram, 1963); Swami Ramdas, *Krishna Bai* (Ramnagar: Anandashram, 1940); Swami Satchidananda, *Viswamata Krishnabai* (Kahnangad: Anandashram, n.d.); Sriram, *With the Divine Mother* (Kahnangad: Anandashram, n.d.).

Krishnalila See [RASA LILA](#).

Krishnamurti, Jiddu (1895–1986) *spiritual teacher of radical self-observation*

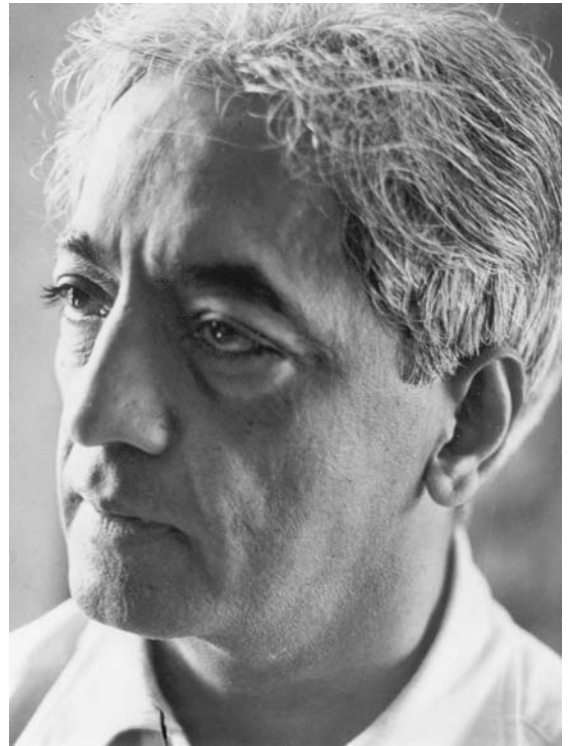
Chosen while still a child as the new messiah, or World Teacher, by the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, the Indian J. Krishnamurti acquired world fame as he traveled and lectured on the society's universalist teachings. After a personal spiritual transformation, he rejected the society and its occultism and went on to teach his philosophy of free inquiry toward the goal of understanding the self.

Born on May 12, 1895, in Madanapalle, near Madras (Chennai) in colonial India, Krishnamurti (the image of Krishna) grew up in an orthodox BRAHMIN family steeped in tradition, ritual, and a sacred view of the world. After the death of his mother when he was only 10 years old, he moved with his father and siblings to the compound of the Theosophical Society, a rapidly growing spiritual movement, in Adyar, near Madras.

The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 in New York City, began as an organization dedicated to a synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy with the credo "There is no religion higher than truth." Theosophical teaching includes the exploration of clairvoyant powers for discovering the hidden mysteries of nature and the esoteric powers of humanity. The Theosophists drew freely from their understanding of Eastern

thought, particularly Buddhist and Hindu cosmologies, to form a worldview that included a complex cosmology, an esoteric psychology, and an evolutionary scheme that encompassed eons. Drawing upon many religious traditions and prophecies, the Theosophical Society at the time of Krishnamurti's youth was actively looking for a messiah, a world teacher, who would destroy evil and restore righteousness.

In his early teen years, Krishnamurti was chosen by the Theosophists as the young world teacher and appointed head of the Order of the Star in the East, an organization devoted to realizing his teaching mission. For a number of years he traveled and addressed audiences, maturing in



Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), philosopher and teacher of radical self-observation (*Krishnamurti Foundation America*)

his understanding of the order, the Theosophical Society, and his role in each.

Over many months in 1922–23, Krishnamurti experienced a profound transformation. Begun as MEDITATION, Krishnamurti's "process" contained moments of great beauty and clarity offset by periods of physical pain, even agony. He would fall unconscious, converse with nonphysical entities, and speak from several personas. Krishnamurti's account is consistent with other reports of mystical non-dualist transformations. His personality dissolved into communion with all that lay beyond him. In his words, "I was in everything, or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the work and all breathing things."

After "the process" was complete, he experienced a growing dissatisfaction with the authority structure of the Theosophical Society and its emphasis on occultism. At the death of his brother, which the occultists of the Theosophical Society did not foresee, his dissatisfaction became overwhelming. He declared himself in revolt against Theosophy and against all forms of spiritual authority, advising every person, "Be a light unto yourselves." He disbanded the Order of the Star in the East in 1929, declaring, "Truth is a pathless land."

From then until his death in 1986, Krishnamurti traveled around the world teaching his insights. He became a champion of freedom and inquiry and a relentless advocate of the discovery of truth without the aid of any organization, religion, or belief system. His teaching emphasized the necessity of developing awareness of one's conditioning and one's bondage to thought, fear, and time. His goal was to make people "unconditionally free" and, to this end, he invited those who listened to him to observe their inner selves, including their motives and the functions of thought. With each audience, Krishnamurti inquired into the basic nature of humanity and found that real self-transformation involves an instantaneous awareness of the psyche and its

workings. Accompanied by simplicity and humility, this awareness can open a person to the reality of oneself.

The Krishnamurti Foundation of America was founded in 1969 to preserve and disseminate his teachings. Activities include the Oak Grove School, the Krishnamurti Archives, the Krishnamurti Study Center, the Krishnamurti Library, and Krishnamurti Publications of America. The Krishnamurti Foundation of England, begun in 1968, oversees the Brockwood Park School. The Krishnamurti Foundation of India sponsors the Rishi Valley School, the Krishnamurti Study Centre in Varanasi, Vasanta College of Rajghat, and other centers.

During his lifetime Krishnamurti created schools for children and young adults in India, the United States, England, and Switzerland. These alternative schools continue today in their mission to provide a new definition and practice of education, free of the conditioning and authority structures prevalent in modern educational institutions.

In his later years, Krishnamurti joined the physicist David Bohm in an exploration of the human condition through a series of dialogues. Both men recognized the limitations of traditional didactic teaching and sought a way in which truth and insight might be discovered within individuals and small groups. The dialogue process, practiced today in all Krishnamurti Foundations in the United States, India, and England, encourages individual inquiry without didactic formalism and authority structures. Krishnamurti and Bohm predicted that the actual structure of the human brain could change as a result of increased awareness and open inquiry.

Krishnamurti died on February 18, 1986, in Ojai, California, among his students.

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Constance Jones, “Krishnamurti Foundations,” in J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann, eds., *Religions of the World* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2002); J. Krishnamurti, *Commentaries on Living, from the Notebooks of J. Krishnamurti*. Edited by D. Rajagopal, 3 vols. (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1960); ———, *Education and the Significance of Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1953); ———, *The First and Last Freedom* (San Francisco: Harper, 1954); ———, *Freedom from the Known* (San Francisco: Harper, 1969); ———, *Talks and Dialogues of J. Krishnamurti* (New York: Avon, 1968); J. Krishnamurti and David Bohm, *The Ending of Time* (San Francisco: Harper, 1985); Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti*, 3 vols. (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1988).

Krishnamurti, U. G. (1918–) *unorthodox teacher of philosophy of “no self”*

U. G. Krishnamurti is an original teacher in the Hindu tradition, who believes that conscious thought is the enemy of true knowledge.

Born into a BRAHMIN family on July 9, 1918, in Andhra Pradesh, India, U. G. Krishnamurti was exposed by his family to many forms of Hinduism as well as the philosophy of the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. His childhood home was visited by monks, SWAMIS, pundits, GURUS, and religious scholars, who engaged in constant conversations on philosophy, religion, occultism, and metaphysics. He studied classical yoga with Swami SIVANANDA of Rishikesh and visited Sri RAMANA MAHARSHI in Tiruvannamalai.

At the University of Madras (Chennai), U. G. Krishnamurti studied philosophy and psychology. He married in his 20s and had four children. He became a public speaker and delivered orations for the Theosophical Society, becoming acquainted with J. KRISHNAMURTI (no relation), the person chosen in 1914 by Theosophists as the “world teacher.”

U. G. Krishnamurti’s teaching centers around a radical notion that so-called SELF-REALIZATION is actually the discovery that there is no self to

discover. There is a “natural state” for humans that simply happens, without thought and without effort. Thought is an enemy because thought cannot touch anything living and cannot capture, contain, or express the quality of life. Further, religious and spiritual teachings that reduce the quality of life to thought and systems of thought are polluting to the spirit of humanity. Anything based on knowledge through thought is an illusion. Any moment of experience cannot be captured or given expression. Once the moment is captured, it is made a part of the past. In this way, U. G. Krishnamurti challenges the way that society is organized, in its political ideologies, legal structures, and religious institutions. What is necessary for survival of the human organism are an intelligence of the body and awareness of the moment of existence.

U. G. Krishnamurti continues to teach in Switzerland, India, and the United States.

Further reading: Mahesh Bhatt, *U. G. Krishnamurti—a Life* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2001); U. G. Krishnamurti, *Mind Is a Myth—Disquieting Conversations with the Man Called U. G.* Edited by Terry Newland (Volant: Dinesh, 1988); ———, *The Mystique of Enlightenment: The Unrational Ideas of a Man Called U. G.* Edited by Rodney Arms, 3d ed. (Bangalore: Sahasramana Prakashana, 2001); ———, *Thought Is Your Enemy: Mind-Shattering Conversations with the Man Called U. G.* Edited by Anthony Paul Frank Noronha and J. S. R. L. Narayana Moorthy (Bangalore: Sowmya, 1991).

Krishnananda, Swami (1922–2001) *philosopher of advaita Vedanta*

Swami Krishnananda was a great scholar of Sanskrit scripture, who shared his learning in many books and lectures. He served the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh as secretary for 40 years.

Subbaraya, later named Swami Krishnananda, was born on April 25, 1922, the eldest of six siblings in an orthodox Madhva BRAHMIN family. Raised through the example of his father’s holi-

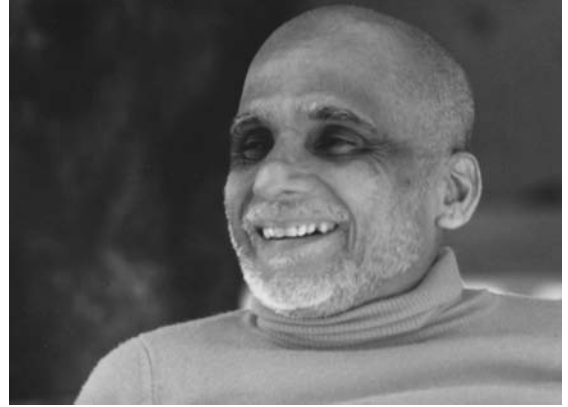
ness and piety, Subbaraya learned to maintain his family's religious tradition with earnestness. He became versed in SANSKRIT as a young boy and was a passionate learner of scripture. Subbaraya attended school in Puttur, where he excelled in all subjects, rising to the top of his class. Aside from his usual studies, he spent time reading and memorizing Sanskrit scriptural texts. At age 16 he memorized the entire BHAGAVAD GITA by heart, reciting it each day.

Subbaraya's self-study of major Hindu scriptures led him to an acceptance of ADVAITA (non-dual) philosophy. His growing interest pushed him toward a renunciation of the material world, even as he was pressured by his father and uncle to seek employment and earn money. Subbaraya accepted a government post at the Hospet Government Training School in Bellary District in 1943 but soon fell ill and returned home. Succumbing to his desire for the religious life, he traveled to Rishikesh in 1944 to join the Sivananda ashram. In 1946 Swami SIVANANDA initiated Subbaraya into SANNYAS (renunciation), giving him the name Swami Krishnananda.

Swami Krishnananda was employed at the ashram as a letter writer and editor of books. Sivananda later gave him the job of handwriting and typing manuscripts. In 1948, at Sivananda's request, Krishnananda began to write books on philosophy and religion. He accepted the task with great zeal and wrote his first book, *The Realization of the Absolute*, in a mere two weeks. He spent the remainder of his life writing commentaries on Hindu scriptures and delivering lectures on Eastern and Western philosophy and religion.

In 1957, Krishnananda became secretary of the ashram and focused his attention on managing finances. In 1961, he was nominated by Sivananda to the position of general secretary of the Divine Life Society. Krishnananda retained this position for the next 30 years until his death on November 23, 2001.

Swami Krishnananda is recognized for his knowledge of scriptures, his balance of KARMA



Swami Krishnananda (1922–2001), scholar, teacher, and secretary of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh (Courtesy Divine Life Society, Rishikesh)

(action) and JNANA (learning) YOGA, and his ability to communicate complicated concepts to students. He was a regular lecturer, teaching three-month-long courses at the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy of the Divine Life Society. His literary skill was used in varying degrees throughout Sivananda's organizations. He was made president of the Sivananda Literature Research Institute because of his understanding of all 300 of his guru's works. He was later made president of the Sivananda Literature Dissemination Committee, which worked on translating Sivananda's books into the major Indian languages.

Swami Krishnananda wrote over 40 books of his own, including works of poetry. His topics included yoga, MEDITATION, traditional scriptures, mysticism, and philosophy. Many of these books convey an essential message of peace, wisdom, and SELF-REALIZATION, which the Divine Life Society continues to spread.

Further reading: Swami Krishnananda, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Yoga* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1982); ———, *Meditation, Its Theory and Practice* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1974); ———, *The Philosophy of the Bhagavad-Gita*

(Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1980); ———, *The Realization of the Absolute* (Rishikesh: Divine Life Society, 1972).

Krishna Prem, Sri (1898–1965) *Western-born Vaishnavite guru*

British-born Sri Krishna Prem was a prominent GURU in the orthodox Vaishnavite tradition.

Ronald Nixon was born in Cheltenham, England, on May 10, 1898; served as a pilot in World War I while still a teenager; and later graduated in philosophy from King's College, Cambridge. While at Cambridge, he studied Theosophy, Buddhism, and Pali and took a Buddhist initiation.

In 1921, after graduation from Cambridge, he went to India to take a position as lecturer in English at Lucknow University and to continue his spiritual search. The vice-chancellor of Lucknow University, Dr. G. N. Chakravarti, was a Theosophist, who had known Madame BLAVATSKY and was a friend of Annie BESANT, then president of the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY. During a party at the home of Dr. Chakravarti and his wife, Monica, Nixon observed Monica in a meditative and devotional state in front of an image of Lord KRISHNA. In 1924, she became his guru and gave him initiation into VAISHNAVISM (the worship of incarnations of VISHNU).

In 1928, Monica took the vow of SANNYAS (called *vairagya* in the GAUDIYA Vaishnavite tradition) and assumed the name *Yashoda Ma*. Soon after, Nixon took *vairagi* vows from her and was given the name Krishna Prem. They looked for a place to start a community and found a rural area near Almora; they founded the Uttar Brindaban Ashram and dedicated a temple to Radha and Krishna there in 1931. The ASHRAM began and has continued to be aligned with strict orthodox Vaishnavism, including total vegetarianism, thrice-daily PUJAS, and a sacramental attitude toward all of life.

Yashoda Ma died in 1944, leaving Krishna Prem as her successor. He initiated two people

before her death: her daughter, Moti, and an Englishman he had known at Cambridge. The ashram grew and eventually included other Indian disciples, some of whom built their own cottages near the temple.

Krishna Prem traveled little, but in 1948 he visited Sri RAMANA MAHARSHI and Sri AUROBINDO and the MOTHER. At his death on November 14, 1965, leadership of the ashram passed to Sri Madhava ASHISH, another Englishman, who collaborated with Krishna Prem on publications and edited some of his work posthumously.

Further reading: Krishna Prem, *Initiation into Yoga: An Introduction to the Spiritual Life* (Bombay: B. I., 1976); ———, *The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita* (Longmead, England: Element Books, 1988); Krishna Prem and Madhava Ashish, *Man, the Measure of All Things, in the Stanzas of Dyzan* (London: Rider, 1969); Dilip Kumar Roy, *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968).

Krita Yuga

All of the YUGAS, or ages, in the Indian tradition, refer to throws in an ancient game of dice. *Krita* (“the one that made it!”) is the best throw—a 4.

The Krita Yuga, which like all ages has appeared an infinite number of times and will return an infinite number of times, is also called Satya Yuga, or the age of truth. It is 1,728,000 years long. In Krita Yuga the highest virtue is said to be MEDITATION. In this age, BRAHMA is god. Eternal DHARMA is said to have all its four feet in this age, while in the others it progressively has three, two, and one. In the Krita age there is no distinction between the best and worst of creatures. Their life, happiness, and attractiveness are all equal. They are also free of sorrow, completely good, and enjoy solitude, rather than crowds. They are devoted to MEDITATION, active in spiritual restraints and austerities, and act always without self-interest. They are always joyful and have no permanent homes, but live in the mountains or by the oceans.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kriyananda, Goswami See [TEMPLE OF KRIYA YOGA](#).

Kriyananda, Swami (1926–)
kriya yoga guru

Swami Kriyananda is the founder of the ANANDA MOVEMENT of religious and communal organizations, designed to spread the teachings of KRIYA YOGA and the principles of cooperative living.

James Donald Walters was born in Toleajen, Romania, to American parents. As a youth he was sent to boarding schools in Switzerland and England and later attended Haverford College, a Quaker school in Pennsylvania, and Brown University. He left school before completing his degree and settled in South Carolina.

In South Carolina, he had his first serious contact with Hinduism, when he read the Bhagavad Gita followed by *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa YOGANANDA. At about the same time he became a vegetarian. In 1948, he moved across the continent to meet Yogananda and offer himself as a disciple. He quickly moved into a leadership position with Yogananda's relatively small organization, the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP (SRF), and within a year was lecturing on its behalf. His leadership role increased after Yogananda's death, and in 1955 he was named the main minister at the center in Hollywood. It was at this time he took the vows of the renounced life and became known as Kriyananda.

In 1960 he was selected as a member of SRF's board of trustees and named its vice president. However, by this time he had become focused on exploring the communal aspects of Yogananda's thought, and in 1962 he resigned all posts with

SRF and decided to put his time into realizing the development of several small economically independent communities. He wrote several books underscoring the rationale for such communities, including *Cooperative Communities: How to Start Them and Why* (1968). His lectures from this time would later be compiled and published as *Crises in Modern Thought* (1972).

In 1967 he purchased land in the foothills of the Sierra as a site for the first Ananda Cooperative Community. The next decade would be spent in building the community, making it a center for teaching the *kriya yoga* he had learned with Yogananda, and writing.

In 1983, Kriyananda abandoned his vows of SANNYAS (which included celibacy) and became a lay believer/teacher. He began using his birth name again and married in 1985. Members of the community accepted this change with relative ease. In 1990, he led in the establishment of a new religious community, the Ananda Church of Self-Realization, part of the ANANDA MOVEMENT.

The progress of Ananda has been punctuated by several traumatic events. First, in 1976, a forest fire swept through the Ananda Village in the Sierras, destroying almost all its structures and threatening the survival of the community. However, it was rebuilt. After the incorporation of the church, Ananda began a lengthy litigation with SRF over usage of the term SELF-REALIZATION. SRF also sought to deny Ananda the use of a number of Yogananda's books and images. Ananda won most of the issues being litigated, although the community faced a huge bill for more than a decade of legal work. When a former member successfully sued Ananda claiming sexual harassment, Ananda was thrown into bankruptcy, from which it is slowly recovering.

Most recently, Walters has resumed his vows of *sannyas* and is once again known as Swami Kriyananda. In November 2003, he and several leaders in Ananda moved to Delhi, India, and opened an Ananda branch in India. He has continued to turn out numerous books as well as music

(his role as a composer is one of the less known aspects of his career). The Ananda movement has also established a center in Assisi, Italy.

Further reading: Swami Kriyananda, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita* (Nevada City, Calif.: Crystal Clarity, 2006); J. Donald Walters, *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga* (Nevada City, Calif.: Crystal Clarity, 2002); ———, *Cooperative Communities: How to Start Them and Why* (Nevada City, Calif.: Ananda, 1968); ———, *Crises in Modern Thought* (Nevada City, Calif.: Ananda, 1972); ———, *The Path: Autobiography of a Western Yogi* (Nevada City, Calif.: Ananda, 1977); Ted A. Nordquist, *Ananda Cooperative Village: A Study in the Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes of a New Age Religious Community*. Religion-historiska Institutionen Monograph Series (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1978).

kriya yoga

The “yoga of ritual action,” *kriya yoga* is contrasted with *jnana* (learning) *YOGA* and equated with *KARMA* (action) *yoga* in the Trishikhi-Brahmana Upanishad. The practice of *kriya yoga* involves concentrating the mind upon a particular object that transmutes energy and experience. *Kriya yoga* is said to obliterate the subliminal activators (*SAMSKARAS*) through asceticism (*TAPAS*), study (*svadhyaya*), and devotion to God.

Kriya yoga is based on specific breathing patterns. Through *PRANAYAMA* (disciplined breathing) the devotee’s focus leaves ordinary reality as it begins to climb in order to merge with the divine. It is important that the practitioner leave thoughts of mundane reality behind because such thoughts interfere with the ability to focus concentration on the other-worldly. This ability to turn inward to receive spiritual energy is believed to lead the disciple to God realization. As each *CHAKRA* (invisible energy wheel) is opened through *MEDITATION*, the *KUNDALINI* energy is released to travel from the base of the spine, where it is coiled in latency, through the glands of the body to release the energy of

transformation. The culmination of the process occurs when the crown chakra is energized and opened to receive energy from the divine. The process of *kriya yoga* transmutes the life force or energy that connects the physical body and the subtle anatomy described in the Hindu scriptures.

In the last century, *BABAJI*, *LAHIRI* Mayasaya, *Sri YUKESWAR*, and *Paramahansa YOGANANDA* have been responsible for a renewed interest in *kriya yoga*.

Further reading: Georg Feuerstein, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

Kriya Yoga Centers

The *Kriya Yoga Centers* are a set of related ashrams founded by Swami Hariharananda Giri (1907–2002), a god-brother to Swami Paramahansa *YOGANANDA*. Both swamis learned *KRIYA YOGA* under the tutelage of *Sri YUKTESWAR* (1855–1936), who made his home in Puri, Orissa, and who built an *ASHRAM* (religious community) there in 1906. *Yuktswar* passed his lineage to *Yogananda*, who left India and took the concepts of *kriya yoga* to the United States. In India, the lineage passed first to *Sreemat Swami Satyananda* and then in 1970 to *Swami Hariharananda Giri*. *Hariharananda* was chosen from among the members and disciples who had remained close to the ashram through the years.

Born *Rabindranath Bhattacharya* in *Habibpur*, *West Bengal*, on *May 27, 1907*, *Hariharananda* took initiation in the path of *JNANA yoga* from *Sri Bijaykrishna Chattopadhyaya*. In 1932, he met *Sri Yuktswar*, who initiated him into *kriya yoga* and gave him charge of the ashram in *Puri*. In 1935, *Swami Yogananda* gave him a second initiation into *kriya yoga*. In 1938 he renounced the world and spent 12 years in seclusion in *Puri*. In 1949, he had a vision of the eternal yogi *BABAJI*, who prophesied that he would spread the message of *kriya yoga* to the world. In 1951, *Yogananda*

empowered him to give initiation to others. In 1959, he took formal monastic vows from the Shankaracharya of Puri and was given the name Hariharananda Giri.

After assuming leadership, Hariharananda promoted the work of the ashram throughout India, creating affiliations with other ashrams. Believing that the *kriya* path should be shared with other peoples around the world, he proceeded to make formal visits to promote knowledge of *kriya yoga* as the clearest path to enlightenment around the world.

By 1974, Hariharananda had made the decision to go west, initially with plans to develop ashrams in Switzerland. He continued to found ashrams and centers throughout Europe. His decision to start an organization in New York City introduced the work to the United States, much as Yogananda's mission had evolved into the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP.

The United States headquarters of the Kriya Yoga Centers is located in Homestead, Florida. The international headquarters is in Orissa, India. The center publishes a periodical, *Soul Culture: A Journal of Kriya Yoga*.

Further reading: Swami Hariharananda Giri, *Isa Upanishad* (Homestead, Fla.: Kriya Yoga Ashrams, 1985); ———, *The Laughing Swami: Teachings of Swami Hariharananda* (Washington, D.C.: Yes International, 2005); ———, *Secrets and Significance of Idol Worship among the Hindus* (Puri: Karar Ashram, 1984).

Kriya Yoga Tantra Society

The Kriya Yoga Tantra Society is one of the many tantric movements (see [TANTRISM](#)) that entered the West from their spiritual homeland in India in the later decades of the 20th century. The society was founded by Andre O. Rathel, more commonly known by his spiritual name, Sunyata Saraswati.

The American tantric groups have developed through several independent sources. Sunyata was

a student of the esoteric sciences, tantra, and the martial arts. During his travels he went to India, where he studied with Satyananda Saraswati, the most significant tantric teacher of the 20th century and the founder of the Bihar School of Yoga (now the International Yoga Fellowship) in Bengal. After completing his course of tantra and MEDITATION he returned to the United States and founded Beyond/Beyond in Los Angeles, California, which eventually evolved into the Kriya Yoga Tantra Society.

Sunyata availed himself of a number of teachers and teachings in order to be more fully informed about a variety of esoteric topics. He made an independent evaluation of different tantric teachers and studied with several Taoist masters in Hong Kong. From his studies he selected tantra as the most powerful of all paths to liberation and enlightenment. His central and primary path is the system called *KRIYA YOGA*, originally popularized by Paramahansa YOGANANDA (1893–1952), which was thought to be the original tantra of the legendary BABAJI, who is believed to live, after many centuries, in the HIMALAYAS.

Although Yogananda occasionally taught from the perspective of tantra, he did not stress left-hand tantra, the system that Sunyata adopted. According to the teachings of Sunyata, tantra promotes intense sexual energy through touch and yogic practices. The intense energy that is developed unleashes the KUNDALINI energy, a latent energy believed to be resting at the base of the spine. Once released, this power travels the spine, opening each CHAKRA (seven invisible wheels of energy along the spine) to the top of the head, when a person reaches *moksha* (spiritual liberation) or enlightenment.

Sunyata travels widely offering seminars in his method of tantric enlightenment. Retreats are offered by the society in relatively secluded areas in order to preserve the sacredness of the teachings and the privacy of the attendees. Headquarters are in San Francisco, California. The society publishes the periodical *Jyoti*.

Further reading: Andre O. Rathel and Annette B. White, *Tantra Yoga: The Sexual Path of Inner Joy and Cosmic Fulfillment* (Hollywood, Calif.: Beyond Beyond, 1981); Sunyata Saraswati, *Activating the Five Cosmic Energies* (San Francisco: Kriya Jyoti Tantra Society, 1987); Sunyata Saraswati and Bodhi Avinsha, *The Jewel in the Lotus: The Art of Tantric Union* (San Francisco: Kriya Jyoti Tantric Society, 1987).

K's, Five See [SIKHISM](#).

Kshatriya

The Kshatriyas are the warrior/kingly class in the ancient fourfold class system of India. They are second in the hierarchy beneath the BRAHMINS. Their duty was to protect and rule. They were always allied with Brahmins in their role as kings and overlords, but they vied for control of the top of the social hierarchy. In the sixth century B.C.E. the heterodox movements of Buddhism and JAINISM, which opposed Brahminical orthodoxy, were founded by men of Kshatriya lineage, respectively, Siddhartha Gautama (later, BUDDHA) and Vardhamana (later, MAHAVIRA).

As do Brahmins, Kshatriyas receive the SACRED THREAD, making them “twice-born.” Up to the GUPTA era (c. 600 C.E.) they learned SANSKRIT and to some degree the scriptures. The UPANISHADS give examples of Kshatriya kings who teach Brahmins the highest wisdom.

Kshatriyas play a significant role in Indian literature, along with the Brahmins. Both the RAMAYANA and MAHABHARATA are essentially Kshatriya epics dealing with issues of kingly succession. They also, of course, highlight the two Kshatriya heroes RAMA and KRISHNA, both recognized as avatars of Lord VISHNU.

Further reading: Shanta Anand, *Ksatriyas in Ancient India: A Socio-Economic and Religious Study* (Delhi: Atma Ram, 1985); Bimla C. Law, *Ancient Mid-Indian*

Ksatriya Tribes (Varanasi: Bharatiy Publishing House, 1975); C. T. Metcalfe, *The Rajpoot Tribes* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1982).

Kubera

Kubera is the early god of wealth in India. However, he did not develop a large cult following and perhaps was overshadowed by the goddess LAKSHMI, whose attributes and realm of power were similar.

There are different stories about Kubera's birth and upbringing. Generally he is said to have ruled over Lanka (Sri Lanka) until the demon Ravana gained the power to steal some of his magical belongings and exile him. Both Kubera and Ravana are seen as descendents of the mind-born son of BRAHMA, Pulastya. Kubera apparently took up residence in the north; he is seen as the guardian of the northern direction, while INDRA guards the east, YAMA the south, and VARUNA the west. In all these stories he is always heralded as the lord of gold and riches.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kumar, Guru Sushil (1926–1994) *Jain teacher*

Guru Sushil Kumar was a teacher of Jain tradition and of interreligious understanding. He broke with Jain convention by traveling abroad in pursuit of his mission, and he founded the International Jain Mission (see [JAINISM](#)).

Sushil Kumar was born on June 15, 1926, into a Hindu Brahmin family in the small village of Sikhopur in Hariyana, India. The village was later renamed Sushalgarh in his honor. When he was a very young boy, a deceased Jain YOGI and enlightened master, Sri Roop Chandji Maharaj, appeared

to him in a vision and told the young Sushil to become a monk. At age seven, he left his family and village to live with a Jain monk, Sri Chotelal Maharaj, who became his guru. In 1941, at age 15, Sushil took initiation (*DIKSHA*) and became a monk in the *STHANAKVASI* sect of Jainism.

Sushil pursued an academic career in classical Indian and yogic philosophies, while experiencing directly the topics he was studying. His abilities to teach and share his experiences attracted disciples, who recognized him as a source of wisdom, truth, and understanding. He actively promoted peace and harmony throughout India and worked to establish a sense of universal brotherhood among the country's conflicting religious traditions.

In 1975 he began a controversial international tour, which broke with the Jain tradition's requirement that monks travel only by foot. He broke the ancient restraint against traveling by plane in order to share the Lord MAHAVIRA's message of nonviolence, peace, and oneness of all living beings.

His teaching of the Arhum Yoga system involves mastery of the inner self through watchfulness and direct perception. Arhum yoga includes the eight limbs of PATANJALI's yoga system, sound vibration, healing, awakening of the KUNDALINI, energy, holistic health, and the teachings of Jainism. The main text he used was the Matrika Yidya of the Namokar Mantra, a foremost mantra in the Jain tradition.

Sushil presided over a number of world religion conferences and was director and president of many organizations devoted to intercultural and interreligious cooperation, world peace, universal brotherhood, animal and environmental protection, and nonviolence. He was a founding member of the VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD.

Sushil motivated the Sikh leader Tara Singh to participate in dialogue with the Indian government to solve the animosities that were threatening the state of Punjab.

He also founded many spiritual organizations, including the World Fellowship of Religions in 1950, Vishwa Ahimsa Sangh in 1957, International

Jain Mission in 1978, Arhat Sangh in 1979, and the World Jain Congress in 1981, and World Center of Nonviolence. He died on April 22, 1994.

Sushil's main ashram is Siddhachalam, in Blairstown, New Jersey, established in 1983, the first Jain pilgrimage site (*tirtha*) established outside India. Siddhachalam is a residential community for monks, nuns, and laymen and laywomen, as well as a retreat center. It serves as headquarters for the International Jain Mission, the World Fellowship of Religions, and the World Jain Congress. The ashram is also a wildlife sanctuary.

kumbhaka See [PRANAYAMA](#).

Kumbhakarna

Kumbhakarna (He with *karna*, ears [as big as], *kumbha*, pots) is a *rakshasa*, a demon, the brother of Ravana (see [DEMONIC BEINGS](#)). He plays a part in the RAMAYANA story and he is burned yearly in effigy during the Ramlila celebration, when the victory of Lord RAMA over the evil demons is remembered.

The story goes that Kumbhakarna was a very powerful demon, and naturally strong. Other demons, *rakshasas*, acquired their powers as the result of austerities and boons, but he alone had the natural power to kill any god, man, or being. Once Kumbhakarna was besting INDRA, the king of the gods himself, in battle. Indra, along with other gods, *RISHIS*, and various beings went to BRAHMA to ask for aid. Brahma cursed Kumbhakarna at that moment, to sleep forever. Ravana, his brother, pleaded with Brahma to soften his curse and Brahma then cursed him to sleep for six months at a time, after which he would voraciously eat for one day, and then would go back to sleep again. This curse was meant to hold him in control so that he would not conquer all the worlds.

In the RAMAYANA, when the *rakshasas* have begun their war with RAMA, Lakshmana, and the monkeys, there is a rather humorous scene that

takes place when Ravana tries forcibly to wake Kumbhakarna to fight. They beat him and scrape him in every way; they have elephants drag him; they beat a thousand drums; and so on, but Kumbhakarna continues to snore. Finally, hit with trees and doused by thousands of pitchers of water, Kumbharakarna awakes. This done, he is asked to fight and agrees, but first he must be fed vast wagon loads of food, which he takes whole into his voracious mouth. His endless hunger sated, he goes into battle. After wreaking havoc, he eventually is slain by Lord Rama himself.

Further reading: S. P. Bahadur, trans., *The Complete Works of Gosvami Tulsidas* (Varanasi: Prachya Prakashan, 1978–2005); Robert Goldman, ed., *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, 6 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984–2005); C. Rajagopalachari, *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972).

Kumbha Mela

The Kumbha Mela (pot festival) is held once every three years, moving in rotation among four riverside sites in India: Prayag (ALLAHABAD), HARIDVAR, Ujjaini, and Nasik. The first two of these locations are in Uttar Pradesh, Ujjaini is in Madhya Pradesh, and Nasik is in Maharashtra.

The Kumbha Mela may have originated in great antiquity when various seeds were taken to river banks, dipped into the water, and then sown for a bountiful harvest. One myth of the festival's origin begins with a pot of the nectar of immortality; it was carried away by Jayanta, the son of INDRA, with the gods and demons in hot pursuit. As he carried the pot for 12 divine days (12 human years) a little was dropped in each of the four festival locations. Hence the name Pot Festival.

The Kumbha Mela festival at Allahabad (Prayag), held every 12th year and called the Maha (great) Kumbha Mela, is the largest festival in India and perhaps in the world. According to astrologers, the Maha Kumbha Mela takes place

when the planet Jupiter enters Aquarius and the Sun enters Aries. Millions of people assemble together at this sacred site for ceremonial processions, devotional singing, religious discourses, and other special activities for the religious. Monks and holy men and women from every Hindu sect converge together at this site to participate in this sacred and festive gathering.

Further reading: Jack Hebner and David Osborn, *Kumbha Mela: The World's Largest Act of Faith* (La Jolla, Calif.: Ganesh, 1990); D. K. Roy, *Kumbha: India's Ageless Festival* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955).

kundalini

The kundalini is envisioned in Tantric Yogic practice as a serpent at the base of the spine with her head turned downward. She is the embodiment of the GODDESS. When the practioner has learned to control the breath in its channels (NADIS) in the proper way, the serpent is made to turn her head upward and begin the ascent up the spine, piercing as she goes the energy centers or CHAKRAS in their various locations along the spine. This piercing activates energies of the body to create occult powers and spiritual awakening. When the kundalini goes beyond the body to a place 12 fingers above the head called SAHASRARA, or the place of the thousand lotuses, it joins in erotic embrace Lord SHIVA, engendering complete enlightenment and liberation in this world.

Further reading: Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 2000); Sir John Woodroffe, trans. and ed., *The Serpent Power*, 4th ed. (Madras: Ganesh, 1950).

Kundalini Research Foundation (est. 1971)

A number of gurus have introduced KUNDALINI methods to the United States for dissemination. One such yogi is Gopi KRISHNA (1903–84), who led a life of MEDITATION in search of liberation

(*moksha*) and enlightenment (*samadhi*). He experimented with several types of yoga for 17 years before achieving enlightenment. After his experience with the awakening of KUNDALINI energy, he became a prolific writer, speaker, and teacher of spiritual kundalini yoga.

Kundalini energy is believed to be a well-spring of spiritual energy that is coiled at the base of the spine. Seven invisible wheels of energy (CHAKRAS) along the spine are the sites of powers that must be accessed to allow enlightenment to occur. Teachers of yoga, such as Gopi Krishna, frequently speak of opening these chakras with special breathing techniques so that the life force (*prana*) can be utilized to transform consciousness into a state of enlightenment (*samadhi*).

Gopi Krishna, with a wealth of knowledge about yoga, wrote 17 books about various aspects of the awakening of kundalini. In 1970, an American, Gene Kietter, realized the significance of what Gopi Krishna had learned and founded the Kundalini Research Foundation in New York in 1971 in order to promote his work. The foundation, now headquartered in Darien, Connecticut, seeks to promote the scientific investigation of enlightenment, inspiration, genius, and the evolution of consciousness.

Further reading: Darrell Irving, *Serpent of Fire: A Modern View of Kundalini* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1994); Gopi Krishna, *Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975); ———, *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); ———, *The Goal of Consciousness Research* (Darien, Conn.: Friends of Gopi Krishna, 1998); ———, *The Wonder of the Brain* (Norton Heights, Conn.: Kundalini Research Foundation, 1987).

Kurma Avatar

The Kurma Avatar or tortoise AVATAR (incarnation) of VISHNU plays a small role in the myth of the churning of the MILK OCEAN, which is widely

repeated in Sanskrit epics, the PURANAS, and story. There, the story goes that the fate of the gods took a bad turn when the king of the gods, INDRA, was cursed by the sage DURVASAS for slighting him. The gods asked Vishnu his advice on how to restore their good fortunes. Vishnu suggested that they churn the Milk Ocean, from which they might obtain the nectar of immortality. They were advised to do this in concert with their enemies the ASURAS or antigods (demons), since the task was monumentally difficult. When they stirred the Milk Ocean, they used the divine serpent Vasuki as the churning stick. Vishnu offered himself as a huge tortoise (*kurma*) upon which to rest the churning stick.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Shakti M. Gupta, *Vishnu and His Incarnations* (Bombay: Somaiya, 1993); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); Pandrimalai Swamigal, *The Ten Incarnations: Dasavatara* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kurukshetra

Kurukshetra (province of the Kurus) is a tract of land south of present-day Delhi and is the site of the great war depicted in the MAHABHARATA epic. The Kurus were a great clan, including both the PANDAVAS and the KAURAVAS, the main contenders in that war. Both groups were descended from an ancient progenitor named Kuru.

The place-name also appears in the first line of the BHAGAVAD GITA, where it takes on a metaphorical significance. The battle, as the Gita understands, actually takes place in the consciousness of every human being, who must ascertain right action (dharma) in relation to God. In the simplest terms this battle is between right and wrong, or, yogically, between higher and lower states of

being. Kurukshetra has been an important pilgrimage site from ancient times (perhaps since the time of the Mahabharata). It is mentioned as such in different PURANAS.

Further reading: J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahabharata*, Vol. 1, *The Book of the Beginnings*, Vol. 2, *The Book of the Assembly Hall*, vol. 3, *The Book of Virata and the Book of Effort* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973–78); Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van

Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); P. C. Roy, *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, 12 vols. (Calcutta: Bharata Karyalaya, 1888–96); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Kurus See [MAHABHARATA](#).

L



Lahiri Mahasaya (1828–1895) kriya yoga teacher

Sri Lahiri Baba, also called Yogiraj, was a modest but intensely pious and learned man. He was a disciple of the legendary BABAJI, an honored teacher of *KRIYA YOGA*, and a pioneer in women's education in India.

Born as Shyamacharan Lahiri to Gourmohan and Muktakeshi Lahiri on September 30, 1828, in the village of Ghurani in the Punjab, Lahiri Mahasaya was raised in a pious family of devout followers of Lord SHIVA. Gourmohan Lahiri was a recognized pundit and scholar of King Krishnagar's court. In early childhood, Shyamacharan's mother would find him smeared in ashes and sitting in MEDITATION with his eyes closed. The most significant of these events took place when both mother and son were completely absorbed in the worship of Lord Shiva in the temple. Muktakeshi opened her eyes upon hearing "mother" from an unknown voice. Standing before her was a monk draped in a saffron cloth with locked and matted hair. The monk was the immortal yogi, Babaji. He told her that he had initiated her son for the purpose of liberating both saints and householders from worldly suffering using simple techniques of SELF-REALIZATION. He assured her that her son

would remain in the world and would be a highly respected being committed to the God-realization of others.

In 1832, a flood destroyed the family home and killed his mother. Shyamacharan moved with his father and sister first to Calcutta and then to BENARES (Varanasi), a city holy to Lord Shiva. As a boy, he was humble, quiet, calm, and detached. He attended an English school and studied SANSKRIT, Hindi, Urdu, Farsi, and English. At age 12 he entered Sanskrit University in Benares. In 1848 he completed a degree in English, with significant study of Indian philosophy and literature, as well as Western philosophy. He studied the VEDAS with the noted Maharashtrian Sanskrit scholar Pundit Nagabhata. He later continued Sanskrit study under the tutelage of Pundit Devanarayan Ghosal Vidya Vachaspathi from Bengal. Gourmohan was proud of his son's achievement, but was also concerned that his quiet nature would lead him to asceticism, so he arranged for a marriage. The wedding took place in 1846; Shyamacharan was 18, and Kashimoni was 10, as was common practice of that time. During their 47-year marriage, she remained completely loyal and supportive of her husband's goal of self-realization. They lived a simple, impoverished life in the early years of

their marriage. As Kashimoni grew older, she became an advocate of the education of women at a time when it was unpopular. Her husband taught her to read.

One day, Kashimoni had a profound vision and saw her husband to be none other than an incarnation of Lord Shiva himself. From this point onward, her commitment to God was intensified and her support for her husband's work increased. From 1851 to 1888, he worked as a clerk in public works and tutored children of kings and merchants. Some of these students would later take YOGA initiation from him. In 1888, he opened a Bengali school, of which he remained secretary throughout his life. He later established a school exclusively for women, an unprecedented action for the time.

On November 27, 1861, BABAJI called on him. Leaving his wife in Kashi (or Benares) he set out on a journey to Ranikhet, not knowing why. There he met Babaji, who claimed to have been waiting for him for quite some time. With just an extension of his hand onto Shyamacharan's head, an electromagnetic force passed through his body, and slowly he started to remember his past life as an ascetic. He now fully recognized Babaji and the place where they were. With their reunion, Shyamacharan's path was clearly defined, and thus began his life as Sri Lahiri Baba, also called Yogiraj. He went on to initiate many students, including his wife, in the lost practice of *kriya yoga*. This technique integrates the use of mantras and meditation to endow calmness and control on the body and mind. In his lifetime, Lahiri Baba did not author any books, but his teachings, when imparted, inspired many books by his disciples. He died on September 26, 1895.

Further reading: Paramahansa Prajnanananda, *Lahiri Mahasaya: Fountainhead of Kriya Yoga* (Orissa: Graphic Art Offset Press, 1999); Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1969).

Lakshmana See [RAMAYANA](#).

Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the wife of VISHNU and the GODDESS of wealth and happiness. She also is associated with beauty. Lakshmi sometimes goes by the name of Sri, though in very early times Sri seems to have had an independent identity and was only later conflated with her.

Lakshmi is most often depicted seated on a lotus. She is golden or white in complexion. She has four arms; in two hands she holds lotuses and with an upraised hand and downward pointing hand she gives gestures that indicate well-being and prosperity. She is commonly depicted in her iconography being bathed by two celestial elephants holding a pot of water. When she stands beside VISHNU, her husband, she is generally shown with only two hands. Lakshmi is an extremely popular goddess.

Further reading: Upendra Nath Dhal, *Goddess Lakshmi: Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Oriental, 1978); Niranjana Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography of the Goddess of Abundance and Fortune in Three Regions of India* (Burdwan: University of Burdwan, 1979); David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Lakshmanjoo (1907–1991) *teacher of Kashmiri Shaivism*

Rajanaka Lakshmana, known as Lakshmanjoo, was a popular and widely respected scholar and yoga master in the tradition of KASHMIRI SHVAIVISM. He was the last living representative of the great lineage of teachers of Kashmir Shaivism, and the only remaining repository of its oral teachings.

Born in Srinagar, Kashmir, on May 9, 1907, Lakshmana was raised by his father, Sri Narayandas Raina, and his mother, Shrimati Aranyamali, both of whom were devotees and disciples of Swami Ram Joo. Sri Narayandas was a well-known

builder of houseboats in Srinagar who had similar aspirations for his son. Yet, in early childhood, the boy exhibited actions of a spiritual nature and appeared to be on the path of becoming a yogi. At the age of three he made a clay Shiva for his worship. He spent long hours in MEDITATION, which caused him to act oddly. Out of concern for his well-being, his parents approached the family guru, Swami Ram Joo, who assumed care for the boy's spiritual education.

Lakshmana learned the discipline of Shaivism first under the guidance of Swami Ram, and then, when the latter died, under Swami Mahtab Kak. His father's illness forced him to look after the family business while still a teenager. He ended his formal education but continued to practice YOGA and study under Mahtab Kak. During this time he began to learn the Shaiva Sastras.

Lakshmana endured great struggles with his family as his spirituality developed. At the age of 13, he refused his parents' request for an arranged marriage. When he experienced SELF-REALIZATION for the first time at the age of 20, he became uninterested in his family's business and felt a strong urge to practice his SADHANA (spiritual search) in solitude. He left home and traveled to Sadha-malyun Ashram in Handawara, Kashmir. His parents searched frantically for him and eventually found him at the ashram. His father convinced him to return home only after promising to build an ashram for him. Four months later he moved into an ashram located on the slopes of a mountain opposite Srinagar. Lakshmanjoo continued his studies of the Shaivite Sastras for the next seven years under the guidance of the scholar Maheshuvar Nath Razdan. During this time he accepted the daughter of Sri Jai Lal Sopori, Sharika Devi, as a student and taught her the practice of Shaivite YOGA. After she attained self-realization under his guidance, the ashram attracted other devotees.

During the 1930s, Lakshmanjoo traveled throughout India, making the acquaintance of Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI in Sevagram, Sri

AUROBINDO at Pondicherry, and RAMANA MAHARSHI at Tiruvannamalai.

In 1957, Lakshmanjoo commissioned a new ashram, Ishvara Ashrama, in the village of Ishaber, where his public teachings attracted a large number of devotees. Disciples began to call him Swami Ishvara Svarupa, a name given to him by Sharika Devi. Lakshmanjoo taught the Shaivite tantras (see TANTRISM) and other texts of the tradition to his disciples and to scholars from India and Europe. He gave Sunday talks on Shaivite yoga and received other spiritual teachers and scholars. As the last in an unbroken lineage of masters of an "oral tradition," he dedicated his life to the sacred teachings of Kashmiri Shaivism. He also established the Ishvara Ashram Trust and, in 1982, the Universal Shaivite Trust, which served as the foundation for the Universal Shaivite Fellowship.

Lakshmanjoo embodied the full yogic tradition, on both the practice side and the theoretical side. During his life he experienced all the transformative disciplines of the Shaivite tradition—he was a *jnani* (realized sage).

The knowledge of Kashmir Shaivism was traditionally passed along by oral communication or other unseen means, directly from master to disciple. Some material was written from the eighth century, but the texts were often intentionally obscure in an effort to prevent misunderstanding and misuse. The texts dealt with yogic experiences that are extremely individual and difficult to describe in words, and the practices involved are emotional. A living master, founded in the oral tradition, was always needed for guidance.

To forestall the loss of these oral traditions, Lakshmanjoo published works in Sanskrit, Hindi, and English. He was universally recognized for his scholarship as well as his perfection in Shaivite yoga. He received an honorary doctoral degree in 1965 from the Varanaseya Sanskrit University for his contribution to Sanskrit and to tantra. He is best known for reviving Kashmiri Shaivism as a vital philosophy. His influence on the scholarship of Shaivism extended into Europe and the United

States. He made his only trip to the United States in 1991 just months before his death on September 27, 1991.

Further reading: Vijnana Bhairava, *The Practice of Centering Awareness: Commentary by Swami Lakshman Joo* (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2002); John Hughes, *Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism: The Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Swami Lakshman Jee, *Awakening to the Supreme Consciousness*. Edited by Jankinath Kaul (Delhi: Utpal, n.d.); ———, *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme* (Albany, N.Y.: Universal Shaiva Trust, 1988); ———, *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*. Edited by John Hughes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); *Shiva Sutras: The Supreme Awakening, Revealed by Swami Lakshmanjoo*. Edited by John Hughes (Albany, N.Y.: Universal Shaiva Fellowship, 2002).

lalata chakra

The *lalata* (forehead) chakra is the seventh CHAKRA from the base of the spine in some systems of KUNDALINI YOGA. It is located at the crest of the forehead. A place of peace, calm, and contentment, the *lalata* chakra takes the YOGI to the verge of the highest consciousness, giving him or her every supranormal power. The associated deity is SHIVA himself or, in certain systems, Shiva and his consort in erotic embrace. The SHAKTI, or energy, of this chakra is the highest Shakti, or goddess herself. This chakra has eight bluish white petals.

Further reading: Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 2000); John G. Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power*, 7th ed. (Madras: Ganesh, 1964).

Lalleshvari (14th century) poet-saint

Lalleshvari was a 14th-century poet-saint of the Kashmir region of India. Her songs are beloved

among Kashmiris to this day. Her philosophical standpoint is in alignment with the tantric traditions of Kashmiri SHAIVISM.

Lalleshvari was born to the family of a Kashmiri BRAHMIN pandit in the village of Pandrenthan, four miles south of Srinagar. According to legend, she married the son she had borne in a previous life in the same village. In that life, when it was time for the 11-day purification ceremony after the son was born, Lalla (her given name) asked the priest, “What relation is this child to me?” The priest, amazed at the question, answered that the child was her son.

The mother answered that this was not the case. She said that she would soon die and be born as a female horse with certain obvious markings that the priest would know. If he were to find this foal, he would learn who her son really was. That very moment the woman died.

The priest hurried to the place where he was told the horse would be. He indeed found her, but when the foal told him she would soon be reborn as a puppy, the priest gave up the search. Lalla underwent six births in the animal world before she was finally reborn as a girl, who grew up to become the wife of the very son she had borne. When the same priest arrived to perform the wedding ceremony, Lalla confided in him the full story.

Lalla thus became the daughter-in-law of her former husband, who had remarried, and she went to live with the family. She was badly mistreated there, and after 12 years she left to become a disciple of the Shaivite SIDDHA Sri Kantha, the family priest she had known in her previous life. He lived in the village of Pampur and was a direct disciple of one of the founders of KASHMIRI SHAIVISM, Vasugupta.

Lalleshvari became a wandering *yogini*, going about naked, despite the ridicule and criticism she received. As the yogic scriptures state, she took praise and blame equally, not being swayed by either. She went about the Kashmir countryside and towns singing and dancing in mystical ecstasy

and died, it is said, at an advanced age in Brijbihara, some miles southeast of Srinagar.

Her verses in the old Kashmiri language constitute a major contribution to the somewhat limited Kashmiri literature. They reveal a mystic perception that the notion of a god with characteristics and form, approaching a monistic absolute that comprehends infinity, both visible and invisible. She says:

*In that place not even Shiva reigns supreme
Nor the Shakti that belongs to him
Only is the Unknown, like a dream,
There pursuing a hidden sway*

Further reading: R. N. Kaul, *Kashmir's Mystic Poetess, Lalla Ded, Alias, Lalla Arifa* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1999); Swami Muktananda, trans., *Lalleshwari: Spiritual Poems by a Great Siddha Yogini* (South Fallsburg, N.Y.: SYDA, 1981); Jaishree Kak Odin, *The Other Shore: Lalla's Life and Poetry* (New Delhi: Vitasta, 1999); B. N. Parimoo, trans., *The Ascent of Self: A Re-Interpretation of the Mystical Poetry of Lalla Ded* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978); B. N. Parimoo, *Lalleshwari* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1987).

Lanka See [RAMAYANA](#).

Laws of Manu (c. 200)

The Laws of Manu is a seminal text in Indian social history. It gives greatest attention to the social obligations of BRAHMINS, whose supremacy in the social order is assumed, but it also outlines the obligations of rulers and other castes. It was the first of many systematizations of Hindu social law.

The book begins with the history of the world and the creation by the divine being of the social order, with the Brahmins at the top. It then outlines the elements of VEDIC education that are required in the BRAHMACHARYA or student stage of life. It gives an idealized description of

the householder stage of life, dealing with marriage, children, ceremonies for ancestors, virtues such as generosity and merit, and a listing of the permitted occupations for a twice-born person, a person of the three top castes. Among other topics are the acceptance of food from various people, the types of foods that can or cannot be eaten, and things that will pollute a Brahmin by contact. It also discusses the forest dweller's (VANAPRASTHA'S) duties and behavior that would be taken up when the householder reached that stage of life.

Two chapters deal extensively with the proper conduct of kings. There is a chapter on women that has become notorious for its call for their complete submission to men, and other sections on issues of inheritance and kingly justice. The book outlines the four-CASTE system and discusses the various mixed of castes. It has a chapter on restitution for various crimes; a lower-caste person is to be punished more severely than an upper-caste person. Finally it discusses issues of transmigration and KARMA.

Further reading: Wendy Doniger, with Brian K. Smith, *The Laws of Manu* (London: Penguin Books, 1991); Urmila Rustagi and Sudesh Narang, *Manu/Manu Smrti: An Appraisal* (Delhi: J. P., 1995).

Lekhraj, Dada See [BRAHMA KUMARIS](#).

lila

A common notion in Indian tradition is that there is no logical "reason" for things as they are in the universe; everything is merely the *lila* (play) of the divinity. This term is used only in association with a deity who can be seen as overseeing all of the universe. This would most often be VISHNU (or one of his incarnations), SHIVA, or the great GODDESS. Any such divinity will be said to have his or her divine *lila*.

Further reading: Harish Johari, *Leela: The Game of Self-knowledge* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 1993).

lingam

The lingam or SHIVA LINGAM is a phallic-shaped icon that is a primary object of Shiva worship. The lingam always stands on a round base, which is representative of the YONI or vagina of the GODDESS.

The origin story for this cult object is well known. Shiva in his guise as a mad ascetic, naked, smeared with human ashes, and disheveled, appeared in the Pine Forest (deodar forest) where sages had retired with their wives to meditate. Mischievous and powerful, he began

to brandish his erect penis before the women. Because of his divine power, the women were enthralled. However, the *rishis* were appalled and cursed the god so that he would lose his penis.

Instead of falling, Shiva's penis took off at lightning speed and fearsome energy and began rocketing around the universe causing endless destruction. The frightened *rishis* went to the gods to see how they could save the universe from destruction. The gods called upon the *devi* or goddess to offer her *yonis* as a safe place for the Shiva lingam to rest; thus it is that every Shiva lingam rests on a representation of the vagina of the goddess.



Main symbols of Lord Shiva: lingam and trident, in Gujarat (Constance A. Jones)

Further reading: Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva the Erotic Ascetic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Siva* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Lingayat sect See [VIRASHAIVAS](#).

Lokenath Divine Life Mission

Lokenath Divine Life Mission is an outgrowth of the work of Swami Shuddhananda (b. 1949), who has become a holy figure serving the poor of Calcutta (Kolkata), much as his late Roman Catholic counterpart Mother Teresa. His fellowship carries out its social and religious service in the areas where there are poverty and sickness. He has played a major role in developing schools and medical facilities, as well as economic activity, to provide nourishment, homes, and education for the underprivileged. The mission offers courses to transform stress into a positive power that produces success, peace, and harmony. The mission also sponsors programs to foster women's empowerment and sustainable rural development in India.

The fellowship is named for Baba Lokenath (1730–1890), who reportedly lived for 160 years as an embodiment of love, compassion, and humility. He taught his disciples that he would guide and help them forever, even after his death. The Lokenath Fellowship calls upon this promise and assumes that the enlightened sage watches over the social service organization devoted to his work in life.

As a young man, Shuddhananda emerged from school and university as a professor in business at Hyderabad University. Concerned about the religious and social service needs of underprivileged people he eventually left the academic arena and sought refuge in the Himalaya Mountains. He remained there several years searching his soul about how to help others.

As a very young man he had had visions of the 19th-century *rishi* and saint Baba Lokenath. The

memories of the visions never left him. After his pilgrimage in the Himalayas he founded a social service and religious center where he could nurture those in need. The design of his mission and the scope of his services, from medicine to social support, are reminiscent of the work of Swami SHIVANANDA SARASWATI of Rishikish, the founder of the Divine Life Society.

During the 1990s Swami Shuddhananda traveled to the United States to share his spirituality and to talk about the way he has designed his social service mission. A small number of disciples have joined to learn from him and help with his charitable work in India. The Fellowship in the United States is located in Louisiana. The International Mission has headquarters in Calcutta.

Further reading: Anne Cushman and Jerry Jones, *From Here to Nirvana* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).

Long, Barry (1926–2003) *Australian teacher of realization*

Barry Long was a spiritual teacher from Australia whose realization of immortality in 1965 transformed his life and advanced him to realization of a higher consciousness.

Born in Sydney, Australia, in 1926, Long pursued a career in newspaper editing and politics. At the age of 31 he experienced a death of self and a dawning of a new sense of existence. The event sparked in him a lifelong quest for truth and self-knowledge. In the 1970s he traveled to London to secure publication of his experiences. There he continued writing and began meeting regularly with small groups of people interested in his teachings. In the 1980s he started holding meetings and meditation classes with larger audiences. His first widely circulated book, *The Origins of Man and the Universe*, published in 1984, increased his public recognition.

The Barry Long Foundation was established as an educational charity in England in 1985. Later that year, he founded the Barry Long Centre on

the Gold Coast of Queensland. In England, North America, Australia, and New Zealand he taught seminars in his increasingly popular Course in Being. In 1993 Long began teaching a 16-day event called the Master Session, which took place annually in New South Wales. His teachings emphasize the living of truth and the realization that no duality exists between one's self and the greater power. Long's seminars introduce the stillness of being and the attainment of an inner place from which people can live their daily lives. The Barry Long Foundation headquartered in Australia does not have formal membership but continues to publish and distribute Long's written works through its publication branch, Barry Long Books.

Long died of prostate cancer on December 6, 2003.

Further reading: Barry Long, *Knowing Yourself: The True in the False* (London: Barry Long Foundation, 1996); ———, *Only Fear Dies* (London: Barry Long Foundation, 1994); ———, *The Origins of Man and the Universe* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); ———, *Wisdom and Where to Find It* (London: Barry Long Foundation, 1994).

Lozowick, Lee (1943–) *Western Baul teacher*
Lee Lozowick is an American teacher of the YOGA practices and syncretic Buddhist-Hindu philosophy of the BAUL SECT of Bengal. He is a prolific poet and writer, whose practice strongly emphasizes music—he and his followers have performed around the world.

Born on November 18, 1943, in Brooklyn, New York, to Russian Jewish parents, Lozowick describes his early life as “completely ordinary.” His grandfather had been a *tzaddik*, or religious teacher, and his father, Louis, a successful artist. In 1970, while living in New Jersey, Lozowick became a teacher of Silva Mind Control and studied the human potential movement in depth. In 1975, after reading the works of ADI DA SAMRAJ (known at the time as Bubba Free John), which

he recognized as true, he became enlightened, or as he puts it, “woke up.” He describes the process as completely impersonal and not the result of any training or discipline. In 1977, Lozowick went to India and met Yogi RAMSURATKUMAR, who was living at the ashram of RAMANA MAHARSHI in Tiruvannamalai, South India. Lozowick called the yogi his “father.”

Lozowick relates that since 1975 he has been teaching in the Western Baul tradition. The Bauls of Bengal are a 500-year-old sect of ecstatic singers, love poets, and wandering minstrels who sprang from the folk tradition of rural Bengal. The Bauls blend tantric Buddhism and devotional Hinduism with music, dance, and yoga of sexual energy and breath, to form a path to God-realization through the body. Lozowick has adapted this tradition to serve spiritual seekers in the West.

Lozowick's teachings emphasize the practice of guru yoga, which he himself practiced for 25 years when his own guru was alive and continues to practice since his death. Lozowick functions as both guru and disciple. He has published over 1,000 poems to his master, Yogi Ramsuratkumar.

After awakening, Lozowick formed a small community called Hohm in New Jersey and began to teach spiritual devotees. In 1980, the community moved to Arizona, where both the Hohm Sahaj Mandir (temple) and Hohm Community are located. Lozowick also founded two ashrams, in France and India. Hohm Press has issued a number of publications on spiritual topics, natural health, Eastern religion, poetry, and parenting. Lozowick himself has written 18 books.

Lozowick is known for the poetry and music he has produced in the past 20 years. He is the lead singer in Sri, a blues band composed of members of his community that has produced nine albums and performs yearly tours to large audiences throughout Europe and the United States. His community also has a theater company, a gospel choir, a children's school, a publishing company, and several published authors. He is a passionate advocate for children and teaches prac-

tices for conscious parenting. For Lee Lozowick and his students, spiritual maturity is expressed in and through all aspects of life, and service to the divine is expressed through service of humanity.

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Lust, Benedict (1872–1945) founder of naturopathy

Benedict Lust was a pioneer in what has come to be called holistic medicine and a facilitator of the dissemination of YOGA in the United States. Lust was born in Michelbach, Baden, Germany. As a youth, he became ill and was cured by Fr. Sebastian Kneipp, a famous advocate of the water cure, a popular form of healing in the 19th century. He eventually traveled to the United States as Kneipp's official representative and in the late 1890s organized the water cure movement, especially among the many first generation German Americans.

Meanwhile, Lust studied osteopathy and various schools of healing that eschewed the use of drugs and surgery. By 1900, Lust was looking

toward a new synthesis of nonintrusive healing arts, which he termed *naturopathy* (a name he actually purchased from a colleague).

In 1919, by which time Lust had launched his long-term battle to have the government recognize naturopathy, Lust met Sri YOGENDRA, a yogi who had traveled to New York from Bombay (Mumbai). Yogendra was a pioneer in reviving HATHA YOGA as a discipline for body and mind in India and had gone to the United States to conduct a set of scientific tests with the Life Extension Institute in New York. Lust quickly saw the value that hatha yoga might have in his repertoire of healing tools.

In 1924, Yogendra returned to Bombay. The restrictive, discriminatory immigration laws that went into effect at the time prevented him from making any return visits. Thus, Lust, through his naturopathy, was to become the major disseminating force for yoga in the next generation. Only after World War II did Asian teachers arrive in the United States once more to help popularize hatha yoga.

Lust died in 1945. Subsequently yoga has been deemphasized by naturopaths, and Lust's role in introducing yoga in America largely forgotten. The Benedict Lust Publication Company still offers books on naturopathy, health, and healing.

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M



Maa, Shree (1950–) *teacher of bhakti yoga*

After spending her childhood and early adult years meditating and worshipping virtually in solitude, Shree Maa emerged in the 1980s as a teacher and religious singer in India. In 1984 she founded the Devi Mandir temple in California and began spreading her teachings through worldwide tours and music recordings.

Shree Maa was born in Assam in northeastern India around 1950. Although no records exist for her name and date of birth, she reportedly was born in the year a great earthquake shook the region. She is from a family, that included businessmen as well as advanced yogis and is a descendant of the 18th-century Bengali poet-saint and KALI devotee Ramprasad Sen. She received her early education from her grandmother, whose attentiveness to worship in daily activities made a great impression upon her. She spent much of her childhood in meditation at the local temple and in the family shrine room.

In her early teens, Shree Maa spent many hours in solitude and worship, both at home and in the nearby caves of the Himalayas. She knew as a child that the 19th-century priest of Kali, Sri RAMAKRISHNA, would be her personal GURU. In high school and college she continued to live

introspectively and to worship in seclusion, showing little interest in family and social gatherings. After completing college she left home and traveled to KAMAKHYA, the famous pilgrimage site in the foothills of the HIMALAYAS. She spent the next eight years wandering in the area living the life of an ascetic. Villagers always found her in deep meditation. She spoke very little and ate only basil leaves and sandal water. Devotees claimed that she reached SAMADHI, the highest state of consciousness, and gave her the name *Shree Maa*, Respected Holy Mother.

Breaking her solitude in the late 1970s, Shree Maa began worshipping in temples and singing publicly, exposure that drew an increasing audience of devotees. In 1980, at a temple in Bakreswar, West Bengal, Shree Maa met Swami Satyananda Saraswati, an American-born traveler who had been studying under a number of gurus in India since the 1960s. The two traveled together throughout India, performing religious rituals wherever they were invited.

In the early 1980s, Shree Maa received divine instruction from Sri Ramakrishna to move to America and teach the meaning of DHARMA, the path of righteousness. In 1984, with few possessions and almost no money she and Swami Satyananda

Saraswati arrived in California. Refusing to advertise or promote their presence, the two established a temple, Devi Mandir, in Martinez, California, and undertook the CHANDI YAJNA, a three-year fire ceremony. As word spread, people traveled from around the world to worship at the temple. In the early 1990s as a regular congregation formed, Devi Mandir moved to Napa Valley, California.

Since 1992, Shree Maa and Swami Satyananda have traveled much of the world offering programs and teachings of devotion and inspiration, while maintaining Devi Mandir. Shree Maa has recorded compositions inspired by Ramprasad and has produced several instructional videos demonstrating systems of worship. Following the tradition of Ramakrishna, she encourages worship and devotion in all places, insisting that all action can be a service to the divine.

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Madhva (c. 1197 to 1276 C.E.) *Vedanta philosopher*

Madhva was a brilliant, prolific scholar of VEDANTA who developed his own DVAITA or dualist philosophy.

Madhva was born near Udipi in Karnataka in a village called Rajapitha, which may be the modern Kalyanapura. He was born into an orthodox Vaishnavite BRAHMIN family. He became the disciple of Acutyapreksha, a great teacher.

Madhva studied the writings of SHANKARA, the great non-dual (ADVAITA) philosopher, but concluded by rejecting his teachings. In fact, he eventually wrote tracts opposing 21 important philosophers in order to establish his own philosophy of *dvaita* or dualist VEDANTA. He made a

circuit of the south of India, going first to Trivandrum and staying in RAMESHVARAM, the famous Vaishnavite holy city in Tamil Nadu. As he spoke, he would argue against the various existing philosophical schools. He later traveled in North India, living in such places as HARIDVAR and Badarika. He is said to have converted many followers of Shankara in his travels. Eventually, he even converted his own GURU.

Madhva produced a massive corpus of work including commentaries on all the 13 orthodox Vedic Upanishads, the Vedanta Sutra, and the Bhagavad Gita. In these works he relentlessly argued for the idea that God and the human self or soul were completely distinct from each other, and that the world also was completely distinct from God. His profound dualism was a challenge to the non-dualist thinkers who preceded and followed him, who represent by far the largest school of Vedanta. He argued that only the grace of God, in the form of KRISHNA, could save a human being from the endless round of birth and rebirth, and only BHAKTI, or devotion to the divinity, could rescue humans from the abyss of successive rebirth.

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madya See PANCHA MAKARA.

Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram)

Mahabalipuram was an ancient port city, known to Greek traders, which served as a provincial capital under the Pallava dynasty (sixth through eighth centuries). It is known for its extraordinary rock carvings.



Monolithic stone architecture in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu (*Constance A. Jones*)

The city served as the port for the chief Palava capital at KANCHIPURAM. It was situated at the mouth of the Palar River, 32 miles south of Madras (Chennai). The river long ago changed course.

A granite hill about 100 feet high and a half a mile in length, and a smaller granite outcropping farther south, provided the site and the raw material for the sculptures. Each work is carved out of solid stone, without the use of any brick or mortar, and without assembly of individual pieces. The technique was also used at the Kailasanatha temple at ELLORA TEMPLE contemporaneously.

The most dramatic carving, "Descent of the GANGES" (also known as ARJUNA'S Penance), covers an entire cliff 30 feet high and 60 feet wide. It shows the Ganges's descending from

heaven, flanked on both sides by *NAGAS* and *NAGINIS*. Deities, human beings, and animals all face the fissure in the rock where the Ganges descends in attitudes of adoration. A small shrine immediately to the left has a standing *SHIVA* image, before which bows Bhagiratha, who was responsible for the Ganges's descent. Above the temple Bhagiratha is shown doing penance, emaciated, holding his arms above his head, as was on the orthodox ascetic practice. There are monumental elephants to the right of him and a cat, delightfully imitating the ascetic posture of the sage. Mice are depicted at his feet and nearby are remarkably realistic carvings of deer and a monkey plucking fleas from its mate. The "ascetic" cat is faking asceticism to get mice, a

not so subtle jab at renunciants who have not truly left behind desire.

The hills contain 10 carved-out *mandapas* (temple areas) with pillars. The largest is 25 feet wide and 15 to 20 feet high, with a depth of about 25 feet. The *mandapas* contain reliefs and statues of VARAHA and VAMANA (AVATARS of VISHNU), the Sun God SURYA, DURGA, and the special LAKSHMI, Gajalakshmi, a form showing her being bathed by celestial elephants.

Several *rathas* (chariot-shaped temples) can be found as well—the granite copying in every detail the shape and form of wooden buildings, although without finished interiors. They are dedicated variously to DRAUPADI, Arjuna, BHIMA, Dharmaraja, and Sahadeva. Some of these are of the oblong *chaitya* type, most often associated with Buddhist architecture.

Finally, there is an elaborate shore temple, with two towers, all carved from solid granite. It contains images of both SHIVA and Vishnu, quite unusual in Indian temples of any era.

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Mahabharata

The Mahabharata (MBh), is one of the two great Indian epics (the other is the RAMAYANA). It tells the story of the descendents of BHARATA, the legendary leader of the early Indian tribes. It is the world's largest epic, containing at least 100,000 verses. It is often said in India that there is nothing that is not in the MBh and that which is not in the MBh is to be found nowhere. The story is said to have been dictated to the god GANESHA by the sage VYASA. Vyasa is the teller of the tale for our own era, but it is considered to have existed long

before. From time to time Vyasa himself plays an important role in the epic.

The epic recounts a dynastic struggle that took place near Delhi in northern India. The eldest son in the dynasty of the Kurus is Pandu, whose wife, Kunti, has five sons (considered Pandu's sons, although each was fathered by a different god): YUDHISHTHIRA, ARJUNA, BHIMA, Nakula, and Sahadeva. Collectively they are known as the PANDAVAS. Because of a curse on Pandu that he will die if he has sexual intercourse with either of his wives (Kunti and Madri), Pandu is forced to give up his claim to the throne in favor of his blind brother, Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra has 100 sons, the oldest of whom is DURYODHANA. They are known collectively as the KAURAVAS.

Dhritarashtra becomes regent until Pandu's sons are of age, when one of them will rightfully assume the throne. Dhritarashtra is weak-willed and cannot resist his son Duryodhana's attempts to usurp power. The plotting of Duryodhana and his Kauravas against the Pandavas forms the central dynamic in this intriguing story. When their plot to murder the five Pandava brothers fails, they fleece them at dice and drive them into exile.

Finally, events culminate in open warfare between the two camps. The Pandavas are forced to fight against not only their evil cousins and uncles, but their venerable guru DRONA and their grand-uncle BHISHMA. In fact, part of the epic's greatness is that the story is not pure black and white, but instead shows shades of gray on both sides.

The god KRISHNA serves as the noncombatant charioteer of the brave Pandava, Arjuna. As the two pull up to look at the opposing armies before the war begins, Krishna recites the celebrated BHAGAVAD GITA, a profound poem that summarizes Hindu philosophy. On the battlefield of KURUKSHETRA a terrible carnage ensues, as the Pandavas eventually triumph and gain the kingdom.

This epic story is known to all Indians, many of whom are named for its heroes; place names in every part of India are taken from this story as

well. There are versions in every one of the local Indian languages, as well as simplified folk dramas that act out its tales for those who cannot read.

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Maha Kumbha Mela See [KUMBHA MELA](#).

Maharaj Ji, Guru See [RAWAT, PREM](#).

Mahashivaratri

The 14th day of the dark half of every lunar month (when the Moon is waning) is called Shivaratri (Shiva night). The Shivaratri of the month of Magha (February–March) is designated as Mahashivaratri (Great Shiva night) and is celebrated with a festival.

Several stories in the Skanda, Lingam, and Padma Puranas describe this festival, and the power associated with it. Once, it is said a hunter unknowingly fasted, watched over, and bathed a Shiva LINGAM all night, not knowing it was the Mahashivaratri time. For this simple deed he was rewarded by being taken directly to the abode of Shiva.

Mahashivaratri is the one major Hindu celebration that is not accompanied by revelry and gaiety. It is a solemn event that emphasizes restraint; devotees make vows such as forgiveness, truth telling, and noninjury to beings, which must be honored for the full 24 hours. Fasting and staying awake all night to worship Shiva are also important aspects of this observance. One spends the night reciting the MANTRA of SHIVA—*om namah*

shivaya—and praying for forgiveness. If the rites are performed faithfully one is rewarded with worldly success and the heavenly realm of Shiva.

The festival and its vows probably originated around the fifth century C.E. In mythological terms the Mahashivaratri observance is often attributed to an episode that occurred on that day: when Shiva manifested himself as the fiery lingam (*gyotir lingam*), BRAHMA set off on his swan vehicle to find the lingam's top, and Vishnu set out in the form of a boar to root for its bottom. Neither of the two divinities was successful, thus proving that Shiva was supreme. In another story, Mahashivaratri was the day when Shiva, in order to save the world from destruction, drank the terrible poison that emerged when the MILK OCEAN was churned by the gods and demons to produce the nectar of immortality.

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mahat See [BUDDHI](#).

mahavakyas

The *mahavakyas* (*maha*, great; *vakya*, sayings) are usually a series of brief statements extracted from the UPANISHADS that are said to sum up their philosophy. Occasionally, they are from commentaries on the Upanishads or other sources that express Upanishadic philosophy. They are subjected to extensive exposition and exegesis in the different schools of VEDANTA.

Most commonly, only four *mahavakyas* are counted. These four statements are from the YAJUR, SAMA, RIG, and ATHARVA VEDAS in order. Some Vedic systems cite five, six, or even seven *mahavakyas*.

The first of the basic four is from BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD I. 4. 10: “*Aham brahmasmi*” (I [*aham*] am [*asmi*] the ultimate reality [the *brahman*]). In other words, the individual self is identical to the ultimate reality of the *brahman*. From the CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD VI. 8. 7 is the second phrase, “*Tat tvam asi*” that [*tat*] (is what) you [*tvam*] are [*asi*]. *That* refers to the *brahman*, while *you* refers to the ATMAN, the individual soul or self within every human being. In Vedanta the atman as ultimate self and the *brahman* are seen to be one. This particular phrase is used in succession eight times in chapter 6 of the Chandogya Upanishad, and once each in sections 8 through 16, when Aruni, the father, is teaching his son the truth of the Atman, the Ultimate Self.

The third *mahavakya* is “*ayam atma brahma*” (This [*ayam*] self [*atma*] is *brahma*.) This means that the individual self is the Ultimate Reality, the All, the *brahman*. This phrase is found verbatim in MANDUKYA UPANISHAD I. 2 and is the logical conclusion of statements made by YAJNAVALKYA to two different questioners in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, II.4. 1; II.4.2 and II. 5.1. The fourth phrase is taken from AITAREYA UPANISHAD, III.3.13: “*prajnanam brahma*.” The Ultimate Reality is wisdom (or consciousness [*prajnanam*]).

Another *mahavakya* from the Upanishads that is sometimes cited is “*sarvam khalu idam brahma*” (All indeed is that [60]) (CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD III.14.1 and Maitri Upanishad IV.6 2). Other *mahavakyas* commonly cited are from the commentaries of specific Vedanta philosophers such as SHANKARA or from still other sources. The word can be used generically to refer to the “Great Sayings” of any particular person, for example, SAI BABA OF SHIRDI.

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Mahavira (c. 599–527 B.C.E.) *Jain Arhat* (*omniscient being*)

Mahavira (great spiritual hero) is considered by Jains to be the last of the great disseminators of their faith in this half-era (see JAINISM). His life is celebrated in legends and festivals and is considered a model for all Jains to imitate.

He was born in 599 in Kundagrama, a large city near the modern city of Patna. His father, Siddhartha, belonged to the Jnatri clan, and his mother, Trishala, was the sister of the king of the area. The texts say they were followers of the earlier Jain TIRTHANKARA and teacher PARSHVANATH. They named their child Vardhamana, “he who brings prosperity.” The SHVETAMBARA Jains believe that Mahavira was originally conceived by a Brahmin couple, Rishabhadatta and Devananda, and that the embryo was transferred into Trishala’s womb magically. DIGAMBARA Jains do not accept this story.

Before Mahavira’s birth Trishala had a series of auspicious dreams. Of the two major Jain sects, the SHVETAMBARAS say there were 14 dreams; the DIGAMBARAS say 16. In these dreams she saw (1) a white elephant, (2) a white bull, (3) a lion, (4) the Goddess Sri, (5) garlands of *mandara* flowers, (6) the full Moon, (7) the rising Sun, (8) a large and beautiful flag, (9) a vase of fine metal, (10) a lake full of lotuses, (11) an ocean of milk, (12) a celestial house in the sky, (13) a huge heap of gems, and (14) a blazing fire. Digambaras add (15) a lofty throne and (16) a pair of fish cavorting in a lake. Jains today recall and reenact these dreams when they celebrate the five auspicious moments of Mahavira’s life.

It is said that Vardhamana remained very quiet inside the womb, exhibiting the Jain virtue of AHIMSA or noninjury. He only moved when by his powers he learned that his mother worried he was not alive. His birth was accompanied by many marvels as all beings celebrated the birth of the Tirthankara, the karmically special unique teacher, of this half-era.

Not much is known of his childhood. There is a story of his subduing a ferocious snake by his

courage and calm. The Shvetambaras and Digambaras disagree about what occurred once Mahavira reached a marriageable age. The Shvetambaras say that he fulfilled his duties as a householder, married a princess called Yashoda, and fathered a daughter called Priyadarshana. They say that he did not become a mendicant until his parents died. The Digambaras believe that Mahavira never married. They stress the notion that he had an aversion to worldly matters from an early age.

When Mahavira was 30 years of age some gods went to him and urged him to renounce the world. A great ceremony took place when he embarked on his renunciation in a large park under an *ashoka* tree. According to the Digambaras he removed all his clothes and pulled out

all his hair in five bunches (as is the norm for Jain monks and nuns even today), becoming a naked ascetic.

The Shvetambaras accept most of these details, but they believe he wore a small loincloth given to him by INDRA, king of the gods. They say that he wore this cloth for 13 months, when out of complete disregard for such things he let it fall from him and proceeded as a naked mendicant.

Mahavira wandered for 12 years, abstaining for long periods from water or food or both, ignoring all bodily pains or pleasures, not caring whether he was in the burning sunshine or the pouring rain. (Digambaras, however, believe he observed a vow of silence and solitude for these 12 years.) According to the Shvetambaras, he



Mahavira, 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, in Palitana, Gujarat (Constance A. Jones)

was approached during this period by the AJIVIKA ascetic Makkhali Gosala, who, upon seeing his magical yogic powers, became his disciple and companion. Unfortunately, they report, Gosala eventually broke away and declared himself a *jina* or spiritual victor, cursing Mahavira when the latter contradicted his claim.

After an amazingly difficult and extended period of austerity, in which Mahavira showed no concern for any bodily insult or trial, he ascended to *kevalajnana* enlightenment—an infinite supreme knowledge and intuition. He then became the 24th and final Tirthankara of the current half-era.

When he became enlightened and omniscient, the gods built him a vast assembly hall, where he sat quietly and uttered a divine sound that carried the essence of the Jain teaching. The Digambaras believe that the message was heard by all beings of every sort—heavenly beings, hell beings, humans, animals, and gods—all of whom gathered there in amazement; they also believe that Mahavira no longer ate, drank, slept, or aged, as a sign of his pure state. Shvetambaras believe that only the gods and a select few disciples heard his teaching. A Jain community began to form around him from that moment, though he made no effort to create it.

After his enlightenment, Mahavira lived for 30 years as an omniscient being, traveling from place to place. At the age of 72, after undergoing a series of ever more rigorous fasts, he took his death. He passed from this world, his soul heading toward the top of the universe, where it remains eternally in unlimited consciousness and bliss.

Historians believe that a Jain community of monks, nuns, and lay people emerged during Mahavira's lifetime. Nuns always outnumbered monks in the community by a significant margin.

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mahayuga

A Mahayuga or “great age,” is a traditional Indian unit of TIME In Hindu tradition. It consists of four YUGAS in descending order, totaling 4,320,000 years.

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Mahendranath, Sri (Lawrence Amos Miles) (1911–1991) *tantric teacher*

Sri Mahendranath was a British-born student of a great variety of Eastern religious movements. He founded an ashram to teach his syncretic system of twilight YOGA. Lawrence Amos Miles was born on April 29, 1911, in London, England. As a child, he was interested in spiritual questions and the pagan way of life, and as a young man he had a series of unique experiences that forecast his devotion to the inner life.

In his early 20s Miles met Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), who suggested that he study the *I Ching* with Asian adepts. Miles went to India in 1953 and was initiated into SANNYAS (renunciation) by Sadguru Lokanath, a teacher in the Adinath branch of the Nath Sampradaya School (see NATH YOGIS). This tantric order (see TANTRISM) is unorthodox in its practices, which include wandering and nudity. During his 30 years as a renunciant in India, Miles studied with other GURUS and was initiated into two other schools, the Kaula and the Sahajiya, both of which are “left-handed” tantric sects, meaning that they use the impurities of life as a means of SELF-REALIZATION. He also went to Bhutan, where he was initiated into Tibetan Buddhism; to Malaysia, where he became a Taoist priest; and to Sri Lanka, where he became a Theravadin monk.

In 1975, he founded an ashram in Gujarat and began to teach a spiritual system called

twilight yoga, which included elements of the *I Ching*, Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and SHIVAISM. In 1978 he established an East-West tantric order, the Arcane Magickal Order of the Knights of Shambhala/AMOOKOS. As a *sannyasi*, Mahendranath traveled to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Australia. He died at his ashram near the Vatrak River in the state of Gujarat on August 30, 1991.

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Mahesh Yogi, Maharishi (b. 1911 or 1917) *founder of Transcendental Meditation*

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi played an important role in spreading the theory and practice of MEDITATION in the West. During the height of the Western “counterculture,” he acquired a large degree of fame and notoriety.

Little is known about the Maharishi’s early life. *Mahesh* is his family name, and *Maharishi* in Sanskrit means “great sage or saint.” His date of birth has been variously given as either October 18, 1911, or January 12, 1917. Acquaintances in India claim that he is a native of Uttarkashi, a small town in the HIMALAYAS, and the son of a local income tax collector. According to his official biography, he received a degree in physics from Allahabad University in 1942 and then worked in a factory before studying SANSKRIT and Indian philosophy.

According to his biography, the Maharishi studied *ADVAITA* (non-dual) *VEDANTA* for 13 years under Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, Jagadguru and Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math, Himalayas (1870–1953). Upon the death of Brahmananda, he withdrew to a cave near Uttarkashi for two

years. On a visit to South India in 1955, he gave his first talks and became a popular lecturer on the wisdom of Hinduism.

In 1958 at a lecture in Madras (Chennai), the Maharishi spoke of his vision for the “spiritual regeneration of all mankind,” which received a five-minute ovation. The next evening he announced the formation of the Spiritual Regeneration movement, dedicated to the accomplishment of that goal. Soon after, he began the first of more than 12 world tours. He first left India to settle in London, where he established the International Meditation Society. He taught primarily out of a small apartment in London’s Knightsbridge section, as well as private homes and hotels.

He arrived in the United States in 1959 teaching a technique called TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION (T.M.), a practice that draws from Vedic science and employs a MANTRA, or chant, that is given to each student in an initiatory ritual. Each person’s mantra is meant to saturate the mind and allow a peaceful state of mind, absent of thought. Initiates are encouraged to practice at least a half-hour in the morning and a half-hour in the evening. T.M. is well suited to life in the secular, technological West, as the practice does not require devotion or faith and claims a scientific rather than religious basis. In the 1960s the Beatles were his most celebrated followers.

In addition to the Spiritual Regeneration movement founded in 1958, the Maharishi formed the Students International Meditation Society and the International Meditation Society in the 1960s. In 1971, Maharishi International University was founded by the Maharishi in Iowa to train teachers of T.M.

The Maharishi returned to India in the late 1970s and moved to the Netherlands in 1990. His organization includes ashrams, clinics, schools, universities, and Vedic study centers. His teachings have stimulated a broad array of interest in Vedic literature. With over 5 million initiates, T.M. has expanded the reach of traditional yoga and Vedic philosophy.

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maithuna See [PANCHAKAMARA](#).

Malaysia

The earliest Hindu state to appear on the Malay Peninsula was Kamalanka, which emerged during the seventh century C.E. It appears to have developed out of the earlier kingdom of Lang-La-Tsiu, a dependency of the Cambodian kingdom of Funan. Eventually the Malay Peninsula became part of the Hindu kingdoms of Srivijaya (Sumatra) and Majapahit (Java). Hinduism as well as Buddhism were practiced throughout the peninsula, which became in 1957 the Federation of Malaya. Malaysia was formed in 1963 when the former British colonies of Singapore and Sabah and Sarawak (on Borneo) joined the federation.

Malaysia became a British colony during the 19th century; from the start, the colony accepted Hindu immigrants. Immigration from India continued until World War II, with peak numbers entering Malaysia during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The movement of laborers to Malaysia constituted one of the largest Indian out-migrations in history. Unlike in earlier periods (the era of Hindu expansion), emigrants were primarily from the lower castes, recruited to work in the sugar and rubber plantations, or in the fishing, forestry, and mining industries. Most migrants were from the state of Madras and

were culturally Tamil, although significant numbers were Telugu and Gujarati. SIKHS from the Punjab served in the military and police forces. The Tamil financier caste introduced worship of the deity Murugan, or KARTTIKEYA son of SHIVA, who became the principal deity recognized in Malaysia.

Today South Asians compose 8 percent of the population of the Malay Peninsula. Most Hindus do not practice orthodox Hinduism, but rather Tamil folk religion. Recently, Brahminical practices have become more popular, a process called Sanskritization. Hindu fundamentalism was growing among a minority, as in India, at the close of the 20th and beginning of the 21st cen-



Hindu temple in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

turies. Hindus have been very active in politics in Malaysia.

See also [DIASPORA](#); [INDONESIA](#).

Further reading: Crispin Bates ed., *Community, Empire, and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); George Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Edited by Walter F. Vella (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968); K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of Their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); K. S. Sandhu and A. Mani, eds., *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Times Academic Press and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); Steven Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Mallinatha See [TIRTHANKARAS](#).

mamsa See [PANCHAKAKARA](#).

manas

Manas (mind) is the term for the mental capacity in the 24 categories that define reality in SAMKHYA and YOGA. It is seen to oversee the five capacities of action and the five capacities of perception directly. Above mind in the schema are the ego (*ahamkara*) and the intellect (*buddhi*). While *manas* is essential for the proper functioning of the human being, it is always understood to be subject to the whims of ego under the disguise of instinct or in terms of ego's role in creating the "grasping" self.

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

mandala See [YANTRA](#).

Mandukya Upanishad

The Mandukya is a short UPANISHAD (12 small stanzas) in the Atharva Veda, one of the most important for the ADVAITA (non-dual) VEDANTA of SHANKARA. Shankara's guru, GAUDAPADA, wrote a commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad that became important in that tradition.

In its first stanza the Upanishad establishes the supremacy of the syllable om, equating it to the ultimate BRAHMAN. Stanzas 3 through 7 outline the four STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS. Stanzas 9 through 12 establish that the four parts of om (esoterically understood as *a*, *u*, *m*, and a fourth, which is beyond parts) are identical to the four states of consciousness, thus establishing om as the ATMAN or self.

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mangala

Mangala is the name for the planet Mars in Indian tradition; in North Indian languages it is used as the name for Tuesday. Its widest meaning, however, is "auspicious." Along with its opposite, *amangala*, the term is constantly heard on a daily basis in Indian culture.

A number of factors can contribute to making something auspicious in India. It may be an astrological issue—the stars and conjunctions of planets can indicate that a particular day, month, or year will be *mangala* or *amangala*. Certain individuals are by definition *mangala*, such as GURUS, saints, and other holy men. Additionally, certain events can be described as auspicious, for instance, the arrival of an unexpected guest. Places, including rivers, mountains, and shrines, also can be seen as *mangala*, or auspicious, and

yield benefits in both spiritual and worldly terms if they are visited.

A wide variety of places, times, locations, or objects can be described as *mangala*. In Jain tradition the *ashtamangala* or eight auspicious things are taken out for special occasions. They include a mirror and a pot full of water. In fact, the potential for auspicious or inauspicious occurrences is practically unlimited on a day-to-day basis in Indian tradition.

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Manikkavacakar (c. ninth century) *Tamil poet-saint*

Manikkavacakar is often considered the Tamil people's most revered Shaivite poet-saint, even though he is not included in the traditional grouping of 63 saints. His works, *Tirukkovaiyar* and *TIRUVACAKAM*, form the eighth book of the Tamil Shaivite canonical work *TIRUMURAI*. There is hardly a Tamil Shaivite who does not know a line from these two poems, which express devotion to Lord SHIVA with great beauty and fervor.

Manikkavacakar was born in a Tamil Brahmin family in Tiruvataur, a village on the Vaikai River, which also runs through the city of Madurai, and thus he has the proper name of Tirvatavur (He Who Belongs to the Sacred Village of Tiruvataurus). But he is best known, Manikkavacakar (he whose utterances [*vacaka*] are like rubies [*manikkam*]). His father was an adviser to the Pandya king. The son followed in his father's footsteps and became chief minister to the Pandya monarch Arimarttanar.

The story goes that Manikkavacakar was sent by the monarch to a port city with a huge sum of money to buy horses. There Manikkavacakar, who was inclined to renounce the world, met his GURU, who was in fact a form of SHIVA himself. There he took teaching from the guru and asked to be taken

as a devotee. He surrendered to his guru all the treasure entrusted to him by the king. When the king found out, he imprisoned Manikkavacakar. Forced to stand in the hot sun so that he would agree to return the money, the saint prayed to Shiva, and a herd of beautiful horses was delivered to him to give to the king. Unfortunately, the horses were jackals who had been magically transformed and reverted to their former nature during the night.

The king again tormented Manikkavacakar in the hot sun. Eventually, when Shiva revealed himself to the king, Manikkavacakar was released. He was ordered by Shiva to go to three shrines to teach and to defeat the Buddhists in debate.

One of these shrines was the famous Shiva shrine of CHIDAMBARAM. It was there that most of the hymns that formed the *Tiruvacakam* were first sung (and probably written by his followers). It is said that the Buddhists there heard of the saint and sent someone to debate him. Manikkavacakar completely vanquished the Buddhists in debate, invoking SARASVATI to strike them dumb. The Buddhists then all became devotees of Shiva. Eventually, Shiva himself wrote all the poet's works, and the saint disappeared into the icon of Shiva in Chidambaram.

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manipura chakra

The *manipura* or "City of Jewels" CHAKRA is the third chakra from the base of the spine in the KUNDALINI YOGA system. It is situated on the spine at the level of the navel. This chakra is associated with the drive for power and accomplishment. Arrogance and vanity are the emotions that manifest from it. Its element is fire (see *PANCHA MAHAB-*

HUTAS). Its deity is RUDRA. Its SHAKTI, or presiding female divinity, is LAKINI, sometimes also called *Bhadrakali*. It has 10 blue petals.

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mantra

A mantra is a specially empowered spoken or chanted utterance, usually in SANSKRIT, although there are utterances called mantras in every Indian language. Mantras vary in size from one short syllable to a long chant, such as found in the “mantras” of the RIG VEDA. Etymologically *mantra* comes from the *man*, “think,” and *tra*, “instrument,” making a *mantra* literally an “instrument of thought,” or more truly an “instrument of consciousness.”

In the VEDAS the mantras were understood to be of superhuman origin, eternal and uncreated, and were received and recited by seers and reciters in order to call to divine powers. They were used for the removal of sins, diseases, and misfortune; the conquest of enemies; and innumerable other purposes.

In post-Vedic Hinduism the word *mantra* acquired a philosophical meaning. It was said to be derived from *man* (think) and *tra* (protect); a mantra then is that which conditions or protects consciousness and helps lead to liberation. All the old Vedic usages remained throughout Indian tradition, but the use of mantras to purify consciousness, identify with the divinity, and lead one toward liberation was always highly valued.

Mantras are used in India for building temples, for installing icons, and for worshipping them. Those who enter various orders are often given initiation mantras. Any Indian tradition has its *mula*, or basic mantra. Recitation of this mantra in *japa* or repetitive utterance is efficacious for all purposes. The Shaivite traditions use the mantra

om namah shivaya for this purpose. The Jains have what is called the mantra of five salutations, which is used for giving blessings and for asking for good fortune. Since Buddhism grew up on Indian soil, mantras are part of every sect of Buddhism, although their usage and interpretation may vary from those of the various Hindu sects.

The *bija mantra*, or seed mantra, is used most often in rituals. It is a one-syllable mantra, almost always ending with an *m* sound, which embodies the full power of a divinity. For instance, *gam* is the *bija mantra* for GANESHA and is always used in chanting to him.

All Hindu sects have slightly different philosophies of mantra, and all sects have long litanies of names of their divinities that can be recited for any purpose, including liberation. There is the famous VISHNU *sahasranama*, for instance, the Thousand Names of Vishnu, that VAISHNAVITES faithfully recited for all purposes.

In Hindu TANTRA it is common to understand the *mula* mantra, the basic mantra, as being the ultimate form of the divinity, more powerful and efficacious than either the *yantra* (the esoteric graphic form) or the image of the divinity itself. When one does a tantric mantra, one literally *becomes* the divinity, as the mantra is the divinity. Finally, according to tantra belief, by chanting the *mula* mantra or the litany of mantras to the divinity one can realize the *ajapa mantra*, or mantra that constantly recites itself. That is, the mantra begins to repeat itself in one’s consciousness without further external utterance, thus totally transforming the adept. In the SHAKTA forms of tantra the Goddess mantras are called *VIDYAS* (wisdom), and the term *mantra* is reserved for utterances that relate to the male divinities only.

Behind the power and significance of mantra in India is the understanding that the universe itself is constituted of nothing but sound. The world is from *nada* BRAHMAN or ultimate sound. A mantra then is not a mere utterance, but must be understood to be intimately connected to the

substance of the universe itself, and hence yields power when recited.

See also **GAYATRI MANTRA**.

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Manu

Manu is the name of the first man in each of the designated ages or **MANVANTARAS** in Indian tradition, a progenitor somewhat akin to the Western biblical Adam. There have been an infinite number of ages in the past, as there will be in the future. Therefore the Manus are infinite in number.

According to **TIME** calculations in Hindu traditions, there are 14 **MANVANTARAS** in each eon or **KALPA**, which constitutes a day in the life of **BRAHMA** or 4,320,000,000 years. The first Manu of our *kalpa* was Swayambhuva Manu, who Indian tradition says composed the **LAWS OF MANU**, the famous text on social law. In all there have already been seven Manus in the current *kalpa*, each one leading off his designated age, includ-

ing the Manu who began the age we live in today, who is known as Vaivasvata. There will be seven more Manus in the remaining ages until our *kalpa* is ended.

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manvantara

A *manvantara* is one of the divisions of time in Hindu tradition, made up of 71 **YUGAS**. Fourteen *manvantaras* make up one **KALPA**, which constitutes one day in the life of the god **Brahma** or 4,320,000,000 years. Each *manvantara* has its associated **MANU**, or human progenitor. Each *manvantara* also has seven **RISHIS** (saints/seers), certain deities, and its own **INDRA** (king of the gods).

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Mariyamman

Mariyamman is the smallpox **GODDESS** of Tamil Nadu. She compares to **SHITALA** in other regions of India. Every village in Tamil Nadu has a temple to Mariyamman. It was understood that smallpox was both caused and cured by this goddess.

There were those who understood the disease to be in some way a blessing of the goddess upon them, with the white pustules seen as auspicious markings. However, the worship of Mariyamman was almost always intended to ward off the disease or to alleviate its effects. Because smallpox has been eliminated, Mariyamman is propitiated

in the case of chickenpox and other diseases today.

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marriage See [ASHRAMAS](#).

Maruts

The Maruts were originally the storm and wind gods of the RIG VEDA. They accompanied INDRA, king of the gods, who holds a lightning bolt. In various references they are said to be 27, 49, or 180 in number. They throw thunderbolts, churn up wind, and cause the Earth to quake with their fury.

In the Puranas the Maruts are instead seen as the sons of Kashyapa and Diti. Having no child, Diti asked her *RISHI* husband for a boon. She wanted a child who could defeat Indra. Her husband said this could happen if she carried the son in her womb for 100 years while remaining completely pious and pure. At the 99th year, she is said to have faltered and Indra, anxiously observing, split the embryo into seven parts to become the seven Maruts. The name *Marut* was given to them by Indra when he told them not to cry (*rut*).

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Mata, Sri Daya (1914–) prominent American Hindu leader

Sri Daya Mata is the American-born third president of the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP (SRF).

Faye Wright was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, and grew up in an environment of the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). As an elementary school student she first learned about India and quickly developed an emotional attachment that stayed with her as she grew up. Her reading of the BHAGAVAD GITA as a teenager set her on a quest for God that only began to be satisfied in 1931 when she attended a lecture given by Paramahansa YOGANANDA in her hometown.

Wright saw in Yogananda a person with a relationship to the divine that she wanted for herself; she resolved to follow him. Because of an illness that kept her out of school she was able to attend some of his classes, her face bandaged. During one class Yogananda approached her and announced that she would be healed within a week. His prophecy materialized. Two weeks later, with the permission of her parents, she entered Yogananda's ashram in Los Angeles.

Wright became one of Yogananda's closest associates in his Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF). She took vows of renunciation and was given a new name, Daya Mata. At the time of Yogananda's death, she was placed in charge of the movement's headquarters at Mount Washington, California, and James Lynn (Swami Rajasi Janakananda) was placed in charge of the SRF organization. Lynn died three years later. In 1955, Daya Mata succeeded Lynn as the third president of Self-Realization Fellowship, a position she has retained for decades.

She has been very active as president, overseeing a growing international organization, meeting frequent speaking engagements, and authoring several books. On March 5, 2005, she celebrated her 50th anniversary as the leader of SRF.

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Finding the Joy within You: Personal Counsel for God-Centered Living (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2002); ———, *God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1998); ———, *Only Love: Living the Spiritual Life in a Changing World* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1976).

Matagiri See [AUROBINDO](#), [SRI](#).

math

Math is a word for monastery in the Hindi language. Many Hindu traditions established *maths* as austere residences where monks could live and study. Most famous are the four *maths* established by the great VEDANTA teacher SHANKARA (circa eighth century): BADRINATH in far northern India, DVARAKA (Dwarka) in Gujarat, Shringeri in Karnataka, and Puri in Orissa. Monks from the Dashanami order following Shankara's teachings now live at these locations. The abbot of each of these *maths* is referred to as the Shankaracharya (while Shankara himself is referred to as the Adishankaracharya, or first Shankaracharya).

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matsya See [PANCHA MAKARA](#).

Matsya avatar

The Matsya (fish) AVATAR of VISHNU is said to have preserved the world from a cataclysmic flood in a previous cycle of time. According to the story,

the MANU (primordial man) of that era was a great king. He came upon a tiny fish as he was washing himself in the morning. The fish, speaking in a human voice, beseeched the king to save him. He promised to reward Manu by saving him in turn from an impending flood.

Manu agreed. He first put the fish in a bowl of water, but the fish grew very quickly and outgrew it. Then Manu put the fish in a pitcher, but it became too big for it overnight. Manu successively put it into a well, pond, and then the GANGES, but it outgrew them all. Finally, he put it in the ocean, where it became very huge. Once in the ocean the fish instructed Manu that after certain cataclysms a flood would wipe out all of the beings on Earth. The fish instructed Manu to build a huge boat, put the world's creatures in it, and tie a rope to it in preparation for that time. When the flood arrived, Manu attached the rope to the fish's horn and the fish took him to the northern mountain, where he attached the boat to a tree. Thus were all creatures rescued by the Matsya incarnation of VISHNU.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Mauritius

The British acquired the island nation of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean from the French in 1814 as part of the Treaty of Paris. Sugar production on the island flourished under the British, who imported large numbers of African slaves to work on plantations. Prior to 1835, almost 70 percent of the population of Mauritius was of African descent. After the abolition of slavery, British officials began in 1835 to employ indentured servants from India to fill the labor shortage on the

island. Since that time, the migration of Indians to the island has steadily increased. Indians of all faiths now constitute about 68 percent of the total population.

Most Hindus in Mauritius were from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in northern India and Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in southern India. Many migrated to escape the drought and poverty that had ravaged regions of India during much of the mid-19th century. Others were enticed by the prospects of owning land. Large numbers of migrants from India continued to enter Mauritius until 1922, when contracts of indentured servitude were discontinued.

From their first days in Mauritius, Hindus were much more organized and had greater political leverage than their compatriots in other colonies with sizable Indian populations. Conditions for the indentured laborers were deplorable, but Hindus did not face severe persecution because of their religion. Throughout their residence in Mauritius, Hindus established temples, gained recognition of their religious festivals as public holidays, and maintained frequent contact with the Indian homeland. When MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI visited Mauritius in the early 20th century he was impressed by the social justice and activism of the Hindu population on the island. Overall, Hinduism has enjoyed success and longevity there.

The earliest temples were constructed in the mid-1880s on the sugar estates by traders and indentured laborers. They were dedicated to Annam and KARTTIKEYAN, or Murugan. At present there are over 250 Hindu temples on Mauritius.

Temples serve as centers for many traditional Hindu festivals. MAHASHIVARATRI, SHIVA'S Great Night, is one of the largest. The annual celebration is designated a national holiday for those of North Indian descent. The festival involves a nine-day ceremony of fasting that concludes with a night-long worship service to Shiva. Other popular festivals in Mauritius include Thai Pusam, a celebration of the South Indian God

Murugan. The festival is recognized officially as a Tamil holiday, but Hindus of all origins join the celebration of the deity. DIVALI, the festival of lights, is another popular festival proclaimed as a national holiday, in which both Hindus and non-Hindus celebrate. During the height of Divali observances, Hindu temples and Christian churches are lit with many earthen lamps to symbolize dispelling the darkness of ignorance. The festival of Divali represents religious solidarity across ethnic barriers.

Hindus in Mauritius have established strong traditions of both VAISHNAVISM and SHIVISM. Additionally, reform movements such as ARYA SAMAJ have increased in popularity over recent years. In 2000, a celebration of the 125th anniversary of Arya Samaj drew over 15,000 people to more than 165 fire rituals.

Other organizations that have made their home in Mauritius over the decades include the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS, the VEDANTA RAMAKRISHNA SOCIETIES MATH AND MISSION, the Chinmayananda Mission, and the Swami Lakshmanacharya Vishwa Santi Foundation. In 1983, Swami Krishnananda converted an infirmary established in 1888 in Calebassus into an ASHRAM and AYURVEDIC health care center that houses over 200 poor and needy residents.

Hindus in Mauritius still frequent pilgrimage centers in India, even as several sites have been established on the island for pilgrimages. One such destination is Spiritual Park, established in 1999 by Satguru Sivaya SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI, to house worship, music, education, and other activities. The park features three eight-foot statues of GANESHA, Dakshinamurti, and Lord Murugan (KARTTIKEYAN), hand-carved in MAHABALIPURAM, India.

Hinduism remains the dominant religion of Mauritius. A 2000 census estimated that there are over 500,000 Hindus on the island, making up to 44 percent of the total population.

See also DIASPORA.

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maya

The term *maya* has several senses. In the VEDAS the term referred to the magic or power of the divinity. The term is still used in this sense in theistic branches of Hinduism to refer to the delusive and enthralling power of the personal divinity.

In SHANKARA'S ADVAITA VEDANTA the term developed a specialized meaning of "illusion," specifically, the illusory nature of the world of phenomena. It is an alternative term for *avidya* or ignorance—that is, ignorance of the unitary character of the ultimate reality. *Maya* in this context is the veil of illusion over the BRAHMAN or the highest reality. It neither exists nor nonexists, but is something that cannot be defined. *Maya*, the world as we sense it and know it, is thought to disappear as a fog does when the light of knowledge of the singular nature of the ultimate reality moves forward in consciousness.

In the SHAKTA traditions of GODDESS worship, the goddess as supreme divinity is sometimes called *Maya* or *Mahamaya*. In this case the word has no negative connotations, but simply refers to the goddess's supreme magic and power.

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Ma Yoga Shakti International Mission (est. 1979)

The Ma Yoga Shakti International Mission, with ashrams and centers in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States, is dedicated to the spread of YOGA in the West. It offers instruction in a variety of yoga paths.

Ma Yoga Shakti (no birth name available) was born April 6, 1927, and raised in the holy city of BENARES (Varanasi), India. She spent her youth fascinated by high ideals and devoted herself to the quest of finding solutions to life's mysteries. She obtained an M.A. in political science and became principal of an all-women's college in Bihar, India. In 1956 she founded the Annie Besant Lodge of the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY in Chapra. In 1965, she took vows of SANNYAS, renouncing the worldly life, and became a *paramadesa SANNYASI*, or one who becomes a monastic without being initiated by another SANNYASI. She does not acknowledge any one GURU or Hindu lineage. She took the name Ma Yoga Shakti Saraswati. In 1969 she was given the name *Shakti Sant Shiromani* by several monastic orders of India at the KUMBHA MELA. She was given the title Maha Mandleshwar in 1974 by the Niranjani Akhara, one of India's largest orders of monks.

In 1979, following her intention to spread yoga to the West, she established the Ma Yoga Shakti International Mission, with ashrams in South Ozone Park, New York, and Palm Bay, Florida. Other ashrams are active in London and in five cities in India. Following the teaching of Ma Yoga Shakti, the mission emphasizes four forms of yoga—HATHA, raja, KARMA, and BHAKTI—and instructs students to pursue the yogic path that is most accessible to their inclinations and abilities. The mission publishes books by Ma Yoga Shakti in English and Hindi and offers a monthly periodical, *Yoga Shakti Mission Newsletter*. Each of the movement's ashrams offers retreats, devotional services, yoga and MEDITATION classes, and workshops.

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meat-eating

Meat-eating was apparently well established for all classes and castes in very ancient India. The VEDAS show BRAHMINS and others eating beef as well as an assortment of other meats. With the rise of the notion of AHIMSA (nonharm), first introduced by the Jains (see JAINISM) and Buddhists, meat-eating became less sanctioned.

In the *Manu Smriti* or *Manavadharma Shastra* (LAWS OF MANU) (c. 400 B.C.E.), a transitional stage can be seen; meat, including beef, that is killed as part of a Vedic ritual is allowed for Brahmins. However, non-ritually killed meat was not to be eaten by them. Eventually orthodox Brahmins adopted a Jain-like scrupulous VEGETARIANISM that became a cultural ideal of the faith.

However, many sectors of society in India still eat meat and fish. The most common meat eaten in India by Hindus is chicken, followed by lamb and goat. Water buffalo meat is also sometimes eaten. Only the lowest sectors of Hindu society eat pork or beef. Pork is raised by Dalit (untouchable) communities as a regular food source. Dalits also eat beef, taken as carrion.

Under British rule, tensions arose between Muslims and Hindus over the issue of beef. Muslims do not eat pork but do eat beef. Tensions have persisted into postindependence India. Particular offense can be taken if Muslims cook beef on a Hindu holiday, or in an area where Hindus can smell the process. Some cities, such as Delhi, have simply banned the slaughter of cows entirely. McDonalds, Wimpy's, and other international hamburger outlets have been open in India for a long time, but they never serve beef, usually substituting the meat of water buffalo.

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meditation

The term *dhyana* (meditation) is used by Jains (see JAINISM), Buddhists, and Hindus, with somewhat different technical meanings.

The Jains may very well have been the first to practice meditation. Their tradition does not preserve a great deal of information about the early practice; there is no mention of PRANAYAMA or breath control, but *dharana* (focus), as known to the PATANJALI Yoga tradition, was apparently included.

Jain tradition has four types of *dhyana*: *artadhyana* (focus on things unpleasant or sorrowful), *raudradhyana* (focus on cruel and perverse things), *dharmyadhyana* (virtuous concentration), and *shukladhyana* (pure concentration). Most literature on the SIDDHA (perfected beings) and TIRTHANKARAS (most exalted personages) refers to the *shukladhyana* state, which involves intense concentration.

In the Hindu tradition, the term *dhyana* first appears in the Upanishads, in a handful of places, used as a rather generic term. By the time of the epics (c. seventh century B.C.E. to third century C.E.), *dhyana* was a well-established practice. Most later Hindu YOGA traditions derive from *raja yoga* or Patanjali Yoga, where *dhyana* is a refined meditative practice that is taken up after one has mastered *pranayama*, or breath control, and *dharana*, "mental focus." It is a deeper concentration of the mind, eventually leading to the SAMADHI state, which involves highly concentrated focus on the highest reality (or realities).



Wedding of Shiva and Minakshi, goddess of Madurai, Madurai Temple, Tamil Nadu (Constance A. Jones)

In other yogic traditions, those practicing *dhyana* focus on a *MANTRA* (recited word or phrase); a *YANTRA*, or sacred diagram; or an *ISHTA DEVATA*, or chosen divinity.

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Meenakshi Temple, Madurai

The Meenakshi Sundareshvarar Temple at Madurai, dedicated to the goddess Meenakshi (MINAKSHI)

and to SHIVA as the beautiful lord (Sundareshvarar), is one of the largest in India. The original temple was built by Kulasekara Pandyan, a king, sometime in the first millennium C.E., but it fell into ruins. The current structure was laid out by Viswanath Nayakar, a later monarch of Madurai, in the 16th century and was completed by Tirumalai Nayakar in the 17th century.

The original site was dedicated exclusively to the goddess Minakshi, whose presence in the area is very ancient. The current temple also contains, in addition to the inner sanctum with Minakshi's image, a LINGAM (phallus) for Shiva worship, as well as a striking, huge NATARAJA (Shiva as Lord of Dance) in one of its larger halls. Most notable are the 120-foot towers at each of the four entranceways. These are all elaborately decorated with myriad stucco-covered stone carvings of scenes

from mythology, beautifully painted in bright colors.

Points of interest include the arched area of the eight SHAKTIS; the golden lotus pond near the Minakshi shrine, where people descend to bathe; the hall of the parrots, where parrots sing praises of the two divinities, Shiva and Minakshi; the 1,000-pillared hall; and the wall paintings that depict scenes from the Purana telling the story of the holy acts of Shiva. Each year during the CHITTIRAI FESTIVAL in April–May the wedding of Shiva and Minakshi is celebrated. Because VISHNU is said to be the brother of Minakshi and takes part in the wedding, the temple also houses depictions and sculptures representing Vishnu.

Further reading: Chris Fuller, *A Priesthood Renewed: Modernity and Traditionalism in a South Indian Temple* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); ———, *Servants of the Goddess: The Priests of a South Indian Temple* (New York: Cambridge University Press); William P. Harman, *The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Meera, Mother (1960–) *embodiment of the Divine Mother*

Mother Meera is considered by her followers as an AVATAR of the Divine Mother. She is a silent teacher, primarily offering DARSHAN (eyegazing) to visitors to help them achieve health and happiness.

Born Kamala Reddy on December 26, 1960, Mother Meera was raised in the village of Chandrapalle in southern India. Her parents were not religious and raised her under no particular tradition. She was described as an unusual child, who often spoke of mysterious lights that visited her. She would later reveal that she received much of her love and spiritual guidance from visions. At the age of six she experienced her first SAMADHI, higher state of consciousness. Her uncle recognized the child's gift and invited her to stay with him in Pondicherry. In 1974 she visited

SRI AUROBINDO'S ashram, attracting considerable attention there, and soon began giving DARSHAN, her own blessings to others. Her presence in Pondicherry attracted many and her popularity grew.

Devotees throughout the world consider Mother Meera an avatar of the Divine Mother, who has previously incarnated in other forms, such as KALI and the Virgin Mary. The appearance of the Mother is believed to offer people of the world healing, protection, and transformation in a time of crisis. Mother Meera has stated that the world is now in crisis and that her role is to give the transformative light of Paramatman, the Supreme Self, to everyone around the world. The light that she speaks of is the Supreme Being, which is an untapped energy permeating the world. Mother Meera believes that the ignition of supreme energy will give health, joy, and happiness to anyone who is open to it.

In 1982, Mother Meera married a German by the name of Herbert and relocated to Schaumburg, Germany. Thousands have met with her there and receive her *darshan*. Her teaching is not through words, but through silence. She greets all devotees who arrive for her blessing with an intense gaze. Looking into their eyes, she encounters every corner of their being in order to determine what help she can give.

Mother Meera meets with hundreds of visitors each year and offers regular *darshan*. She requires no devotion and is open to all individuals regardless of their religion. She continues to draw the interest of devotees from around the world.

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Meher Baba (1894–1969) *God-Realized master said to be avatar of the age*

Meher Baba considered himself to be an AVATAR, a being who ushers in a new cosmic age.

Born Merwan Sheriar Irani to Persian parents on February 25, 1894, in Poona, India, Meher Baba (compassionate father) was exposed to a number of faiths early in life. His father, Sheriar Irani, was a devout Zoroastrian. Merwan went to a Christian high school in Poona and later attended Deccan College.

According to Meher Baba, five perfect masters exist in the world at all times. These masters can

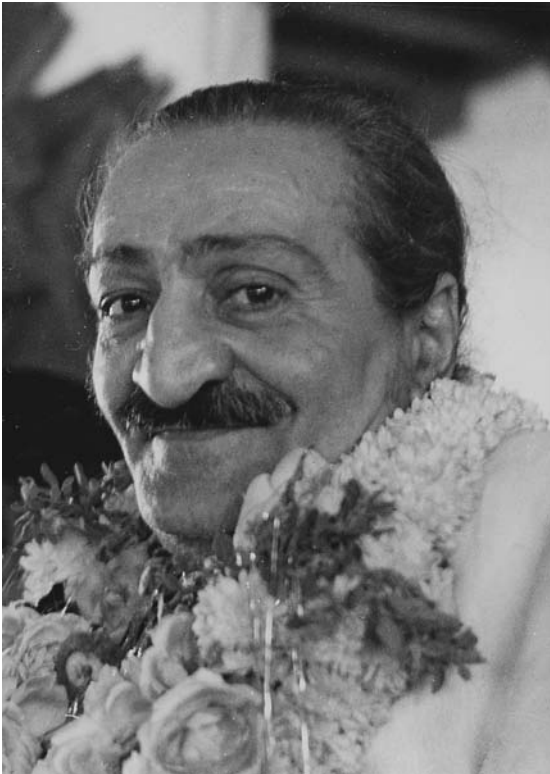
summon an avatar when needed to assist the world. Although they appear to be five different individuals, they are actually Satgurus, who are in the unity of the one God. They “bring down” the avatar so that the world can escape *MAYA*, the cage of illusion, and experience reality. While in college, in 1913, Irani met the first perfect master, Hazrat Babajan, an Islamic woman saint who kissed him on the forehead and showed him indescribable bliss, which continued for about nine months. In 1914, Babajan gave him instant God-realization and made him aware of his spiritual calling and destiny.

Another perfect master, Upasni Maharaj, a Hindu who resided in Sakori, gave Merwan gnosis or divine knowledge over the course of seven years. Through these experiences he gained spiritual perfection. In 1921 his spiritual mission began when his first close disciples gathered around him. His disciples gave him the name Meher Baba.

After years of teaching disciples, Meher Baba founded a colony near Ahmednagar, called Meherabad. The colony included a school, hospital, dispensary, and shelter for the poor. From its inception, Meherabad did not recognize caste distinctions in training its students or serving the needy. Another important part of the work begun by Meher Baba is work with the *masts*, the advanced souls or “God-intoxicated” individuals who live perpetually in awareness of the highest realm of consciousness. He sought out *masts* and took care of their physical needs, which the *masts* themselves often ignored. He also washed the feet of and fed lepers and the destitute of India.

From July 10, 1925, Meher Baba observed silence, communicating with others and giving discourses only through dictation on an alphabet board. Much later, he abandoned the alphabet board and communicated through hand gestures unique to him.

He asserted that he was the Ancient One who had returned to redeem humankind from its bondage to ignorance and to show to all their true



Meher Baba (1894–1969), God-realized master from western India, said to be the avatar of the current age who bridged Hinduism and Sufism (Courtesy Avatar Meher Baba Trust)

Self, which is God. He was acknowledged by his followers to be the avatar of the age.

In 1959, when he was 65 years old, Meher Baba established the Avatar Meher Baba Trust to provide for disciples who were dependent on him and to care for his tomb and property. The trust oversees charitable activities in India and the United States and has created a development plan for Meherabad, the site of Meher Baba's tomb.

Meher Baba traveled to the United States six times between 1931 and 1958. His center in the West is located at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. He left his body on July 31, 1969.

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Meru, Mount

In ancient Indian cosmology Mount Meru is a golden mountain, supporting the heavens, located at the center of the known universe. Its location is at the center of the continent of Jambudvipa (the island of the rose-apple tree). The part of Jambudvipa south of the mountain is called *Bharatavarsha*, which is identified with historical India. BRAHMA, SHIVA, and VISHNU are understood to reside on the summit of Mount Meru, accompanied by sages praising the gods, *apsarases* (celestial dancers), and *GANDHARVAS* (celestial musicians). The pole star is seen to shine directly over the summit of Meru.

The GANGES falls from heaven to the peak of Meru, where it is channeled to the four regions below. There are numerous mythological stories associated with this mountain. One says that Mount Meru and the god of the wind (VAYU) were

good friends. However, the mischievous sage Narada approached Vayu and instigated him to humble the mountain. Vayu blew with full force for one full year, but Meru did not yield. However, after a year Meru relaxed for a while, and taking advantage of this opportunity, Vayu increased in intensity. The top of the mountain was broken off and it fell into the sea. Thus was the island of Sri Lanka born.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimitt and J. A. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

Metamorphosis League for Monastic Studies (est. 1987)

The Metamorphosis League for Monastic Studies was founded by Kailasa Chandra Das (born Mark Goodwin) in 1987, in response to disputes within the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON) between the leadership and some other disciples who had been trained and initiated by the founder, Swami A. C. Prabhupada BHAKTIVEDANTA. The stated goal of the league is to help define norms for a valid devotional Vaishnavite organization. These norms suggest that a GURU, teacher; YOGI, or spiritual guide must be a self-realized Vaishnavite, that is, a devotee of VISHNU who has traveled the spiritual path to enlightenment and God. This person also must have realized the supreme personality of the god-head, KRISHNA.

Those who seek help from the league are advised to leave any guru who attracts disciples by charisma only. The charismatic personality, the league believes, may not always follow spiritual rules and may succumb to the illusion of power and self-aggrandizement, which would mislead disciples on the path to SELF-REALIZATION. On the other hand, there is a danger that an institutional guru, with a following of disciples who have

accepted him in a leadership role, might succumb to empty ritualism, devoid of spirituality. A genuine guru, according to this view, is modeled on the prototype of Bhaktivedanta Swami Pradhupada, who was said to derive his authority from God and to live his life in the purity of spirit.

The league upholds the paradigm of Pradhupada and advises that devotees be very careful about proclaiming allegiance to a guru who does not have a direct lineage to the godhead. The league follows the beliefs and principles of Pradhupada. Members must abide by all rules, including VEGETARIANISM, repetition of the Hare Krishna mantra, and abstinence from intoxicating substances. Members are also required to refrain from associating with members of ISKCON and consorting with “fake gurus” who are merely charismatic or who receive their status from a group that does not promote the truth as the league sees it. The league is headquartered in Beaverton, Oregon.

Milk Ocean

Between cosmic eras, Lord VISHNU is said to lie asleep on a couch made of the great snake Adishe-sha, who in turns floats upon a primordial ocean of milk. This ocean appears in another well-known Hindu myth: the churning of the MILK OCEAN by the gods and the ASURAS (the antigods).

The story goes that the irascible sage Durvasas once obtained a beautiful garland from a woman. Seeing Indra, king of the gods, go by on his white elephant Airavata, the sage offered the garland to him. INDRA placed the garland on the head of his elephant, who immediately took it with his trunk and tossed it on the ground.

Durvasas was outraged at this insult. He cursed Indra with the loss of his power to the *asuras*, who then triumphed over the gods. The gods went to Lord Vishnu to ask his help. Vishnu suggested that they go to the Milk Ocean along with the demons to churn out the powerful elixir of immortality (*amrita*). The demons agreed to this

cooperative task, which could be accomplished if they all worked together.

At Vishnu’s command, they gathered some herbs to throw into the ocean; took Mount Mandara, which props up Mount Meru, as a churning stick; and used Vishnu himself, incarnated as a tortoise, as the base for churning. They used the divine serpent Vasuki as the churning rope and began to churn.

In some versions of the story, the first thing to emerge from the churning ocean was a poison that could consume all the worlds. The gods begged SHIVA to control it, and he drank it up in one gulp. His wife, PARVATI, fearing for his life, grabbed his throat so the poison would not enter his stomach; the burn on his throat can be seen in his iconography as a dark blue marking. Fortunately, the next things to emerge from the Milk Ocean were more salubrious: Surabhi, the wish-fulfilling cow, came forth, followed by Sri, the goddess of prosperity and fortune (see LAKSHMI); Dhanavantari, the physician of the gods; the Kaustubha gem that always adorns Vishnu’s chest; and other wondrous things and beings, until finally, the nectar of immortality was churned out.

Knowing that the demons would want to seize the nectar, Vishnu took the form of the enchantress MOHINI, and, while the demons were mesmerized with her beauty, she served the nectar to the gods alone. As only the gods were now immortal, when the demons attacked them they were easily routed; the world was once again in the hands of the gods.

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Mimamsa

Mimamsa (inquiry) is one of the six traditional orthodox schools of Indian philosophy. The Mimamsa SUTRAS of Jaimini (c. third century C.E.) is the first extant text of the tradition.

Mimamsa in its earliest form (Purva [early] Mimamsa) preserves a strict Vedic tradition; it sees the Vedas as eternal, divine texts that should guide all life and action. According to early Mimamsa one must do one's ritual duties and worldly duties precisely according to the Vedas. The Mimamsa texts, therefore, aim to clarify the precise meaning of each Vedic injunction, so that devotees can reach the heavenly realm after death. The Mimamsakas argue very strongly that even the UPANISHADS, valued by so many for their philosophy, should be read only to learn any requirements for action that they may contain.

Mimamsa cannot be said to be theistic or oriented toward gods in a true sense; the gods are at the beck and call of humans thanks to the power of the Vedic MANTRAS. Gods exist, but the Vedas supersede all. The soul or self is understood to exist in Mimamsa, as in all six orthodox Brahminical systems.

Early Mimamsa preserved the ancient Vedic understanding of the afterlife: after death, a person went to a heavenly realm somewhat like the earthly one, where one remained in a happy state, being fed by one's family. There is no overt mention of reincarnation in the Vedic mantras themselves, with the exception of the late ISHA UPANISHAD, which is appended to the mantras of the YAJUR VEDA. Salvation itself in Mimamsa put the soul in an inert state, liberated from the bonds of earthly existence through proper performance of Vedic duty. As Mimamsa developed and changed around the seventh century with the commentary of Shabaraswamin, it accepted the notion of karma and rebirth. In this respect it converged, as did YOGA, with the other VEDANTIC schools.

Two lines of teachers, drawing upon Prabhakara and Kumarila (eighth and ninth centuries),

refined the doctrine further, using careful philosophical analysis of perception, causation, and the like, for the purposes of this school. This precise investigation was replicated in the commentary on the Upanishads that developed into VEDANTA. Because it was seen as an extension of the earlier Mimamsic investigative method, Vedanta is often called Uttara Mimamsa, or "later Mimamsa."

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Minakshi

Minakshi is the GODDESS of the city of Madurai. Her shrine is the site of one of India's most spectacular temples, the Meenakshi Sundareshvarar Temple. Her name (*mina*, fish; *aksha*, eye) is understood to mean "she whose eyes are the shape of lovely fishes," the translation of her original Tamil name, Anokayalkanni.

There is little question that Minakshi was the overseer of Madurai from very ancient times. However, as the Brahminical influence entered Tamil Nadu she was assimilated into the larger Brahminical culture as the wife of SHIVA.

The story goes that Minakshi's father and mother performed a special ritual to get a son. Instead of a son, a girl child emerged from the fire with three breasts. The parents were told to treat her as a prince would be treated and have her assume rulership. She was a powerful warrior and defeated all beings in all the directions. One day, however, she contended with SHIVA himself; upon seeing him, she fell in love. As this happened, she suddenly became bashful and timid (no doubt a patriarchal addition to the story!) and lost her third breast. She and Shiva were ceremoniously married, and he then became the king of Madurai and she the queen; the temple is now dedicated to both deities.

The kings of Madurai have retained their connection with Shiva, seeing themselves as ruling in his line. However, in the temple precincts Minakshi retains pride of place in the inner sanctum, which contains a small image of her.

Each year the CHITTIRAI FESTIVAL (in the lunar month of Chittirai) commemorates the marriage of Minakshi and Shiva. It is marked by 10 days of pageantry and celebration; a huge temple chariot bearing the festival images of Minakshi and Shiva is paraded around. Because of her status in Madurai, a great many businesses there, from tire companies to restaurants, are named after the goddess.

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Mirabai (c. 1450–1547) *mystic poet and devotee of Krishna*

Mirabai is one of the great mystic poets of India. A princess of the Rajput warrior clan in the Indian state of Rajasthan, she married a great prince of the famous town of Udaipur but was so devoted to Lord KRISHNA that she could not play the role of a proper wife. She eventually became the disciple of Raidas, a low-caste Hindu who was himself later worshipped as a saint.

Mirabai was persecuted by her husband and his family; it is said that they even gave her poison to drink, which failed to kill her. Finally Krishna appeared to her and told her to abandon family life and go to BRINDAVAN, his most sacred shrine. After spending some time there she settled at last in Gujarat in Dvaraka, where she died. Legend has it that she disappeared into the icon of Krishna in order to avoid a delegation from Rajasthan that was pleading for her to return.

Mirabai's works, written in the Hindi dialect Braj, show a passionate all-consuming devotion to Lord Krishna as the divine lover. As was the case with so many Vaishnavite (see VAISHNAVISM) saints, her songs often depict the agony of separation from God (Lord Krishna), who only rarely visits in mystical union. The mode of Mirabai very much resembles that of St. John of the Cross in his famous "Dark Night" (*Noche Oscura*). Mira's songs are known all over India but are sung particularly in Rajasthan.

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Mishra, Ramamurti (1923–1993) (*Swami Brahmananda Saraswati*) *teacher of raja yoga*

Ramamurti Mishra was an Indian-born yogi who founded the ANANDA ASHRAM in Monroe, New York. He wrote many books on YOGA and AYURVEDA and he commented upon many SANSKRIT texts.

Ramamurti Mishra was born in Benares (Varanasi), India, on March 6, 1923, into a religious Brahmin family. His mother was a spiritual teacher with many disciples and his father was a high court judge and practitioner of astrology. From an early age, Ramamurti was immersed in the study of Sanskrit, MEDITATION, and YOGA. At the age of six, he became ill and apparently died—for 36 hours, no vital signs of life, including respiration, were detected. As his father was about to light the fire for his cremation, the child sat upright and declared that he was alive. Ramamurti always considered this date, March 6, was his real birthday.

At a young age he left home to pursue the study of Sanskrit and medicine. He completed his first medical degrees in Ayurveda and Western

medicine at Banares Hindu University. In 1955, he left India to study medicine in the United States and served as a resident in neurosurgery at Bellevue Hospital in New York City.

In 1964, he founded Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York, where figures such as Timothy Leary and RAM DASS visited and taught. The ASHRAM continues to function as a year-round retreat for spiritual practice.

In 1966, Mishra resigned from his medical career to devote himself to spiritual discipline and the teaching of *raja yoga*, with a focus on the question, Who am I? Convinced that the cause of suffering is not in the body or the mind, but rather in ignorance of the true Self, he began to teach and explore the path to discovery of the “I AM” consciousness that he believed to be eternal and ever present.

In 1984 he was initiated into the vow of *sannyas* (renunciation) by Swami Gangeshvarananda and was given the name Brahmananda Saraswati. He was a prolific writer who published texts on yoga, meditation, *raja yoga*, Ayurveda, and commentaries on Sanskrit texts. He died on September 19, 1993.

Further reading: Ramamurti S. Mishra, *Fundamentals of Yoga* (Monroe, N.Y.: Baba Bhagavandas Publication Trust, 1996); ———, *Self Analysis and Self Knowledge* (Monroe, N.Y.: Baba Bhagavandas Publication Trust, 1997); ———, *The Textbook of Yoga Psychology* (Monroe, N.Y.: Baba Bhagavandas Publication Trust, 1997).

Mishra, Vachaspati (c. 840 C.E.) *Hindu scholar and commentator*

Vachaspati Mishra was a philosopher particularly celebrated for his *Bhamati*, a subcommentary on SHANKARA’S commentary on the VEDANTA SUTRA. He was a prolific scholar and writer whose name is attached to commentaries on NYAYA (logic), SAMKHYA, YOGA, and other subjects. Another of his well-known works was a subcommentary on

the Veda Vyasa’s authoritative commentary to the YOGA SUTRA of PATANJALI.

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

Mitra

Mitra is a minor deity often mentioned in the Vedic hymns, especially in association with VARUNA. Many hymns and offerings are given to the pair Mitra-Varuna in the Vedic rituals. Some believe that Mitra was a form of Sun god who lost his ancient character. The Iranian *Avesta* has a prominent god named Mithra, who is clearly related historically to the Mitra of the VEDAS.

Further reading: Gonda, Jan. *The Vedic God Mitra* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

Mohenjodaro (Mohenjo Daro) See [INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION](#).

Mohini

The enchantress Mohini was a form that VISHNU took during the churning of the MILK OCEAN. The demons and gods had cooperated in churning the ocean to produce the nectar of immortality (AMRITA). Knowing that the demons would want to seize the nectar for themselves, Vishnu assumed the form of MOHINI, mesmerizing the demons with her beauty while she served the nectar to the gods alone. As only the gods were now immortal, when the demons attacked they were routed, and the world was once again in the hands of the gods.

Further reading: Guruseva Dasi, *Churning the Milk Ocean: A Young Reader’s Edition of the Classic Story from the Puranas of Ancient India* (LaCrosse, Fla: Bhavani Books, 2002); Cornelia Dimitt, and J. A. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).

moksha

In a literal sense, *moksha* is the desire to be released from birth and rebirth, but the term has come to mean the release itself. It is used interchangeably with *mukti*. *Moksha* is the highest spiritual goal in the Hindu tradition (the term is used in JAINISM and SIKHISM as well). Traditional Hinduism recognizes four primary ENDS OF LIFE and *moksha* is the last in the list.

While every Hindu tradition sees *moksha* as the ideal, there are different understandings of its nature. Some traditions believe that one can be liberated while still alive—*JIVANMUKTA*. Some see liberation as a merging into a characterless *BRAHMAN*, while others see liberation as simply becoming one with God, or being liberated near God.

Further reading: M. C. Bharatiya, trans. and ed., *Moksa the Ultimate Goal of Indian Philosophy* (Ghaziabad: Indo-Vision, 1984); Balbir Singh, *Atman and Moksha: Self and Self-Realization* (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1981).

Mother, The (Mirra Richard) (1878–1973) *revered utopian yoga teacher*

French-born Mirra Alfassa was a revered teacher of YOGA in a modern context and of utopian social thought. The title *Mother* was given to her by her associate, the great Indian sage Sri AUROBINDO. It indicated that she was considered a form of the GODDESS.

Mirra Alfassa was born to an Egyptian mother and Turkish father in Paris on February 21, 1878. Though she lived in a strictly atheistic household, young Mirra began to have spiritual and occult experiences as a young girl. She would often fall into a silent trance for minutes at a time. As she grew older she had experiences of distance sight and astral projection. As a young woman she took full advantage of the cultural excitement of Paris at the turn of the 20th century. Her first husband, with whom she had her only child, was an artist associated with the burgeoning modern art scene.



The Mother (1878–1973), spiritual partner of Sri Aurobindo and founder of Auroville Community, Tamil Nadu (Courtesy Sri Aurobindo Archives, Pondicherry)

At the age of 28 Mirra went to Algeria to study occultism under a little-known teacher, Max Theon, and his wife, Alma, but decided in the end that Theon was not a pure master. She felt that he was ego driven and self-centered. On a 1914 trip to India with her second husband, the diplomat Paul Richard, she met Sri Aurobindo, who had recently taken refuge in Pondicherry. She describes this visit dramatically in her diaries. She had dreamed of just such a person, with flowing robes and beard, when she was much younger and she felt that she had met a person of pure and powerful spirit. She relates how she was enveloped in his presence in the most profound silence of the

mind. She did not, however, join Sri Aurobindo at that time, but went with her husband to Japan.

After leaving Japan and spending some time in Europe, Mirra Richard abandoned married life and joined Sri Aurobindo as his spiritual partner in 1916. At first there were questions about her status at his ASHRAM from people close to Sri Aurobindo, but he quelled them by declaring that his consciousness and the Mother's consciousness were one; it was he who gave her the important spiritual title, *Mother*. In his book *On the Mother* he explained her spiritual role in the new world.

The yoga that she and Sri Aurobindo practiced was worldly. Rather than the isolated transcendence of the renunciant in a cave, it was a transformative yoga aimed at changing all of reality in its wake. They wanted to bring to earth the divine superconsciousness, termed the *supramental*, by Aurobindo, which would, they thought, alter the nature of reality itself. The Integral Yoga, or complete yoga, of Sri Aurobindo and Mother was designed to orient its devotees yogically toward a life in the world that would progressively become divine.

In 1926 Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion in the ashram and left Mother in charge of day-to-day affairs. He declared that he had reached the Overmind in his yogic work and needed seclusion to work with the powerful forces in order to expand this into a supramental manifestation. Mother from then on managed all ashram affairs, designed the movement's educational programs, and provided inspiration to the burgeoning group of followers who began to attend more regularly.

Sri Aurobindo died in 1950 without completing his spiritual project. He declared that it was the Mother herself who would succeed in bringing about the supramental manifestation that would begin the transformation of all life, all matter, and all the cosmos toward perfect consciousness and bliss. In 1956 Mother announced that she had succeeded in bringing down the supramental and

proceeded from that day to prepare the world for the power of a new consciousness that she felt would now inevitably manifest.

Mother had already, in the early 1950s, envisioned a utopian ground where all nations could join to manifest the unity on Earth that she felt would accompany the new consciousness. This early vision of an international center for education gradually changed into the idea of a city to be built in South India under her auspices. In 1968 she broke ground for this city—AUROVILLE—which was to be a guide for the new earthly transformation. People from around the world flocked to the city to begin the new spiritual experiment.

Mother died in 1973 at the age of 95 and was buried in a tomb beside her beloved spiritual partner, Sri Aurobindo. She left a legacy of practice and commitment that few women spiritual teachers in the 20th century could match. Her writings were not vast as her mentor's were, but her words and wisdom were dutifully recorded by her student Satprem, who transformed them into a many-volume series, *The Mother's Agenda*.

Further reading: Kireet Joshi, *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: Glimpses of Their Experiments, Experiences, and Realisations* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1989); Satprem, *Mother's Agenda*, 12 vols. (Paris: Institut de recherches évolutives, 1991); George Van Vrekhem, *The Mother: The Story of Her Life* (New Delhi: Harper-Collins Publishers India, 2000).

***Mother India* (1927)**

Mother India was a controversial book, written in 1927 by Katherine Mayo, an American medical missionary and journalist, that condemned Hinduism as a cause of India's suffering.

The book was inspired by Mayo's encounters with Indian women and customs during her travels to the country in 1925 and 1926. It raised consciousness of important gender and caste issues that needed to be addressed; however, it

also served as an indictment against Indian society and Hinduism in general.

Mayo claimed that Hindu customs were dangerous not only to India but to the entire world. She believed the customs weakened the human “stock” with poverty, disease, and physical and mental frailties. Historians have interpreted the book as a racist tract that emerged from the age of British and American imperialism. The book negatively influenced popular Western perceptions of India for decades and hindered support and sympathy for Indian independence around the world.

The main thesis of *Mother India* was an assertion that Hindu practices made Indians weak, incapable of self-rule, and unable to become economically self-sufficient. A primary indictment concerned the roles of women. Mayo charged that the Hindu religion enslaved women, forced them to be sexually subservient to men, and demanded that they follow social patterns that produced impoverishment and ignorance. Mayo cites factors such as child marriage, lack of education, the burdens of having many children, child widowhood, prostitution, and epidemics of venereal disease as significant problems for women in India.

Some American feminists during the 1970s revered Mayo as a pioneer who created awareness of the plight of Indian woman. Indian critics, by contrast, dispute *Mother India*'s representation of all Indian women as weak, passive, and incapable of resistance. Mayo made no mention of the Indian women's movement or of efforts by the Indian National Congress to support women's rights. While depicting Indian women as helpless victims, the book lauds the British imperialists as a civilizing force, saving India from the customs of a decadent religion.

The book prompted outrage and criticism from Indian nationalists. Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI referred to it as a “gutter inspector's report,” and it received further condemnation from Indian women's organizations. In Britain,

however, *Mother India* received enthusiastic reviews. Indignant Hindus in America rebutted the publication with many books and pamphlets; they tried to turn the tables by condemning American society as rampant with crime, political scandal, and marital infidelity.

The book did succeed in raising awareness of some issues and fostering British reforms in India, such as the Child Marriage Act of 1929. Ironically, *Mother India* also contributed to an alliance between Indian nationalists and women's movements, which organized to refute and neutralize Mayo's indictments. The alliance helped to pass the Sarada Act, a law enforcing a minimal age for marriage.

Mother India continues to influence Western perceptions of Hinduism and India. Its wholesale rejection of Hindu beliefs and practices and its depiction of a sexually deviant culture have influenced popular media to represent India as exotic, forbidden, and dangerous. Yet, *Mother India* remains inspirational to others who use its thesis to promote heightened awareness for reform in India.

Further reading: Elizabeth Bumiller, *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey among the Women of India* (New York: Random House, 1991); W. Estep, *An American Answers Mother India* (Excelsior Springs, Mo.: Super Mind Science, 1929); Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1927); ———, *The Isles of Fear; The Truth about the Philippines* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).

Mount Abu See [ABU](#), [MOUNT](#).

Mount Kailasa See [KAILASA](#), [MOUNT](#).

Mount Meru See [MERU](#), [MOUNT](#).

mudra See [PANCHA MAKARA](#).

mudra

Mudra is a technical term used in both [YOGA](#) and Indian dance. In yoga the *mudras* are particular hand gestures or bodily attitudes that have spiritual or yogic meaning or purpose. In Indian dance the *mudras* are hand gestures accompanied by particular bodily stances. For example, in [BHARATA NATYAM](#), the Indian national dance, *mudras* are used to communicate the moods of characters and their dramatic interactions.

Further reading: *Mudras in Symbols: Bharatnatya Manual Primer* (Madras: Centre for Promotion of the Traditional Arts, 1988); Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* (Bihar: Bihar School of Yoga, 1999).

Muktananda, Swami (1908–1982)

Shaivite guru

Swami Muktananda was an influential teacher who formulated the Siddha Yoga philosophy and helped spread it around the world.

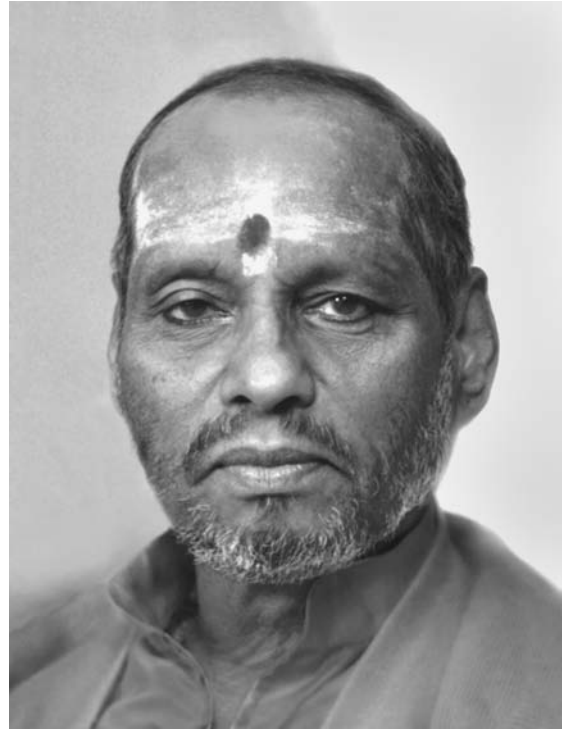
Muktananda (his birth name was Krishna) was born on May 16, 1908, into a prosperous farming family. His father was the headman of a village near Mangalore in Karnataka state. His mother, deeply pious, had prayed for the birth of a son, and from his earliest years she provided him with a strong religious foundation. While still in his teens he had several encounters with the wandering spiritual adept, Bhagawan [NITYANANDA](#), who would later become his [GURU](#). At the age of 15 Krishna decided to dedicate his life to attaining a direct experience of God and adopted one of the traditional Indian paths to that experience, that of a wandering [SADHU](#), mendicant.

In the early 1920s, shortly after his travels began, Krishna went to Hubli in northern Karnataka, to the [ASHRAM](#) of Siddharudha Swami, a renowned [VIRASHAIVA](#) yogi. In Siddharudha's

ashram, he studied [VEDANTA](#), took vows of *sannyas* (renunciation), and received the name Muktananda (the bliss of freedom). In 1930, a year after Siddharudha's passing, Swami Muktananda began an extended period of wandering.

Muktananda once said that he walked across India three times. He traveled mostly on foot, carrying only a water bowl and staff as he moved from one teacher to the next. During this time he studied all of the major texts of the Hindu scriptural canon; he became adept at [HATHA YOGA](#) and [AYURVEDIC](#) medicine, and he met scores of holy beings. He became a renowned teacher in his own right, and still he kept searching.

In his spiritual autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*, Muktananda calls August 15, 1947,



Swami Muktananda (1908–1982), Shaivite teacher, scholar, and founder of Siddha Yoga Dham (© SYDA Foundation)

“the most auspicious of all auspicious days”, it was the day that Bhagawan Nityananda, by then living in Ganeshpuri, gave him *shaktipata* *DIKSHA*, spiritual initiation. This was followed by nine years of intense meditation under Nityananda’s direction, until the guru declared that Muktananda was “one with *BRAHMAN*.” In 1956 Bhagawan Nityananda installed Muktananda in a tiny ashram just down the road from his own. That spot, where Swami Muktananda’s tomb and shrine now stand, remains the heart of what has become an international center for spiritual learning and the Siddha Yoga “mother” ashram, Gurudev Siddha Peeth.

Shortly before Nityananda’s death in 1961, he made Swami Muktananda his spiritual successor. After his guru’s passing, Muktananda began formalizing Nityananda’s teachings, which he called the Siddha Yoga path. Siddha Yoga is the way of an enlightened, or *SIDDHA*, master; the practice is to follow the master’s guidance and teachings with the aid of the master’s enlivening grace. For all siddha yogis, the path begins as it did for Muktananda, with *shaktipata diksha*, spiritual initiation. The goal is permanent dwelling in a realization of the divinity that exists within and as everything. Muktananda’s emblematic teaching, one that he repeated again and again throughout the two decades of his teaching mission, is “Meditate on your own Self. Worship your Self. Respect your Self. God lives within you as you.” By the capitalized *s of Self*, he emphasized that he was referring not to one’s individual ego but to an expanded identification of the Self with supreme consciousness.

Baba Muktananda, as he became known, traveled throughout India and completed three world tours, initiating and guiding students of Siddha Yoga meditation. He created the Siddha Yoga Shaktipat Intensive as the ideal environment for spiritual awakening. He founded ashrams around the world, established the SYDA Foundation to manage the Siddha Yoga mission, and created the canon of Siddha Yoga philosophy through his

own writings and his synthesis of the teachings of VEDANTA, KASHMIRI SHAIIVISM, and the writings of the BHAKTI poet-saints.

In 1982, Muktananda named his disciple Swami CHIDVILASANANDA to carry the Siddha Yoga lineage forward. The ceremony that announced and enacted this transmission was held publicly in Gurudev Siddha Peeth in May 1982. On October 2, 1982, on the full Moon night of Sharad-purnima, Baba Muktananda left his body (took *mahasamadhi*).

“Baba Muktananda’s *shakti* [energy] is *sat* [being],” Guru Chidvilasananda has said. “It was experienced strongly in the past; it is powerfully with us now; and it will continue to be so in the future. His shakti awakens an ever-new life in all those it touches.” Through his teachings, his ashrams, and the exemplary story of his own spiritual life related in *Play of Consciousness*, people continue to receive transmission of energy and spiritual awakening, which are the basis of his spiritual mission.

One of the first American disciples to receive *shaktipat* from Muktananda was Albert Rudolph (1928–73), who became Swami RUDRANANDA, a teacher of Shaivism in the United States. Later, Franklin Jones became a disciple of Muktananda and returned to the United States to become a spiritual teacher called Bubba Free John (now *ADI DA SAMRAJ*).

Further reading: Douglas Renfrew Brooks et al., *Meditation Revolution: A History and Theology of the Siddha Yoga Lineage* (South Fallsburg, N.Y.: Agama Press, 1997); Swami Muktananda, *from the Finite to the Infinite*, 2d ed. (South Fallsburg, N.Y.: SYDA Foundation, 1994); ———, *Play of Consciousness: A Spiritual Autobiography* (South Fallsburg, N.Y.: SYDA Foundation, 2000); [Pratibha Trivedi] Amma, *Swami Muktananda Paramahansa* (Ganeshpuri: Shree Gurudev Ashram, 1971).

mukti See [MOKSHA](#).

muladhara chakra

In the *muladhara* (basic foundation) CHAKRA at the base of the spine rests the coiled KUNDALINI serpent, who awaits her awakening through YOGA to begin the journey upward to meet her transcendent counterpart SHIVA at the SAHASRARA juncture above the head. This chakra is associated with the most basic urge for survival and gross physicality. It is the site of the lower emotions, such as anger and greed. Its element is earth, the densest of the elements (see PANCHABHUTAS). Its deity is BRAHMA and its ruler GANESHA. Its SHAKTI or energy power is dakini. It has 10 blue petals.

Further reading: Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 2000).

muni

A *muni* is a saint, sage, ascetic, or hermit. This is a traditional term found in the epics and the Puranas, superseding the earlier VEDIC term RISHI. It is still used in modern Hinduism, although somewhat less than the terms *sadhu* and *swami*. The Jain tradition (see JAINISM) uses the term *muni* for a respected monk.

Further reading: Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Sannyasa Upanishads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Murugan See KARTTIKEYA.

myths of creation

The Hindu myths of creation are many and varied. The VEDAS, the most ancient scriptures, include several striking creation hymns. One hymn sees creation as emerging from a divine person, the PURUSHA, who is sacrificed in order for time to begin; creation results directly from his body and being. Another account, in the RIG VEDA, suggests that no one knows what existed before this world; only the one in the highest heaven knows, and perhaps not even he! Still another hymn speaks of a Golden Embryo that precedes all creation, out of which everything emerges.

The UPANISHADS, part of the Vedas, contain numerous cosmogonic (creation) stories. Several of them relate that the world was emitted from the supreme Self or ATMAN, which pervaded all reality. Others speak of reality's emerging from the one BRAHMAN, or ultimate all. Still others speak of the creation's beginning with PRAJAPATI, a male creator god or principle.

In the Puranas, written from about 400 C.E. to 1000 C.E., the god BRAHMA is usually said to be responsible for creation. He is depicted emerging from a lotus in the navel of VISHNU, who is sleeping on the primordial MILK OCEAN between eras. However, worshippers of either Vishnu or SHIVA often credited their chosen god with creating the entire universe.

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N



Nachiketas

In the BRAHMANAS, the explanatory portions of the ancient VEDAS, *nachiketas* was a special kind of fire. The word later became personalized as a character in the KATHA UPANISHAD. There, Nachiketas was a boy banished by his father's curse to the underworld. He arrived at the house of YAMA, the god of death, but was not greeted as a proper guest. When Yama returned, he offered Nachiketas three boons because he had neglected him.

Nachiketas asked to return to his father, to be restored to life, and to learn the secret of death—or rather deathlessness. Yama tried to dissuade Nachiketas from the third request, but the wise young man persisted. Yama then gave him a teaching on the nature of the BRAHMAN, the ultimate reality, and the nature of the Self, or universal soul.

Further reading: Eknath Easwaran, *Dialogue with Death: A Journey into Consciousness*, 2d ed. (Tomales, Calif.: Nilgiri Press, 1992); Mysore Sivaram, *Death and Nachiketas* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981).

nadi

In certain YOGA systems, a *nadi* is a subtle bodily channel used to redirect PRANA (the life force

found within the breath). The goals are to alter consciousness, strengthen the body, and help bring about the transformation needed for liberation from the cycle of births.

In HATHA YOGA, *prana* is forced through these channels to aid in raising the KUNDALINI at the base of the spine. The most commonly known *nadi* is the *sushumna nadi*, which travels up the spinal cord. The *ida* and *pingala nadis* are depicted as widely rippling waves that intersect at each CHAKRA (psychic center), exactly mirroring each other as they ascend around *sushumna*.

Further reading: Swami Sivananda Radha, *Hatha Yoga, the Hidden Language: Symbols, Secrets and Metaphor* (Boston: Shambala, 1989); Pancham Sinh, trans., *The Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975).

Nagapanchami

The Nagapanchami snake-worshipping festival takes place on the fifth day of the lunar month of Shravana (July–August). The worship focuses on the cobra, to thank the snake for its auspicious presence and to palliate the serpent world so that it will not bite. The mythical and mysterious power

of the serpent is recognized the world over; this festival is an ancient Indian tribute to its semidivine power, as a being that moves between this world and the powerful underworld.

On Nagapanchami, images of mythological serpents such as Vasuki are worshipped and given milk, considered a favored food of snakes (of course, Indian villagers often offer milk to live cobras on a daily basis). Figures of snakes may be drawn on walls with cow dung or on boards with red powder to be worshipped. Also, people go to abandoned termite hills and other places where snakes live to make offerings. Snake charmers may be invited to perform on this day, and in certain areas there are huge processions of men (and some women) who handle cobras in fulfillment of vows.

Further reading: Balaji Kundkur, *The Cult of the Serpent: An Interdisciplinary Survey of Its Manifestations and Origins* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Binod Chandra Sinha, *Serpent Worship in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Books Today, 1979).

nagas

The term *naga* appears in different contexts in Indian tradition. Its basic meaning is “serpent” or “snake,” usually the cobra. NAGAPANCHAMI, for instance, is a snake festival celebrated on *panchami*, the fifth day of the lunar month of Shravana. The *nagakal* in South India are “snake stones,” stone images of cobras placed under PIPAL (*ashvattha*) or neem trees. They are commonly worshipped by women who desire to have offspring.

The snake or *naga* plays a very important role in Indian folk religion. Villagers make shrines of abandoned termite hills, where snakes take up residence, give them offerings, and feed them milk. In southwestern India people have a *naga* shrine or grove in the corner of a garden. Most often the snakes are seen as protective, but they also connote immortality and fertility.

A divine, semidivine, or demonic *naga* is associated with all the foremost personages and divinities in the Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions. The BUDDHA was said to have been guarded once by a semidivine serpent. The Jain TIRTHANKARA (saint) PARSHVANATH is depicted in his iconography protected by a huge multiheaded cobra being, or *naga*. SHIVA, too, has a *naga* or serpent around his neck as a necklace. VISHNU reclines on the divine serpent Ananta or ADISHESHA on the primordial MILK OCEAN. The huge serpent Vasuki was used as a churning rope when the gods and demons churned the Milk Ocean to get the nectar of immortality. KRISHNA, when he was young, vanquished the evil serpent Kaliya.

The term *naga* also denotes a category of semidivine creatures, the top half human and the bottom half snake, who guard precious gems and ores underground, similar to dragons in some Western mythology, but without their ferocity. Occasionally, these *nagas* can take fully human form; famous personages such as Nagarjuna are said to be their descendants.

Myths usually place the half-human *nagas* under the Earth, but they may also live under water or in mountain caves. They are beautiful and opulently attired. Their human heads are overarched by cobra hoods emerging out from the back of the neck. They have great wisdom and superhuman powers and indulge in pleasures that are the envy of the human world. These demigods play an important role in Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions and are frequently encountered in the mythology of all three religions.

Further reading: James Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1971); O. C. Handa, *Naga Cults and Traditions in the Western Himalaya* (New Delhi: Indus, 2004); E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986); Jean Philippe Vogel, *Indian Serpent Lore or the Nagas in Hindu Legend and Art* (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1972).

Naga sect

The Naga is a sect of SADHUS or holy men devoted to SHIVA. Many of its followers go about naked, as the word *naga* implies. In doing this they follow the example of Lord Shiva, who was himself a naked mendicant. They often live in mountain caves completely naked, with the mountain snows outside. Following the example of Shiva, Naga sadhus smear their entire bodies with ashes from cremation grounds and wear dreadlocks. As does Shiva, they smoke great quantities of hashish, particularly when singing praises to that god.

The Nagas are also known as ascetic warriors. Though most Indian holy men are known as peaceful seekers of truth and higher consciousness, Nagas have been known to be extremely militant. In the past they have taken up arms against other sects of ascetics, Muslims, and the British.

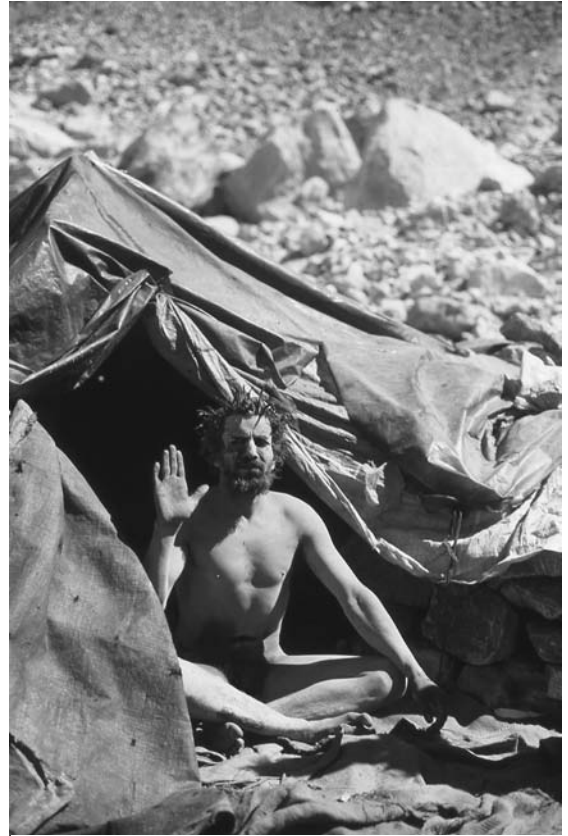
Today Naga sadhus still carry weapons as they wander the countryside—sticks, spears, swords, and most especially the trident (which is a symbol of Shiva). At the KUMBHA MELA (festival) at ALLAHABAD, these sadhus are usually the first to have the honor of entering the confluence of the waters of the YAMUNA and GANGES.

Further reading: Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 2d rev. ed. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962); Dolf Harsuiker, *Sadhus: Holy Men of India* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993); John Campbell Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics, and Saints of India: A Study of Sadhuism with an Account of the Yogis, Sanyasis, Bairagis, and Other Strange Hindu Sectarians* (New Delhi: Cosmos, 1984).

Nakula See PANDAVAS.

namarupa

Namarupa (from *nama*, name, and *rupa*, form) is a term used in Hindu philosophy to refer to



Naked hermit of Naga sect at source of Ganges River, Gomulkh, near Gangotri, in the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains (*Constance A. Jones*)

the phenomenal world, the world of finiteness and limited nature, as opposed to the transcendent reality of the BRAHMAN or god. In Hindu thought, reality begins as an unmanifest infinity devoid of any manifestation or “thing.” As things emerge that acquire a “name” and take a shape or “form,” the manifest world or *namarupa* appears. Most Hindu traditions see liberation from birth and rebirth as a release or escape from the clutches of name and form, or *namarupa*. The term *namarupa* also appears in Buddhism with a

quite different meaning, referring to the mind-body complex.

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namaste

Namaste is the common greeting and farewell in every part of India except Tamil Nadu. It is derived from the word *namas* (from the root *nam*, to bow) and *te* (to you). Thus it is understood as “obeisance,” “homage,” or “salutation.” It is said to mean “I honor the god that is within you.” If one wishes to be slightly more formal, one says “*Namaskar*,” with essentially the same meaning. The statement “*Namaste*” is accompanied, usually, by a gesture placing the palms of the hands together in front of one. (Even in Indian areas where the word *namaste* is not used, this gesture is found.)

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Nammalvar (c. 880–930 C.E.) *Tamil Vaishnavite poet-saint*

Nammalvar, “Our Own Alvar,” was the 11th and greatest of the 12 ALVARS, the poet-saints, of Tamil VAISHNAVISM. He composed four works, of which the 1,100-verse Tiruvaymoli is most influential. Also celebrated are Tiruviruttam and Periyatiruvantati.

According to legend Nammalvar was born in a Vellala family (technically SHUDRA or servant class) to his father, Kariyar, and mother, Utaiyanankaiyar, in Kurugur (Tirunagari) in the

Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. The pair had prayed for a child at a temple at Tirukkurungudi and were told there that the child would be a part of VISHNU himself. Vishnu sent his minister Vishvakshena (theologically a part of Vishnu) to be incarnated as the child.

Maran (the later Nammalvar) was born only 43 days after KRISHNA himself passed from the world. As a baby, he is said never to have cried or drunk milk, but to have been possessed of a beatific, divine smile. After 11 days the parents took this divine child and placed him in the creche of a tamarind tree. The child, in a deep trance, opened neither mouth nor eyes for 16 years.

As Nammalvar was in this trance, the 10th of the Alvares, Mathurakavi, was traveling in the north of India. One night he saw a vision of blazing light in the south, which told him that a saint had been born there. He managed to find the young person seated in MEDITATION, looking impervious to the outside world. To see whether he could distract Nammalvar he dropped a stone on the ground and Nammalvar opened his eyes. Mathurakavi tested him with a difficult riddle; when he answered insightfully the older saint bowed down and accepted Nammalvar as his master. At this moment the transcendent vision overwhelmed Nammalvar and he began to pour forth his devotional songs in a continuous stream.

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Nanak, Guru (1469–1539) *founder of the Sikh religion*

Guru Nanak was a charismatic religious and social reformer. He tried to bridge the gap between

Hindus and Muslims but instead founded a new religion, SIKHISM. Guru Nanak was born on April 15, 1469, in Talwandi-Rai-Bhoe in the district of Shekhupur, now in Pakistan. His father, Mehta Kalu, was a land surveyor and small farmer of the Khatri caste of the Bedi tribe.

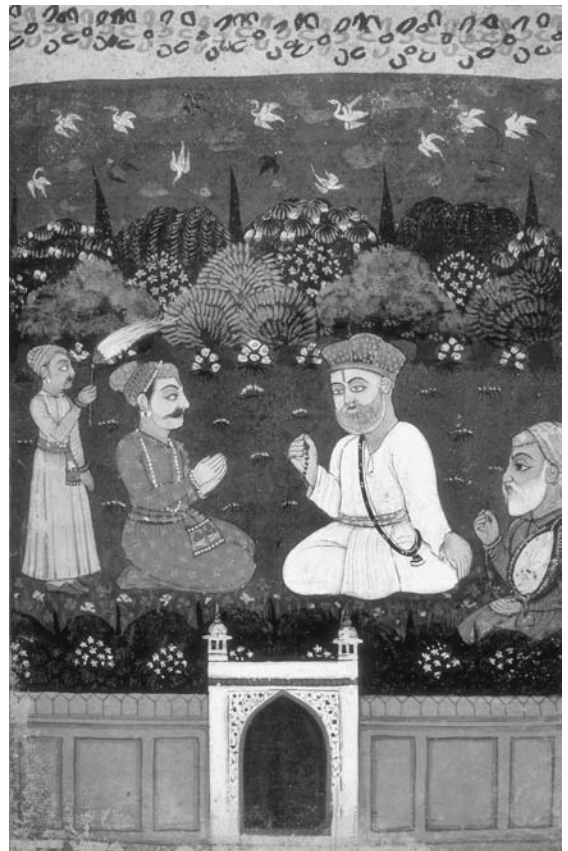
In his early life Nanak showed great devotion to God and was often enveloped in spiritual meditation while watching over cattle. From age five he began to utter mysterious sayings; at seven, when taken to a teacher to learn to read, he would lapse into silence. Myths of miracles have been associated with his childhood. In response to such signs of withdrawal the local community suggested to his parents that he be married. His wife, Sulakhani, a Khatri of the Chona subcaste, eventually gave birth to two sons, Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand.

Nanak studied reading and writing in the local dialect, traditional scripture in SANSKRIT, and poetry in Persian. Throughout his life he had many mystical experiences; one story recounts how he went to the river to bathe and was visited by “messengers of God” who took him to a divine court and fed him nectar. For three days he remained missing, and upon his return he declared that there are no Hindus or Muslims, that all people are equal. His inner experiences gave him equanimity. He taught love, equality, justice, selfless service, and the worship of God. His teaching renounced religious hypocrisy.

Guru Nanak was considered to be a leader in the BHAKTI (path of devotion) movement but was also active in calling for reform of Indian social and religious customs that he saw as unjust. He was outspoken against caste oppression, discrimination, and injustice and committed to awakening the consciousness of people.

Guru Nanak criticized what he considered the empty rituals and sacrifices of Hinduism in his time. Working in the villages near his own he founded and developed the SIKH tradition, which integrated Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic ideals of the virtuous life and enlightenment. According

to Nanak, the process of realization involves the grace of both God and GURU, the spiritual master. The Sikh tradition maintains that the goal of all human beings is to achieve self-perfection in their lifetime and to help others do the same. Sikh philosophy states that self-transformation occurs through guru, guru's grace, guru's will, devotion, discernment, and detachment. He composed the Adi Granth, the sacred text later revered by Sikhs as the last guru. Today the Adi Granth is the only guru honored among traditional Sikhs. Guru Nanak died on September 7, 1539.



Guru Nanak (1469–1539), founder of the Sikh religion (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)



Nandi, the divine bull and vehicle of Lord Shiva (www.shutterstock.com/Arteki)

Further reading: Anil Chandra Banerjee, *Guru Nanak and His Times* (Patalia: Punjabi University, 1971); Prithipal Singh Kapur, ed., *The Divine Master: Life and Teachings of Guru Nanak* (Jalandhar, India: ABS, 1988); W. H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Guru Nanak: His Personality and Vision* (Delhi: Gur Das Kapur & Sons, 1969).

Nandi

Nandi is the divine white bull who is the vehicle of SHIVA. He is the son of Kashyapa, a well-known RISHI (sage), and Surabhi (the wish-giving cow). In his form as Nandikeshvara,

represented as a human with a bull's head, he is believed to be one of the great masters of music and dancing. He is a prominent iconic figure in many Shiva temples. Particularly notable is the massive 10-ton Nandi lying on his belly that greets all those who arrive at the BRIHADISHVARA TEMPLE in Tanjore.

Further reading: John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 12th ed. (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1974); Margaret Stutley, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Narada

The *RISHI* (sage) Narada appears in numerous contexts in Indian mythology. Though he is often taken to be the son of BRAHMA, there are varying accounts of his birth and exploits. In some contexts he is seen very positively: he is considered the inventor of the *vina* or Indian lute, and the one who revealed the DHARMASHASTRAS, or tracts on law. In other contexts he is seen as something of a troublemaker. It is Narada who informed Kamsa, the king who desired to kill KRISHNA, about Krishna's impending birth. Narada is also said to have cursed his own father, Brahma, to be worshipped by very few, to repay him for a curse that Brahma had placed on him.

Further reading: John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 12th ed. (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1974); B. L. Raina, *Legends and Teachings of the Greatest Hindu Divine Sage Narada* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1999); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Narasimha avatar

Narasimha is the man-lion AVATAR of VISHNU. His story has many versions, all relating to the demon HIRANYAKASHIPU. The latter had undergone severe austerities to make himself superior to the gods and nearly invincible. BRAHMA had given him the boons that he could not be killed by man or beast, at night or during the day, outdoors or indoors. The gods beseeched Vishnu to intervene and put an end to the demon's depredations in the worlds.

Vishnu took up the man-lion form (neither man nor beast) and confronted Hiranyakashipu at the threshold of his palace (neither indoors nor outdoors) at twilight (neither day nor night). Thus he was able to kill Hiranyakashipu. The common iconographic depiction of Narasimha shows a sitting creature with a man's body and a lion's head, ripping into the supine demon lying on his knees.

Further reading: John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 12th ed. (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1974); Margaret Stutley, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Narayan, R. K. (1906–2001) *novelist of Hinduism*

R. K. Narayan was one of India's most celebrated modern novelists. Writing in English, he created works that are gentle evocations of small-town Indian life, the life of everyday Hindus.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanaswami, better known by his pseudonym, R. K. Narayan, was born in the Prasawalkam section of Madras (Chennai) on October 10, 1906, and died May 13, 2001, at the age of 94. His father, R. V. Krishnaswami Iyer, moved the family to Mysore, where he became a schoolteacher and later headmaster of Maharajah's Collegiate High School. R. K. was not an outstanding student but managed to receive his bachelor of arts degree at the University of Mysore in 1923. Once he had graduated his natural path was to take a government job, but R. K. had already decided that he wanted to be a writer.

R. K.'s first published works appeared in magazines and in the newspaper *Hindu*. He eventually worked for that paper's Sunday edition. In 1934 he married for love, an unconventional move very much in line with his writing. His wife, Rajam, gave him one daughter, Hema, before she tragically passed away of typhoid in 1939, leaving him with a three-year-old daughter.

Most of R. K. Narayan's novels take place in the imaginary South Indian village of Malgudi, portrayed with brilliance and charm. He gives English readers who do not know his country a glimpse into the foibles and joys of the simple life and everyday piety of Hindu culture in India. He

is also popular in India, where readers revel in seeing the India they know so brilliantly evoked in his deceptively simple prose.

There is always a breezy, easy quality to Narayan's work. It is not fraught with high philosophy or complex themes, but rather blessed with an accessibility that takes great skill to produce. His extraordinary productivity included many short stories and articles as well as his novels. On request, Narayan wrote popular versions of both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

In the late 1980s R. K. Narayan was elected to India's upper house of parliament, the Rajya Sabha. He was also honored with many literary awards, including India's Sahitya Akademi Award (for *The Guide*), the Royal Society of Literature's Christopher Benson Award, and Indian's second highest literary award, the Padma Vibhushan, in 2000. He also made the short list for the Nobel Prize in literature.

He died in 2001 after his own daughter's sad early demise, still working on another novel. Narayan was a great figure in world literature, whose own personal humility and desire to avoid pretense may have made him less widely known than he deserved.

Further reading: A. L. McLeod, ed., *R. K. Narayan: Critical Perspectives* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1994); R. K. Narayan, *An Astrologer's Day, and Other Stories* (Mysore: Indian Thought, 1968); ———, *The Bachelor of Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); ———, *Gods, Demons and Others* (New York: Viking Press, 1964); ———, *The Guide* (London: Bodley Head, 1970); ———, *The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (London: Heinemann, 1978); ———, *Malgudi Days* (London: Heinemann, 1982); ———, *My Days: A Memoir* (Hopewell, N.J.: Ecco Press, 1999); ———, *A Story-Teller's World* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990).

Narayana See [VISHNU](#).

Narayanananda, Swami (1902–1968)

pioneer Hindu teacher in Scandinavia

Swami Narayanananda established VEDANTA centers throughout Europe and North America.

He was born in Coorg, a village in the state of Karnataka, in southern India. A bright boy, from an early age he showed a marked tendency to spiritual matters. He never married and at the age of 27 took the vows of the renounced life (*sannyas*) and began searching for a GURU. His pilgrimage around India eventually took him to the Belur Math of the VEDANTA/RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION, where he met Swami Shivananda, who became his teacher. Several years later, he was instructed by his guru to spend time alone in the Himalayas to strengthen his spiritual practice. In February 1933 he had a deep spiritual experience, which he described as merging into the formless aspect of God, that is, *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

He remained in seclusion until the partition of India in 1947. The violence of the period convinced him to dedicate his life to helping people; he left his retreat and began to accept disciples. In 1955, as a step toward building a more formal following, his devotees established a printing press and began to publish Narayanananda's writings. It would be another 12 years, however, before the swami would consent to incorporating an organization, the Narayanananda Universal Yoga Trust. The first ASHRAM was opened in Denmark in 1967. The first ashram in the United States was opened in Chicago in the early 1970s.

Initially, the leaders of the rapidly expanding movement were all monks who had trained with Narayanananda in India, but in the course of the 1970s a number of Westerners took vows of *sannyas* and took on leadership roles. As in India, the monks live a life of celibacy and follow a spiritual discipline that includes twice-daily MEDITATION sessions with the community and the practice of HATHA YOGA.

Narayanananda died in 1988. His movement continues from its international headquarters in Gylling, Denmark, and the ashram in Chicago.

The various centers offer a range of instruction in hatha yoga and the teachings of Narayananda.

Further reading: Swami Narayananda, *The Ideal Life and Moksha (Freedom)* (Gylling, Denmark: N. U. Yoga Trust & Ashrama, 1979); ———, *The Mysteries of Man, Mind, and Mind-Functions: A Masterly Treatise on Psychology* (Rishikesh: Narayananda Universal Yoga Trust, 1965); ———, *A Personal Guide to Samadhi* (Rishikesh: Narayananda Universal Yoga Trust, 1966); ———, *The Primal Power in Man: Or, the Kundalini Shakti* (Rishikesh: Narayananda Universal Yoga Trust, 1970); ———, *The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga-Asanas* (Gylling, Denmark: N. U. Yoga Trust & Ashrama, 1979).

Nataraja

Nataraja, or Lord of the Dance (*nata*, dance; *raja*, king or lord), is one of the most popular iconic forms of SHIVA (the most common is the LINGAM). In his cosmic dance he creates, sustains, and eventually destroys the universe. When Shiva's dance is seen as symbolizing only the end of time, it is called the Tandava dance.

Nataraja is depicted in a pose from the BHARATA NATYAM dance, with his left leg raised and his right leg resting on a dwarflike being representing ignorance and delusion, sometimes called Apasmara (forgetfulness [of the truth of the divine]). He has four arms. In his upper right hand he holds the "shake-drum" (*damaru*) that can be sounded with one hand, a tethered ball striking either end of a small two-sided drum. His lower right hand is formed into the ABHAYA MUDRA, a gesture that removes fear. His upper left hand holds the flame that symbolizes the end of creation. His lower left hand points toward his upraised left foot. Around his head and in the circular frame to which he is attached is a halo of flames that show his divine energy.

Among Shiva's many celebrated dances: he danced in the sky with VISHNU; once he danced in the cremation ground to please KALI, his

female counterpart; once he danced as a beggar for PARVATI'S hand; once he danced a mad, erotic dance in the deodar forest for the wives of the RISHIS there; and he danced after the destruction of DAKSHA'S sacrifice. The great shrine at CHIDAMBARAMI in South India is perhaps the most famous one depicting Shiva's Nataraja form. There is also an awe-inspiring 20-foot-high Nataraja in black stone in the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai.

Further reading: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva: Essays on Indian Art and Culture*. Foreword by Romain Rolland (New York: Dover, 1985); Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Siva* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Margaret Stutley, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

Nathdwara

Literally, "the doorway to the Lord," Nathdwara is a sacred town near Udaipur in the Indian state of Rajasthan; it is the principal seat of the cult of Sri Sri NATHJI and of the VALLABHA sect. The town itself is sometimes called Sri Nathji.

Sri Sri Nathji is a form of KRISHNA. His image was taken to Nathdwara from Mathura in 1669 to prevent its destruction by the armies of the iconoclastic Mughal Muslim king Aurangzeb. The chief temple of Nathdwara enshrines the image of Krishna taken in 1669, which holds Govardhana Mountain, recalling the myth in which Krishna protected the cowherds of BRINDAVAN from storms caused by INDRA, king of the gods, by holding up this mountain as an umbrella.

Further reading: Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdwara* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1987); H. S. Verdia, *Religion and Social Structure in a Sacred Town, Nathdwara* (Delhi: Researchco, 1982).

Nath Yogis

The Nath Yogis emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries C.E. as a confederation of devotees of Shaivite (see **SHAIVISM**) and **SIDDHA** practices. The sect honors a legendary group of nine exemplars, called the nine *Naths*, or “lords,” who give the sect its name. The nine exemplars are listed with a wide variety of names, but they usually include Matsyendranath and **GORAKHNATH** (with somewhat varying forms). These quasi-historical Naths are considered the original sources for the various Nath lineages. The forerunners of the Nath Yogis were probably the various radical Shaivite groups that arose in the early centuries of the Common Era.

The Nath Yogis were outsiders and very unconventional. They often adopted outrageous practices such as eating offal and public cursing, in order to emphasize their lack of fealty to any convention. They were extreme ascetics, practicing under the umbrella of **TANTRISM**, which sought above all to emphasize the dark and negative aspects of existence as the source of spiritual power and transformation. However, the Naths abstained from the sexual practices generally associated with tantrism, as they generally avoided women entirely.

Alchemy was an important element of Nath Yogi practice. Usually, this included not only changing base metals into gold via mercury, but also changing the body by the use of oxides of mercury to create an immortal body. This esoteric practice is combined with **HATHA YOGA** and the effort to raise the **KUNDALINI** at the base of the spine to effect complete spiritual transformation.

Further reading: Akshaya Kumar Banerjea, *Philosophy of Gorakhnath with Goraksha Vacana Samgraha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988); George W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982); David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Natya Shastra

Natya Shastra, “the authoritative scripture [*shashtra*] regarding drama [*natya*],” is often considered the “fifth VEDA.” It was composed by the teacher Bharata around the second century C.E. Made up of over 5,000 verses, it delineates the art form of dance-drama of its time. The revived **BHARATA NATYAM** dance-drama form of modern India still follows the guidelines of this text.

The *Natya Shastra* claims that drama was created by the creator god **BRAHMA** himself. The text outlines every aspect of the drama, including the dress of the actors, the music, the stage, and the construction of the theater building. Indian drama has always relied greatly on dance; thus the steps, rhythms, and hand gestures or **MUDRAS** are carefully detailed. The text also suggests the most common themes that the drama can present, such as the battle between the gods and demons and the adventures of the individual gods. From a philosophical standpoint the two most important chapters are those that outline the principles of aesthetics in dramatic presentations. They present the distinctive theory of **RASAS**, the emotional “essences” that are communicated via the drama.

Further reading: *The Natya Sastra of Bharatamuni* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 2003); Vasanta Vedam, *A Handbook of Natya Sastra* (Chennai: Vasanta Vedam, 2003).

Navaratri

The Navaratri (Navaratra) or Nine Nights festival is celebrated for nine days in the lunar month of Ashvin (September–October). It is a pan-Indian festival that takes different forms in different regions.

In most Hindi-speaking areas of North India Navaratri is celebrated as Rama Lila (the mysterious divine magic of Lord Rama), a commemoration of the **RAMAYANA** epic. Each day features readings from the medieval Hindi **TULSIDAS** *Ramayana*; in most places plays are presented depicting

scenes from the Ramayana story, sometimes on a grand scale.

The largest of the Rama Lila plays is staged across the river from the holy city BENARES (Varanasi), where the kings have established an immense field as a stage for the Ramayana story. Actors go from station to station on different days as the story develops. On Vijayadashami, the day after Navaratri, effigies of Rama's enemies—the demon king RAVANA, his son Meghavana, and his brother KUMBHAKARNA—are burned to celebrate the victory of Rama over the demons or Rakshasas.

In Bihar, Bengal, and Assam Navaratri is celebrated as a DURGA festival. The festival begins by awakening Durga, who is asleep, and continues by manufacturing a temporary image of her that is enlivened for the purpose of the festival. PUJAS or worship services are performed for Durga on the last three days of the festival. On Vijayadashmi the image of Durga is taken in a great procession to be immersed and left in a tank, a river, or the ocean.

In South India SARASVATI, goddess of learning and the arts, is worshipped on the seventh day of the festival and Durga on the eighth day. On the ninth day there is a worship of instruments and implements of livelihood, which are taken out to be honored with mantras and small offerings.

Further reading: Diana L. Eck, *Banaras, City of Light* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); H. V. Shekar, *Festivals of India: Significance of the Celebrations* (Louisville, Ky.: Insight Books, 2000).

Nayanmars

A Nayanmar or Nayanar is a “leader” or “master.” In the Tamil devotional tradition the Nayanmars were poet-saints who spread the message of devotion to SHIVA throughout Tamil Nadu. Tradition makes them 63 in number, but some of the names are probably legendary figures. The real Nayanars lived from roughly the sixth to

the eighth century C.E. They sang the praise and love of Shiva at numerous holy places, shrines, and temples throughout the region, opposing the Jains, Buddhists, and VAISHNAVITES in their efforts to advance everyone to the grace of their Lord Shiva. They apparently participated in India's first known popular devotional movement, as all their verses are sung in Tamil, the spoken language of the local people, and not in SANSKRIT.

The last of the Nayanars, SUNDARAR, was granted a revelation by Lord Shiva himself at Tiruvarur, of the lives of the 62 saints who preceded him. His work is the first to give the entire list, to which his own name was later added. Nambi Andar Nambi (c. 1000 C.E.) is said to have compiled the songs of all of the Nayanars, adding to them the works of several other famous poet-saints, including MANIKKAVACAKAR, to form the basis of the TIRUMURAI, the basic Tamil Shaivite sacred canon. It consists of 12 books, 11 of them assembled by Nambi.

Included in Tirumurai is Nambi Andar Nambi's own account of the “holy labors” of the 63 saints, as well as his own story and verses. The 12th and final book is SEKKILAR'S PERIYA PURANAM (c. 1200 C.E.); its more than 4,000 verses summarize and add to the earlier Nayanar compendiums and include the works of some other Shaivite saints.

The three best-known and most prolific of the Nayanars are APPAR, SAMBANTHAR, and Sundarar. Their hymns make up the TEVARAM, which serves as the primary liturgical scripture for Tamil Shaivites. These songs are strongly oriented toward particular sacred places, shrines, and temples that were visited by the three peripatetic saints as they pursued their PILGRIMAGE in order to sing Shiva. In Shaivite temples in Tamil Nadu today the Tevaram songs are sung in ritual worship, along with Sanskrit MANTRAS.

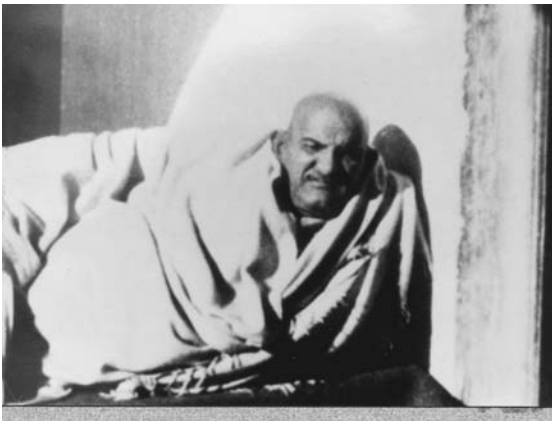
Most Nayanars were men, but a few were women. The most famous of the women saints is the first on the list of 63, Karaikal Ammaiyar. The

saints were from every class and trade, from Brahmin (Sundarar and Sambanthar) to Dalit (untouchables) (Tirunalaipovanar, alias Nantanar).

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Neem Karoli Baba (c. 1900–1973) *bhakti* yoga teacher

Neem Karoli Baba, popularly known as Maharaji, is one of the most influential GURUS from India to encounter the West. Although he never visited America or wrote any books, he graced the lives of many devotees during the 1960s and 1970s. Baba RAM DASS was particularly inspired by Maharaji and Ram Dass's works were among the first to introduce Eastern wisdom on a large scale to the West, particularly through portrayals of experiences with Neem Karoli.



Neem Karoli Baba (c. 1900–1973), teacher known for his dedication to devotion and service; guru of Baba Ram Dass (*Kashi Church, Sebastian, Florida*)

Neem Karoli was born Lakshmi Narayan Sharma to a BRAHMIN family in Akbarpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. In his childhood he was described as detached from desires of the material world. When he was 11 his family arranged a marriage with a girl from another Brahmin family. After the wedding, the groom left home and wandered the country as an ascetic for several years. His father, Sri Durga Prasad Sharma, eventually found him in the village of Neem Karoli (hence his name) and demanded that his son return home. The young man complied and spent the remainder of his life in dual roles as householder and saint.

Neem Karoli always considered the world as his larger family and stated that the key to attaining salvation is to love all, serve all, and feed all. Devotees who were close to him describe the GURU as one who radiated love. He based his teachings on a form of BHAKTI YOGA, emphasizing service and unconditional devotion to God. His techniques have been described as both subtle and literal, and his teachings varied from individual to individual. His advice was determined by the needs of the student, even though he always asserted that one's focus in life should be toward the welfare of others.

Neem Karoli established two ashrams, at Kainchi in Uttachal and at BRINDAVAN in Uttar Pradesh. Over 100 temples have also been founded in his name. American devotees, including Ram Dass, gathered together in 1977 to form a common place of worship in honor of Neem Karoli. The group proposed the construction of a statue representing HANUMAN, a deity most revered by Neem Karoli. The statue was commissioned in India and completed in 1978. It found its permanent home in Taos, New Mexico. Devotees formed the Neem Karoli Baba Ashram around the Hanuman figure and have since held annual celebrations in September, marking the *mahasamadhi* (death) of Neem Karoli Baba on September 11, 1973.

Further reading: Ram Dass, *Miracle of Love: Stories about Neem Karoli Baba* (New York: Dutton, 1979); Sudhir Mukerjee, *By His Grace: A Devotee's Story* (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: Hanuman Foundation, 1990).

Neminatha

Neminatha was the 22nd TIRTHANKARA (Jain saint) of our era, or, more precisely, half-era, as there are always 24 Tirthankaras in each half of a longer era. Unlike the 23rd Tirthankara in our time, PARSHVANATH, and the 24th, MAHAVIRA, both historical figures, Neminatha is not a historical figure.

Neminatha is said to have had his previous incarnation in the celestial abode. He was born to the king Shauripura and his wife, Shiva Devi. His birth was accompanied by many auspicious signs, including the appropriate auspicious markings on his body to indicate his special status. He never undertook the householder life. At the death of own parents he resolved to take up the path of a Jain renunciant, to the acclaim of the gods. He distributed his vast worldly wealth to the indigent.

As Neminatha ascended his royal palanquin for the last time to go to his place of renunciation, all beings hailed him and shouted their praises and encouragement. He arrived at a park named Revika and there removed all his garlands and ornaments and tonsured himself in the fashion of Jain monks by removing all his hair in five handfuls. At that time he took the vow of taking food only once every third day until he entered the order of the wandering monks.

For 54 days Neminatha lived completely ignoring his body in every way. On the 55th day on top of Mount Ajjinta, after reducing his food to once every fourth day, he attained to supreme knowledge and the status of a *kevalin*, having unobstructed wisdom. He attained, afterward, the status of a Tirthankara, a crosser of the ford, and omniscience, knowledge of all that occurred in the world at all times.

At this time he had a community of 18,000 monks, 40,000 nuns, 169,000 laymen, and 369,000

laywomen. With him were 400 monks who had achieved the highest wisdom short of being perfected and many other monks whose knowledge was developing. They say that Neminatha lived for 300 years as a bachelor, 54 days as a monk, and 700 years as an omniscient being. Thereupon, taking food once every month he fasted until he left his body and achieved NIRVANA. More than 84,000 years has elapsed since this event.

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new moon/full moon ceremonies

New moon (*amavasya*) and full moon (*purnima*) observances and rituals have been held in India since VEDIC times at least. Many festivals and holy days occur on these days in contemporary India.

The following are some of the full moon celebrations: (1) Chaitra (or Chitra) Purnima is celebrated to recognize Chitragupta, assistant to the god of death YAMA. It is thought that if he is honored while people are alive he may be more lenient with them after death. (2) The full moon of the month of Ashvina (September–October) is a day for worshipping LAKSHMI for wealth. A vow is taken on that day to stay awake all night. (3) The full moon in the month of Shravana (July–August) is the time when certain BRAHMINS change their sacred threads. In the celebration of RAKSHABANDHAN sisters generally put a thread wristlet on brothers for good luck. (4) On the full moon in the month of Jyeshtha (May–June) occur the bathing of the images of the Jagannatha for the festival at Puri, and the observance of a fast day by married women in recognition of the devotion of SAVITRI, who retrieved her husband from the jaws of death. (5) In Chaitra (March–April) the birthday of HANUMAN, the monkey god, is observed on the full moon.

The following are some of the new moon observances: (1) In the month of Bhādrapada (August–September) the 15 days of the dark half of the Moon are for worshipping ancestors. (2) During the month of Magha (January–February) a day of silence is observed on the new Moon day; it is one of the important days of the Maha KUMBHA Mela (festival) at ALLAHABAD.

Further reading: Swami Harshananda, *Hindu Festivals and Sacred Days* (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 1994); *Hindu Festivals* (Bombay: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1989).

Nimbarka (c. 12th century) *Vedānta* philosopher

Nimbarka was a philosopher of the VEDĀNTA, who founded a sect of VAISHNAVISM centered in Mathura, North India, that focused on RADHA and KRISHNA.

Nimbarka was born in Andhra Pradesh; his name has been traced by some to the village Nimba or Nimbapura in the Bellary District. One myth explains his name more colorfully: once a wandering mendicant visited Nimbarka, who offered him food. Because the Sun had already set, the ascetic refused, saying that he had vowed not to eat after the Sun had set. Thereupon the philosopher took the last rays of the Sun (*arka*) and put them up in a neem tree (nimba tree) until food could be prepared and the ascetic could eat.

Formally, Nimbarka's Vedantic philosophy is called *dvaitavāita*, "both dualist and non-dualist," which makes it quite similar (but not identical) to the philosophy of RAMANUJA and his VISHIṢṬĀDVAITA, "non-dualism via differencing." *Dvaitadvaita*, as does non-dualism, understands that all is the divinity. All souls and all matter are the stuff of the divine. In this sense there is non-duality between the selves, between materiality and the ultimate. At the same time no individual soul (let alone matter) can ever be as supreme or sublime as the divine, so in that sense there is duality (a

difference) between the divinity and the world. Unlike SHANKARA'S VEDĀNTA, Nimbarka saw the world as real and not an illusion.

Less scholarship has been done on Nimbarka's philosophy than on several of the other major Vedānta philosophers. Eight major works in SANSKRIT are attributed to him but only three are available in published form: *Vedānta-parijata-saurabha*, his commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra; a work called *Dasasloki*, which has only 10 verses; and *Krishna-stava-raja*, a devotional work. Several subcommentaries have been written on his work on the Vedānta Sūtra.

Nimbarka's system took Krishna to be god, while the devotee took the role of Krishna's consort, Radha, in adoring him and serving him. Nimbarka is perhaps best known to modern India through the Vaishnavite sect named after him, the Nimbarki sect, which is also referred to as the Sanakadi or Hamsa sect of Vaishnavites, centered in Mathura.

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Nirankari movement (est. 1851)

The Nirankari movement developed within the larger Sikh community as an effort to revive a faltering SIKHISM. The founder, Baba Dyal (1783–1855), denounced new rites and rituals being introduced into Sikhism at the time, which he said were an indication that Sikhism was being absorbed into the more dominant Hinduism. The movement gained its name from his emphasis on Nirankar, or God the formless one.

In 1851, Baba Dyal formally organized his small following as the Nirankari Darbar. He was succeeded four years later by his son, Baba Dar-

bara Singh. Among the emphases of the movement was abstinence from alcohol.

The movement remained small but received a boost in the 1930s from Boota Singh (1883–1944), who sought to revitalize it. He began to preach against all regulations based upon external habits and appearances, including all rules about what one wears, eats, or drinks (including the prohibition of alcohol).

Boota Singh received initiation from the SANT MAT lineage that looks back to Jaimal Singh (1838–1903). He not only passed the lineage to the present leader of the movement but also added the practice of *jnana*, the giving of knowledge by the GURU (or his representative) to each member of the movement. The giving of knowledge is a confidential aspect of the Nirankari faith, and members agree not to divulge its nature. Members also agree not to discriminate against people in respect to caste, sex, color, religion, or worldly status; not to criticize anyone because of his or her diet or dress; and to make no renunciation of the world.

Boota died in 1944, and he passed leadership of his small following within the larger Nirankari movement to Avtar Singh (1899–1969). The latter saw the partition of India and the movement of many Hindus from what is now Pakistan back into Indian territory. Operating from Delhi, he began to gather a following especially among the newly migrating Sikhs. In 1947 he formally organized the Nirankari Sant Mission, which held its first annual meeting (Samagam) the next year. The growth was such that Avtar Singh's following constituted the main body of Nirankaris.

In 1969, Avtar Singh was succeeded by Gurbachan Singh (1930–80), who would oversee significant growth of the movement outside India through the British Commonwealth and the United States. A major stimulant for growth was Gurbachan Singh's world tour the year before he became the head of the movement. Once in his leadership role, he formed a foreign section to stimulate further growth around the world. In

1971, he traveled to North America and organized the work in the United States and Canada. He also authored Avtar Bani, which serves as a holy book for the Nirankaris.

Gurbachan Singh asserted his belief that Nirankaris were Sikhs, in spite of their separate organization. Many Sikhs disputed these claims; against the tense background of Sikh demands for independence from India, intra-Sikh violence occasionally erupted. In 1980, Gurbachan Singh was assassinated. He was succeeded by Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj (b. 1954), who continues as head of the movement, now known as the Nirankari Sant Samagam of the Nirankari Universal Brotherhood Mission. Assisting Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj are seven men chosen by him and known as the Seven Stars.

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Nirmala Devi, Mataji

See SAHAJA YOGA CENTER.

nirvana

Nirvana is the term used to refer to the state of liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth, from worldly existence. The term probably originated within Buddhism. It literally means a “blowing out”—of the fires of worldly existence. In the early Buddhist context this implied the recognition that nothing is permanent and that there is no permanent self, but only a shifting combination of aspects that constitute themselves so as to make us believe in a permanent “self” or soul.

Early Buddhists tried not to describe this state elaborately as it is beyond human conception.

The Jain tradition also adopted the word to refer to the blissful, powerful, superconscious state of liberation from birth and rebirth. In the Brahminical tradition it came to mean union with the ultimate reality. This implies a realization of the infinite being, consciousness, and bliss of the godhead.

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Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981) *advaita teacher*

Maharaj Nisargadatta was a Bombay (Mumbai) merchant and householder, whose *ADVAITA VEDANTA* teachings and *JNANA YOGA* practices drew him a large following. His conversations, recorded by disciples and translated into English, ensured that his ideas would continue to spread after his death.

Born in Bombay in March 1897, Maruti (his birth name) was raised on a small family farm near Kandalgaon in Maharashtra. As a boy he became familiar with spiritual topics by listening to his parents discuss the spiritual life with a BRAHMIN friend, Vishnu Haribha Gore. When his father died in 1915, Maruti and his elder brother became responsible for supporting the family. They left home to seek employment in Bombay. Here, Maruti opened a shop selling *bidis*, hand-made cigarettes. He became prosperous in the trade and established several more shops across Bombay. In 1924, Maruti married Sumatibai, and they later became the parents of a son and three daughters.

At age 34, Maruti began to seek answers to universal questions. His friend took him to Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, a teacher in Bombay in the Navnath Sampradaya, who gave Maruti a MANTRA and instructions on MEDITATION. Maruti quickly developed a practice, giving attention to nothing else than the sense of “I am.” Soon, Maruti began to have visions and to experience trance states. Between 1933 and 1936, he experienced SELF-REALIZATION and reported that he lived in full awareness of the transcendent reality. He named himself Nisargadatta (One Given True Being).

After Sri Siddharameshwar’s death in 1936, Nisargadatta left his family and business to live the renounced life of a SADHU, a wandering monk who owns nothing and begs for food, in the HIMALAYAS. His journey was short-lived, after a fellow disciple convinced him that his spiritual intentions would be more fruitful at home. Returning to Bombay he found his business in shambles. He reestablished one *bidi* shop, which sustained him and his family. Nisargadatta spent the remainder of his life tending his business and devoting himself to a strict discipline of daily observances and veneration of his GURU. He meditated and discussed his master’s teachings with all who visited his *bidi* shop and did not visit saints or temples. As he began to speak to others, larger and larger groups of inquirers and students went to his shop to learn from his eloquence and wisdom.

Nisargadatta’s teachings are based on *jnana* yoga and *advaita* Vedanta, a non-dualistic philosophy. His teachings emphasize the individual’s direct experience with the eternal in the here and now. His typical recommendation to new students was to practice with discipline and follow the same instruction provided to him, which fostered SELF-REALIZATION. Nisargadatta encouraged seekers to draw attention to “I am.” In doing so, he asserted that the practitioner’s mind would soon gain self-realization in thought and feeling. Nisargadatta died in Bombay on September 8, 1981.

Ramesh S. Balsekar became one of Nisargadatta’s closest disciples. Balsekar, a graduate of

London University and retired banker, met Sri Nisargadatta in 1970. He became entrusted with recording the conversations of Nisargadatta, the guru's primary method of teaching. Many of these were later published in the book *I Am That* (1972), which has become a classical treatise on how one person can realize the non-dual reality outside time and space. As more Westerners encountered Maharaj they furthered his teachings by translating his conversations into English, publishing them throughout North America and Europe.

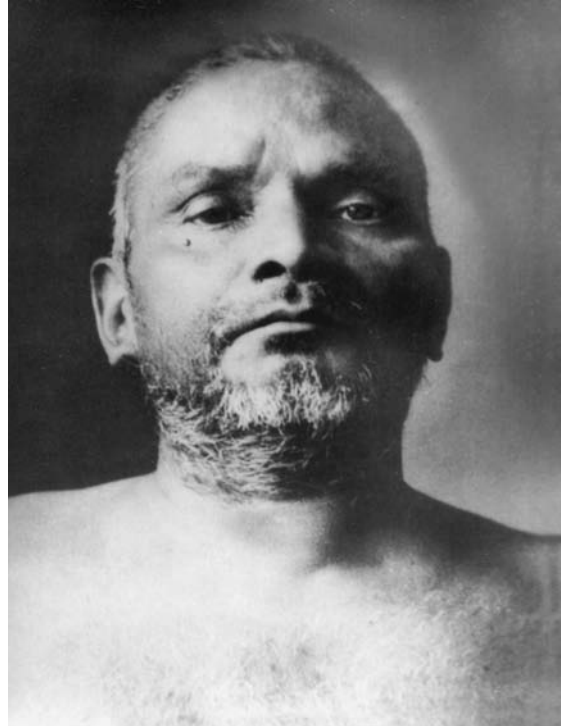
After Nisargadatta Maharaj's death, Balsekar continued his guru's teachings and established the *ADVAITA* Fellowship in 1987. Since that time he has made annual visits to America and has become esteemed as a teacher of *advaita* Vedanta. The fellowship has its headquarters in Bombay (Mumbai), India, and in Redondo Beach, California.

Further reading: Ramesh S. Balsekar and Sudhakar S. Dikshit, *Explorations into the Eternal: Forays from the Teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj* (Bombay: Chetana, 1987); Ramesh S. Balsekar and Sudhakar S. Dikshit, *Pointers from Nisargadatta Maharaj: Maharaj Points to the Eternal Truth That Is Before Time Ever Was* (Durham, N.C.: Acorn Press, 1990); Jean Dunn and Nisargadatta Maharaj, *Seeds of Consciousness: The Wisdom of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (New York: Grove Press, 1982); Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That*. Translated by Maurice Frydman (Bombay: Chetana, 1973).

Nityananda, Swami Bhagawan (c. 1900–1961) *Shaivite siddha yogi*

Swami Bhagawan Nityananda was an inspiring teacher of *siddha yoga* MEDITATION, who attracted thousands of followers and disciples.

The early years of Bhagawan Nityananda are shrouded in mystery of the sort that often characterizes the life of a saint from village India. From interviews with people who knew him in his early years, it appears that he was born near the turn of the 20th century in the town of Qualandi in Kerala state, South India, to parents who worked



Swami Bhagawan Nityananda (c. 1900–1961), renowned devotee of Lord Shiva and *siddha* yogi (Kashi Church, Sebastian, Florida)

as servants in the house of a lawyer, Ishwara Iyer. His childhood name was Ram.

Even as a child Ram lived in an exalted state. Swami MUKTANANDA, Nityananda's successor, wrote of his GURU, "Beyond a shadow of a doubt he was a born *SIDDHA* [a person who is spiritually perfected]. Even though he was a self-born *siddha* still he had to have a *guru*. . . . It is the spiritual law—one has to have a *guru*." Nityananda considered his teacher to be Ishwara Iyer, who was not only his patron but also a devout BRAHMIN and a proficient YOGI. It was he who gave Nityananda his name. The story is that after spending a number of years in the HIMALAYAS, Nityananda returned to Qualandi to see Iyer, who was ill and praying for him to return. When Iyer saw the young yogi, he

said, “Ah, my Nityananda has come!” From that point forward, he was known by that name, which means “eternal bliss.”

Nityananda began manifesting miraculous powers while still in his teens, and he was a wandering SADHU (mendicant) before he was 20. There are accounts from Kerala and Karnataka states of the “sky-clad” (naked) yogi who traveled only on foot and ate only what was handed to him. In his presence, people had profound experiences of meditation and healing, both physical and spiritual. In the 1920s Nityananda built the Kanhangad Ashram around some jungle caves near the town of Kanhangad in Kerala, which is maintained to this day. By the 1930s, however, he left the region, again on foot. In 1936, Nityananda arrived in Ganeshpuri, the Maharashtrian village that was to be his home for the rest of his life. On the day he arrived, the caretaker of the local SHIVA temple built him a hut, and within a few years that *kutir* was enlarged to become Vaikuntha Ashram, the very spot where Bhagawan Nityananda’s SAMADHI shrine stands today.

Bhagawan Nityananda is recognized in Ganeshpuri not only for his spiritual power but also for the material help he provided to the local people, who at that time were often living at a subsistence level. He distributed the offerings given to him, providing for the villagers food and clothing and establishing a local school and hospital and the Balbhojan (children’s food) Center, which still functions in Ganeshpuri.

In the last two decades of his life, thousands of pilgrims traveled to Ganeshpuri for Nityananda’s blessings and the experience of his DARSHAN. Swami Muktananda writes, “In his presence, everyone meditated spontaneously.” Nityananda’s hallmark teaching is “The heart is the hub of all sacred places. Go there and roam.”

Shortly before Nityananda took *mahasamadhi* (died) on August 8, 1961, he passed on the guru’s *gaddi*, the seat of power of his spiritual lineage, to Swami Muktananda, just as, years later, Swami Muktananda would pass it on to his disciple,

Gurumayi CHIDVILASANANDA, who has been carrying forward what is now known as the Siddha Yoga mission since 1982.

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Nivedita, Sister (Margaret Noble) (1867–1911) supporter of women’s education in India

Sister Nivedita, an Irish-born convert to VEDANTA, became a social activist and supporter of women’s education in India.

Margaret Noble was born on October 28, 1867, to Samuel Noble and Mary Hamilton in Dunganon, Northern Ireland, in county Tyrone. Before Margaret was a year old, Samuel moved to Manchester, England, where he enrolled as a theological student of the Wesleyan church. The young baby was left with her maternal grandmother in Northern Ireland, where she enjoyed a happy childhood while her father studied and became ordained. At four years of age, she returned to live with her father, unhappy to leave her grandmother’s home.

With her sister, she attended Halifax College, run by the Congregationalist Church. She learned personal sacrifice from the headmistress of Halifax, a member of the Plymouth Brethren. After her father was appointed minister of a church, she liked to listen to him preach and to imitate his expressions.

Margaret was a thoughtful girl who asked many questions. She had learned about the character of a nation from her paternal grandfather in his fight for home rule for Ireland. At age 18, in 1884, she received a post as teacher and became

engaged in the movement to foster child-centered learning in schools. In 1885, she opened the Ruskin School in Wimbledon, for adults as well as children who wished to study modern educational methods. She was a cofounder of the Congress of Modern Pedagogy, centered on the child's experience of school. She also served as a welfare worker, while championing the underprivileged by writing pamphlets in London.

After Swami VIVEKANANDA'S famous appearance at the WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS in Chicago in 1893, he stayed for three months in London; in 1885, Margaret met him and declared herself his disciple, calling him "Master." Through Vivekananda, she found a religion whose elements could be discussed scientifically and whose goal was expressed in terms of spiritual freedom rather than, as she thought, sin-defined slavery. While the swami was in England she followed his teaching assiduously, attending lectures four times a week. When Vivekananda left England in November 1895, Margaret began to study the swami's philosophical ideas in preparation for meeting him again, declaring herself a "monk."

In 1898 Margaret traveled to India to start her new life of service to education and women. In March of that year, she was initiated by Vivekananda and given the name Nivedita (she who had been dedicated). He asked her to live in an orthodox Hindu way. She opened a school for Indian girls in 1898 in a single room of her house in a poor section of Calcutta (Kolkata). While a plague raged in Calcutta, she nursed the sick and dying. She lectured on KALI, goddess of destruction and plagues, to audiences of thousands. She met and worked with Sri RAMAKRISHNA'S widow, Sri SARADA DEVI (1853–1920), who was revered by the Ramakrishna monks as the embodiment of the Holy Mother.

In 1902 she left the Ramakrishna Order, after Vivekananda's death, because her political activities for Indian independence were declared incompatible with her status as a Hindu renunciant

(*brahmacharini*). The remainder of her life was spent in India working on behalf of Indian women. She died on October 13, 1911, in Calcutta.

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niyama See [YOGA SUTRA](#).

nonviolence See [AHIMSA](#).

Nyaya-Vaisheshika

Nyaya and Vaisheshika represent two of the six "orthodox" systems of Indian philosophy. *Orthodox* here simply entails an acceptance of the VEDAS as an ultimate authority. In practice, even this requirement is observed only nominally in the case of one system, the SAMKHYA.

For many centuries these two schools have been integrated in a single philosophical system. However, certain of their distinctive and separate features are worth noting.

Vaisheshika, from the term *vishesha* (distinction), is usually thought of as the earlier of the two systems. There is strong evidence that this system began to take shape as early as 400 B.C.E., though the earliest extant texts are probably a little later. The 10 chapters of the Vaisheshika Sutra, by the sage Kanada, date around the second century C.E. They teach that salvation can be obtained only by "real knowledge" of things, as outlined in this SUTRA.

Vaisheshika admits of six philosophical categories, with a seventh controversial category added later. The six original categories are (1) substance, which consists of nine eternal realities that compose the foundation of the universe; substance is divided into (a) “atoms” of each of the five main elements or *MAHABHUTAS* and (b) time, ether, space, and soul; (2) attribute, of which there are 24; (3) karma, action or motion; (4) *samanya*, “generality,” that which characterizes all the members of a given class; (5) *vishesha* or particularity, which distinguishes one member of a class from another; and (6) *samavaya*, “relation,” or combination, that is, the relationship that exists between substance and its qualities. A seventh category, “non-existence” (*abhava*), was added later to deal with certain philosophical difficulties of the system.

Most important in the system of Vaisheshika is the understanding of the atomic nature of all the elements. This philosophy was originally realist and nontheistic in orientation. Only later was the notion of God imputed to it.

Nyaya was founded by Gautama (or Gotama) (c. 100 C.E.), who composed the Nyaya Sutra. Other famous philosophers of the Nyaya school are Vatsyayana and Gangesha. Nyaya can be loosely translated as “logic” or “argumentation,” which is indeed the central thrust of the Nyaya tradition. Because it also had a strong realist bias,

it was easily merged with the earlier Vaisheshika school.

Whereas the focus of Vaisheshika was the nature of things and how to categorize them, the focus of Nyaya is on the method of argument, syllogism, and the reliable means for knowing. The syllogisms that Nyaya constructed were similar, but not identical to those of Aristotle. Whatever the similarities, Nyaya developed a rigorous philosophical basis that makes it quite comparable to Western analytical philosophy.

The school of Navya Nyaya, or New Nyaya, that emerged in eastern India around the 14th century was particularly sophisticated philosophically. Nyaya developed proofs of the existence of God (which are not found in the Vaisheshika), which compare quite well to those developed in Christian theology. Though Nyaya-Vaisheshika has very few adherents today, it developed philosophical tools that all the other Hindu traditions used. They were particularly useful in refuting the heterodox Jains and Buddhists.

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om

Om is the most important MANTRA in Hinduism. CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD discusses the significance of om. There it is given the highest value, equivalent to the RIG VEDA and SAMA VEDA combined; it is said to be speech and breath combined. Om is also said to be the Sama Vedic chant encapsulated.

In TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD 1.8 om is variously said to be BRAHMAN or the entire world. The MANDUKYA UPANISHAD outlines the esoteric aspects of om. It is said to be all that is—past, present, and future—and to transcend time. Om is said to be the Self (ATMAN). Esoterically, it is said to encompass the four STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: the waking, dreaming, deep-sleep, and transcendent states. For this purpose, using SANSKRIT grammar, the letter *o* in the word om is understood to constitute an *a* and a *u*. *A* is the waking state, *u* the dreaming state, *m* the deep-sleep state; the fourth state has no external marker and is the non-dual reality.

Later texts understand om to encompass all visible and invisible worlds, and these are enumerated. It is seen to be the three gods: BRAHMA, VISHNU, and SHIVA; it is seen to be this world, the sky world, and the world of heaven; its letters are seen to be the manifest and unmanifest world; and so on. One of the most common MANTRAS



Om, the most revered syllable and mantra in Sanskrit, is believed to encompass all visible and invisible worlds. ([www.shutterstock.com/Junji Takemoto](http://www.shutterstock.com/Junji_Takemoto))

using om is *om tat sat*: “om is that reality: all that exists.”

For a YOGI, to focus on the mantra om is to focus on the ultimate reality. If the yogi pronounces om, it reaches the crown CHAKRA; if the

yogi becomes absorbed meditatively in om, he becomes eternal. Om, too, is understood as the essence of the word *brahman* (*shabda brahman*) and is therefore, via its transcendent sound, the source of all manifest reality, where reality is known to be nothing but the congealing of sound. No mantra begins without *om* and most Vedic mantras end with *om* as well. Om is often referred to as *Omkara* (the *kara*, a meaningless marker), added to make it easier to distinguish visually in Sanskrit script. It is also called *pranava*, which literally means, “That which resounds.”

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Omkara See OM.

Omkarananda, Swami (1930–2000)

Vedanta teacher

Swami Omkarananda was a VEDANTA teacher who founded the first Hindu ASHRAM in Switzerland.

As a 16-year-old in South India the person later known as Swami Omkarananda suddenly left his home and traveled north to RISHIKISH in the foothills of the HIMALAYAS. There, the next year, he was initiated into the renounced life (*sannyas*) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati. He remained at Rishikish for study and in 1954 was awarded a degree by the Yoga Vedanta Forest University. In the following years he met and studied with several other prominent Indian teachers, but from 1962 to 1965 he entered a period of retreat.

In 1965, at the request of several Swiss intellectuals, he traveled to Switzerland to teach. He made a second visit in 1966; at that time he founded the Omkarananda International Ashram at Winterthur, Switzerland (near Zürich), the first permanent Hindu ashram in the country. The ashram grew and purchased a number of houses in Winterthur, identified by being painted blue.

By 1975, tension had developed in the town between the members of the ashram and their neighbors. As the tension increased, some members of the ashram bombed the home of a member of the government of the canton of Zürich.

The perpetrators were arrested, and the swami was also taken into custody and charged with complicity. He pleaded innocent but was convicted. After seven years in jail, he was released but banished from Switzerland. He settled in Austria, near the Swiss border, and resumed his teaching work. His followers initiated actions to have his conviction overturned and to restore his reputation, but he died in 2000 before that could be achieved.

In spite of the setback caused by the events of 1975, the ashram in Winterthur continues to operate, as does its sister branch in Rishikesh. Omkarananda wrote a number of books, many of which have been placed online at the Internet site posted by the ashram.

Further reading: *Omkarananda Ashram Himalayas*. Available online. URL: <http://www.omkarananda-ashram.org/>. Accessed August 16, 2005.

om tat sat See OM.

Osho See RAJNEESH, SRI.

P



pancha makara

In Hindu TANTRISM of the “left-handed” sort, the *pancha makara* or “Five M’s” (SANSKRIT words that begin with that letter), sometimes called the “five forbidden things (*pancha tattva*),” are the elements in a special esoteric ceremony. They are *mamsa* (meat, usually beef), *matsya* (fish), *madya* (wine), *mudra* (parched grain), and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse.) These five elements are meant to involve the participants (there may be one or more pairs in a tantric ritual circle) in forbidden actions that aid in realizing the divinity of mundane existence. By taking “forbidden” elements, they are confronted with the fact that even those things beyond the pale in human terms partake in the truth of the divinity, usually characterized as the goddess.

Beef is forbidden to all caste Hindus. It is highly polluting, and eating it is condemned by society. Fish is also not taken by most BRAHMINS and is believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. Parched grain also is known to stimulate sexual appetite and therefore is not considered desirable. Alcohol is probably the foremost of Brahminical prohibitions. In the *DHARMASHASTRA* of MANU drinking liquor is equated with killing a Brahmin. Sexuality outside marriage is looked upon as a

negative thing. The female sexual partner in tantric sexuality is preferably of very low caste and not the male partner’s wife.

Further reading: Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (New York: Grove Press, 1975); N. N. Bhat-tacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical Study* (Delhi: Manohar, 1982); Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979).

Pancharatra

The Pancharatra (*pancha*, five; *ratra*, nights) sect was one of the early traditions that developed into VAISHNAVISM, the worship of VISHNU. It probably dates to the last centuries before the Common Era. The name may derive from the SHATAPATHA BRAHMANA XIII.6, where the god Narayana, the primordial and all-encompassing divinity, performs a special “five nights” sacrifice in order to transcend and encompass all beings. In later Vaishnavism Narayana became the name of the highest divinity; he was said to transcend BRAHMA, SHIVA, and even VISHNU.

In the Pancharatra system, creation emerges through *vyuhas* (arrangements) of the manifesta-

tions of the godhead. VASUDEVA, or KRISHNA, is the highest changeless god; Sankarshana is the Lord over all life; Pradyumna predominates over mind; and Aniruddha presides over ego. From Aniruddha derives BRAHMA, who then creates the physical universe. From Vasudeva on down, each of the phases or forms of the godhead derives from the previous form. The doctrine in certain ways is reminiscent of the Christian trinity, whereby the one god takes on different aspects.

The Pancharatra doctrines were elaborated in several important texts. The Bhaktisutras of Shandilya were central. The Pancharatra AGAMAS specified the temple cult, iconography, and ritual; they are no longer extant. Important extant Pancharatra texts are the Sasvatasamhita Ahirbudhnyasamhita and the Ishvara Samhita, which deal primarily with worship rituals.

Vedic sacrificial worship, the earliest known phase of Hinduism, did not involve permanent structures (temples) or icons. Those features emerged only after a long process of development, and both the Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions had to develop texts to explain and justify these innovations in Vedic terms. The Pancharatras were the primary agents that performed this task for Vaishnavism.

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975); Sanjukta Gupta, trans., *Laksmi Tantra: A Pancaratra Text*. *Orientalia Rheno-Trajectina*, Vol. 15 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972); S. Rangachar, *Philosophy of Pancaratras* (Mandya: Sridevi Prakashana, 1991).

Pandavas

The five Pandava brothers, among whom ARJUNA and YUDHISHTHIRA are best known, are central characters in the great Indian epic the MAHABHARATA. Their name is a patronymic derived from their father's name, *Pandu*. Through Pandu they descend from the ancient king Kuru and the more ancient progenitor BHARATA. Although they

are considered Pandu's sons, they were not his natural sons, since a curse had been placed upon their father that he would die if he had sex with a woman. Their mother, Kunti (also known as Pritha, an aunt of KRISHNA), used boons she had previously received to bear children with several of the gods.

Kunti bore YUDHISHTHIRA, the eldest, by the god DHARMA; BHIMA by the wind god; and ARJUNA by INDRA. Kunti gave her remaining boons to Madri, Pandu's junior wife; the latter bore the youngest and least famous Pandavas, Nakula and Sahadeva, by the divine celestial twins, the ASHVINS. The five Pandavas shared a secret brother, Karna, who was born to Kunti by the Sun god, before her marriage to Pandu. Karna had been put into a reed basket and left to float away on a river.

After Pandu died while attempting intercourse with Madri, his brother Dhritarashtra, though blind, became regent. Pandu's sons were still considered the legitimate heirs, but Dhritarashtra's 100 sons, known as the KAURAVAS (descendants of Kuru—as were the Pandavas) and led by the eldest son, DURYODHANA, began plotting to destroy their cousins, the five Pandavas. Duryodhana, for instance, tried to poison Bhima but failed. The story of the epic revolves around the struggle for the kingdom between the Pandavas and their cousins. The conflict culminates in the great Bharata war, in which the Pandavas are triumphant, but with frightening losses.

Further reading: Peter Brook, director, *The Mahabharata* (videorecording), produced by Michael Proppe (Chatsworth, Calif.: Image Entertainment, 2002); William Buck, *The Mahabharata* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Mahabharata*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973–78).

Panikkar, Raimundo See [CHRISTIAN-HINDU RELATIONS](#).

papa

In the KARMA system, *papa* is karmic demerit, often translated as “sin.” All Hindu and Buddhist traditions used this term, which is the opposite of PUNYA or karmic merit. An accumulation of *papa* over a lifetime causes a rebirth into a status that accords with the sin. The various types of *papa*, or sins, are detailed in the texts on proper conduct or DHARMA. MANU’S DHARMASHASTRA, for example, has long lists of sins and transgressions. In the Indian context, however, there is no universal notion of sin. Instead, sin is determined by one’s social place and rank.

A BRAHMIN committing a crime, for instance, will not be punished in any way as strictly as a SHUDRA (person of the servant class) would be for the same crime. On the other hand, a Brahmin who would use alcohol or eat beef would be seen to be committing a much greater sin than a Shudra who did.

Further reading: Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans., *The Laws of Manu* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

Paramananda, Swami (1884–1940) pioneer teacher of Vedanta in the United States

Swami Paramananda was a leading teacher of Vedanta in the United States. He founded the ANANDA ASHRAMA AND VEDANTA CENTRE, which carried on his teachings, including his respect for women as spiritual leaders.

Born on February 5, 1884, to an affluent East Bengali family in the village of Banaripara in what is now Bangladesh, Suresh Chandra Guhu Thakurta, the person who would later become Swami Paramananda, was cherished by his parents, Brahmamoyee and Ananda Mohan. His mother died when Suresh was only nine years old. When his father’s second wife died, Suresh turned to an inner search. He began to read in his father’s

library and was introduced to the spirituality of Sri RAMAKRISHNA. He visited the RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION at Belur Math near Calcutta (Kolkata) and studied the life of the Bengali saint. In 1900, only four years after the death of Ramakrishna, Suresh ran away from home and joined the monastery. In 1902 he was initiated into the renounced life of *sannyas* by Swami VIVEKANANDA, student of Sri Ramakrishna and founder of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Paramananda then spent four years in Madras (Chennai) with Swami Ramakrishnananda. While there he received a vision of a mission to the West. In 1906 he accompanied Swami ABHEDANANDA to New York and served as his assistant at the VEDANTA SOCIETY. He succeeded Abhedananda as director of the New York Vedanta Center and later founded Vedanta centers in Boston and Washington, D.C. While in New York, he became close to Sister Devamata (Laura Franklin Glenn) (1867–1942), who in the 1920s published his biography. He traveled widely and was a popular and sensitive spokesman for the message of VEDANTA.

As was his teacher Vivekananda, he was committed to including women in the spiritual life. His first disciple, Sister Devamata, was given considerable responsibility for giving talks and spiritual guidance when he was away. Her talks were published along with those of Paramananda. Some of the Boston students regarded her, rather than the SWAMI, as their spiritual teacher. Another of his students, Sister Daya (Georgina Jones Walton) (1882–1955), as did Sister Devamata, gave talks and spiritual guidance when Paramananda was not in town.

Beginning in 1915, Paramananda began to lecture and teach in Los Angeles, dividing his time between that city and Boston. In 1923 he opened the Ananda Ashrama at La Crescenta, California, and in 1929 opened a second ashram at Cohasset, Massachusetts.

Swami Paramananda died on June 21, 1940, at his Cohasset, Massachusetts, center. During his life, his three centers, in Boston, La Crescenta, and

Cohasset, were closely associated with the larger Vedanta Society in the United States, although organizationally independent. Since his death, the leadership of the ASHRAM has been held by women: Sister Devamata, Srimata Gayatri Devi, and Sister Sudha. The three centers, distrusting the attitude of some swamis toward women, refused to accept the new swamis sent by the Ramakrishna Math to lead their community. They applied to the Ramakrishna Math to be allowed to operate as a sisterhood, but no such permission was granted. In 1953 the Sarada Math, an order of women nuns, was founded in India, finally allowing women in the Ramakrishna-Vedanta tradition to take vows of renunciation. When the Paramananda community still refused to accept new male swamis as leaders, the parent order severed relations.

The Cohasset center and Ananda Ashrama continue to conduct daily shrine worship, give public services and classes, and publish Paramananda's books.

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paramatman See [VEDANTA](#).

Parashurama avatar

Parashurama was an incarnation of VISHNU who fought the warrior class, who had tried to lord it over the Brahmins. It is said that Parasurama has wielded his fierce axe 22 times in different eras to destroy all the warriors on Earth—however, a few always managed to escape. Parashurama is also

associated with the founding of the areas demarcated by the Indian state of Kerala.

The story goes that ARJUNA, hero of the MAHABHARATA, seized a cow from Jamadagni, the father of Parashurama. When the son returned to his father's hermitage, he became furious and went out after the great hero. In a dreadful and bloody battle he eventually beheaded Arjuna.

The sons of Arjuna, bent on revenge, went to the hermitage and killed Jamadagni. The furious Parasurama determined to extirpate the warrior race once and for all. This is when he first launched his 22 campaigns.

In another story, Parasurama's mother went to fetch water and became enamored of a king bathing there. So enthralled was she that she forgot to return to do her requisite sacrifices. When she finally returned, Jamadagni ordered his sons to kill their mother. When they refused, he ordered Parashurama to kill both his brothers and his mother. Knowing the power of his father, he did as ordered and received a boon in return. His wish, ironically, was that his brothers and mother be restored to life and that he forget all that had occurred. His father agreed. Other versions of this matricidal story are found in Indian folk tradition.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 12th ed. (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1974); Swami Bangovind Parampanthi, *Bhagawan Parshuram and Evolution of Culture in North-East India* (Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1987).

Parshvanath (c. 900 B.C.E.) *Tirthankara in the Jain tradition*

Parshvanath was the 23rd TIRTHANKARA (saint) of our cosmic half-era, in the Jain tradition (see [JAINISM](#)). MAHAVIRA, the partly historical promulgator of Jain tradition, was the 24th and last for our



Parshvanath, 23rd Jain Tirthankara of this era, in Benares (Varanasi) (Constance A. Jones)

half-era. There are indications that Parsvanath, too, was a historical figure, who preached an early version of the Jain doctrine of strict worldly renunciation and very strict noninjury to creatures as the only means to liberation from birth and rebirth.

The Kalpa Sutra of BHADRABAHU (c. 500 C.E.) of the SHVETAMBARA Jains tells the story of the life of Parshvanath. It is said that he lived as a householder for 30 years, as a monk for 83 nights, and as an omniscient being for a little less than 70 years, for a total of 100 years.

In his previous life Parshvanath was a divinity in heaven (in the Jain tradition one cannot reach liberation as a divinity, but only as a human).

When that life ended he descended into the womb of Vama Devi, the wife of a king of the warrior caste, in the city of BENARES (Varanasi). It is said that on the night he was born the world was bright with the ascending and descending of gods and goddesses with sounds of beings inquiring what grand event was taking place.

Possessed of immense knowledge and faith, at the age of 30 Parshva took up the life of a renunciant, giving away his massive princely wealth to indigents. Outside the city in a park under an Ashoka tree he took off his finery and pulled out his hair in five handfuls (the custom when one becomes a Jain monk). He began vows of severe fasting and joined the community of homeless monks.

For 83 days, they say, he gave up the care of his body completely and bore every hardship as though it were not hardship. He adopted all the circumspect practices of the monk—careful movement, measured speech, guarded desires, restraint of his mind and physical activities—so as to leave the ego behind completely. During these 83 days he reached omniscience and proceeded to terminate the bonds of KARMA. Eight major followers joined him and he created a community of 350 monks, which grew and grew as his perfection affected more and more people. After 70 years as an omniscient being, he adopted the vow of taking food without water once a month on Mount Sammeta and became perfected (a SIDDHA) and liberated, his soul going to the top of the universe to dwell in effulgence forever.

Further reading: P. S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990); Kastur Chand Lalwani, *Kalpa Sutra of Bhadrabahu Svami* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979).

Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari, Sri

(1927–) *teacher of sahaja yoga*

Sri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari is the leader of the SRI RAM CHANDRA MISSION.

Born in 1927 near Madras (Chennai) in the village of Vayalur, the boy who was to become Sri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari became devoted at age 18 to the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, and experienced a spiritual awakening as he read the ancient book. He went on to graduate from Banaras Hindu University with a B.S. and followed a career as a chemical engineer and executive until his retirement in 1985.

In 1964 he discovered Sri Maharaj RAM CHANDRA and became a student of *sahaja* (spontaneous or innate) YOGA as the teaching had been handed down from Sri Ram's guru, Sri Ram Chandrajī of Fategarh.

Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari, referred to as *Chariji*, travels widely teaching a message of spiritual awakening and enlightenment through *sahaja* yoga. He conducts public seminars throughout the world on a regular schedule.

Further reading: Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari, *The Principles of Sahaj Marg*, vol. 8 (Shahjahanpur: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1994); ———, *Revealing the Personality* (Shahjahanpur: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1993); ———, *Role of the Master in Human Evolution* (Munich: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1986).

Parvati/Uma

In Hindu mythology Parvati (she who belongs to the mountains) is the daughter of HIMAVAT and Mena, and the wife of the ascetic god SHIVA. She is considered the REINCARNATION of Shiva's first wife, SATI. She also goes by the name Uma. The first textual mention of Parvati/Uma is in the KENA UPANISHAD (c. 600 B.C.E.). Many scholars believe that Parvati was a mountain goddess of the indigenous, non-Aryan people of India who was absorbed into the Brahminical tradition.

Parvati is born, according to most stories, to lure Shiva away from asceticism so that he will produce a son. The gods are desperate for this to happen, since only a son of Shiva can kill the otherwise invincible demon Taraka. However, Shiva

ignores all of Parvati's seductions. The gods send the god of love to make Shiva lustful, but Shiva opens his third eye and destroys him.

Parvati then sets out on a quest to gain Shiva's love by doing austerities of her own. She does the most difficult austerities, such as standing on one leg for many years, and gains great merit. The gods, noticing the tremendous power that Parvati is accruing, ask Shiva to grant her wish to marry him. Shiva, impressed by Parvati's devotion and steadfastness, agrees to marry her. The marriage is often described, depicted, and enacted in Indian literature and tradition. All the gods take part in the wedding party. The stories all include a humorous interlude when Shiva's mother-in-law, Mena, is outraged at his ascetic appearance—he is smeared with ashes from the cremation ground, and wears a garland made of a serpent and other disreputable items.

Shiva and Parvati go to live in Mount KAILASA. Some folklore shows Parvati as dissatisfied with living in a mountain cave instead of a proper house. Nevertheless, the lovemaking of Shiva and Parvati is so intense that it shakes the cosmos. One story recounts that Shiva's amorous enthrallment with Parvati turns all the animals, insects, and plants in the pleasure grove where they make love female. A hapless king who enters the grove also turns into a woman, although he wins a partial remission of this condition. (He is only required to be female half of any month.)

As fate would have it, just as Shiva is about to impregnate Parvati, the gods interrupt them and his semen flies off, leaping from one container to another till it finds a safe place only in the GANGES River, which thus becomes the mother of Shiva's son, KARTIKKEYA. GANESHA, a second son, is born in a similarly unconventional way: Parvati rubs her arms, covered with sweet powder, before her bath; takes the residue; and forms a child of it. Parvati then has the child guard her bath (sometimes bedchamber). Unknowingly, Shiva encounters the child and thinks it an intruder. He cuts its head off. When Parvati emerges she chastises Shiva

and has him find another head immediately. In a rush he gets a newly severed elephant head, and thus the younger son Ganesha has the head of an elephant.

Parvati is often said to play dice with Shiva, and she always wins. She argues with him about his constant smoking of marijuana (a staple of Shaivite mendicants). Some stories connect Parvati with KALI, saying that she was originally dark in color but because of Shiva's teasing she changed to a light color. In other stories, Parvati is actually the left half of Shiva in his form as ARDHANARISHVARA. As with other female divinities, Parvati is sometimes conflated with the great goddess or creator and protector of all the universe; she gains supremacy in some mythological contexts.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); John Stratton Hawley and Donnie Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Pashupati See SHIVA.

Patanjali (c. second century B.C.E.) *author of Yoga Sutra*

In Indian tradition two books are ascribed to Patanjali: the Mahabhashya (the primary commentary to the grammar of Panini) and the commentary on the YOGA SUTRA. Western scholarship, however, dates the first work to around 200 B.C.E., and the Yoga Sutra to around 200 C.E., making it impossible for the two Patanjalis to be the same.

Tradition has it that Patanjali was an incarnation of the divine serpent ADISHESHA, upon whom VISHNU reclines between ages on the MILK OCEAN. Patanjali's name, it is said, is from this serpent, which in very tiny form fell (*pat*) onto the palm

(*anjali*) of either Panini himself or his mother, Gonika, or fell from her womb (*anjali*) (the word *anjali* has many meanings). Patanjali is sometimes also referred to as Gonikaputra (son of Gonika).

Iconographically, Patanjali is depicted with the lower body of a snake and a canopy of five serpent heads over his head. He is shown offering *anjali MUDRA* with his palms joined. This clearly refers to the second element of his name.

Further reading: Georg Feuerstein, trans., *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1990); F. Kielhorn, *Katyayana and Patanjali: Their Relation to Each Other and to Panini* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1963); Baij Nath Puri, *India in the Time of Patanjali* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957); Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darsana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Periya Puranam

The Tamil Periya Puranam of SEKKILAR forms the 12th and final book of the TIRUMURAI, the Tamil Shaivite sacred canon. *Periya Puranam* means "Great *Purana*," or great ancient story. It comprises over 4,200 stanzas.

Composed in the 12th century, the book tells the stories of the 63 NAYANMARS or Shaivite saints. These stories were originally recorded by the eighth-century poet SUNDARAR in the *Tondartokai*, or "compendium of the lives of the saints." At royal order the list of saints was expanded in the 10th century by Nambi Andar Nambi. Sekkilar, a minister of the Chola empire, provides the most complete compendium in his Periya Puranam. It is said that he was inspired to create the work to wean the Chola king Anapaya Chola away from reading the highly erotic but heretical Jain text Jivaka Cintamani. Sekkilar is said to have recited this work at the Shaivite sacred shrine of CHID-AMBARAM.

The book has 13 chapters. The longest story is about Sambanthar (1256 quatrains), followed by

the account of Appar (429 verses). The writing follows a simple lively style and was probably designed to be sung. It contains beautiful descriptions of each saint's village or town; the longer stories dwell on the spiritual development of the saints.

Further reading: G. Vanmikinathan, *Periya Puranam, a Tamil Classic on the Great Saiva Saints of South India* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985); Kamil V. Zvelibil, "Tamil Literature," in Jan Gonda, ed., *The History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 10, Fascicle 1 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974).

pilgrimage

Visiting holy sites is one of the central activities in Hinduism. Many pilgrims visit shrines, rivers,

sacred mountains, and sacred groves to obtain spiritual benefits; others go to achieve the worldly benefits that can also accrue from visiting a holy place. Women commonly vow to visit the shrine of a certain saint or god in order to have a child, especially a son. Some may visit a shrine and shave their heads there in order to win success at an exam or important business deal.

All sects in Hinduism do pilgrimage. SHAVITES, SHAKTAS, and VAISHNAVITES alike have myriad important sites. Vaishnavites target the many places where RAMA or KRISHNA visited or lived, as well as the many temples where other forms of VISHNU are enshrined. Mathura, BRINDAVAN, and DVARAKA are particularly important for the devotees of Krishna, while AYODHYA is visited as the birthplace of Rama. Shaivites visit the many



Religious mendicants on pilgrimage in Sonnamarg, Kashmir (Constance A. Jones)

temples and shrines with SHIVA LINGAM, in addition to many other temples to Shiva that can be pilgrimage destinations. SHAKTAS or goddess worshippers have 53 shrines where parts of the goddess are said to have fallen when she was cut into pieces.

Among important pilgrimage cities are Gaya, BENARES (Varanasi), HARIDVAR, and Ujjain. Important rivers are GANGES, YAMUNA, Godavari, Narmada, and CAUVERY.

Perhaps the most significant pilgrimage site for Hindus is Benares. The primary aim of pilgrims in Benares is to bathe in the holy Ganges, which is said to confer heaven upon those who bathe in her. People nearing the end of their lives often go there, so that their ashes can be thrown into the river, and they can reach liberation from birth and rebirth.

Further reading: Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage and Geographical Imagination in India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Baidyanath Saraswati, *Traditions of Tirthas in India: The Anthropology of Hindu Pilgrimage* (Varanasi: N. K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1983); Man Mohan Sharma, *Yatra: Pilgrimages in the Western Himalayas* (Noida: Trishul, 1989).

pingala See [NADI](#).

pipal tree

The fig or pipal tree is foremost among the sacred trees of Indian tradition. This lush tree can grow to a huge size with a large canopy. It has large, rather thin leaves that make a rustling sound in a breeze, which tradition compares to the sound of the lute or *veena*. No one is allowed to cut down, remove branches, or tear off leaves from a pipal tree.

Some associate the pipal tree particularly with VISHNU, who is said to have been born under one. Often a pipal tree is officially “married” to a margosa tree when they are planted together.

A solemn ceremony mimicking an actual marriage ceremony is performed, often before an entire village. Sometimes the tree is also invested with the sacred thread, as a BRAHMIN is. The tree plays a role in certain brahminical rituals, and sometimes in marriage ceremonies. Branches of pipal wood were used in the VEDIC fire ritual. It was under a pipal tree that the BUDDHA reached his enlightenment. Many legends, myths, and stories in Indian literature refer to events and occurrences that take place under this, the most sacred of Indian trees.

Further reading: James Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship* (Delhi: Oriental, 1971); P. Thomas, *Hindu Religion Customs and Manners*, 3d ed. (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons, 1956).

pitri See [ANCESTOR WORSHIP](#).

pollution/purity

Pollution and purity have been important social and religious concepts in Hinduism from ancient times. Pollution often entails substances related to birth, death, blood, bodily processes, and leftover food.

The concepts of purity and pollution are central to the notion of caste in India. People whose traditional occupations put them in contact with leather, dead animals, toilets and sewers, and sweeping (leftover substances) are usually considered outcastes or UNTOUCHABLES (Dalit). At the other social extreme are BRAHMINS, who never have contact with such substances and, ideally, deal only with learning, books, or temple rituals. They are considered pure. Middle castes, which sometimes have contact with polluting substances in their traditional work, have an intermediate purity status. For example, barbers, who have contact with bodily substances as they cut people’s hair, are seen as lower caste, though not untouchable.

For Brahmins, purity is maintained by tradition and occupation and reinforced by vegetarianism. In Vedic times Brahmins were avid meat eaters and even ate beef. As the traditional specialists in ritual sacrifice, they were entitled to the leftover meat from each animal offering.

As new ideas of purity began to develop, Brahmins became the strictest vegetarians, even eschewing eggs in most regions of India. When they became the measure of purity, those who did eat meat were given lower status. Because of their purity, Brahmins may offer cooked food to anyone; thus, they are often hired as cooks in restaurants. Conversely, Brahmins can accept food from and eat together with only a very limited group of people, their own subcaste of Brahmins. Commensality—eating food together—is a sign of an equal level of purity. People who by tradition have different levels of purity traditionally would not eat in the same place or from the same source. Furthermore, any food that has been eaten by anyone else is highly polluting, unless that person is one's infant child or husband; beef is always considered the most impure and reviled of foods. In villages, different castes still draw water from different wells.

In social contexts feet are considered the most polluting body part and must never touch someone else. However, people do touch the feet of a mother, father, elder brother, GURU, or god out of honor, respect, or worship. Any association with blood or death is considered polluting.

Further reading: G. Morris Carstairs, *The Twice-Born* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Pongal

Pongal is an important festival in the Tamil region, celebrated in the Tamil month of Tai (January–February). Technically, the month starts when

the Sun enters the sign of Capricorn. Pongal is a celebration of the harvest, which in Tamil Nadu occurs when the rainy season ends in December.

The word Pongal is from the Tamil root *pongu*, which means to boil. During the festival, a pot is filled with rice, ghee, milk, and sugar or jaggery (palm sugar) and is heated to boiling. The pot is supposed to boil over to show the abundance of the harvest. The day before Pongal old implements and clothing are discarded to be replaced by new ones. On this day cows and other cattle are directly worshipped and are allowed to run free. Bullfights are staged, and young men chase wild bulls, in a somewhat gentler version of the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain.

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Pongala

Pongala, which means “prosperity,” is a 10-day festival celebrated at the Attukal Amma Temple in Tiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) in Kerala. It begins in the month of Kumbham (February–March). The main festival ritual, the boiling of rice in a pot, is connected to the Sunday ritual to the Sun in ancient Dravidian culture, and to the Tamil New Year celebration of Pongal, which has a similar name because the basic ritual is the same. The Pongala ritual has become the largest gathering of women for festival purposes in the world.

A high point of the festival is the recitation of the song of Kannaki, found in classical form in the ancient Tamil text *Cilappatikaram*. In this version, a boy is sacrificed and Kannaki tears off a breast to destroy the city of Madurai. On the ninth day, when the boy is sacrificed and Kannaki tears off her breast, the Pongala ritual fire is lit in the temple. All the women who are gathered simultaneously light their fires to cook rice. The overflow of the rice pot (or, in the case of BRAH-

MINS, the near overflow) indicates that the woman has received the grace of the goddess. No men are directly involved.

As part of the festival young boys ritually (and painlessly) pierce their skin with silver needles, to honor the goddess Attukal Amma. Unmarried girls under the age of 12 offer plates of rice, coconut, areca nut, and flowers to the goddess, to ensure that they remain healthy and protected.

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Poonja, Sri Harilal (Poonjaji, Papaji)

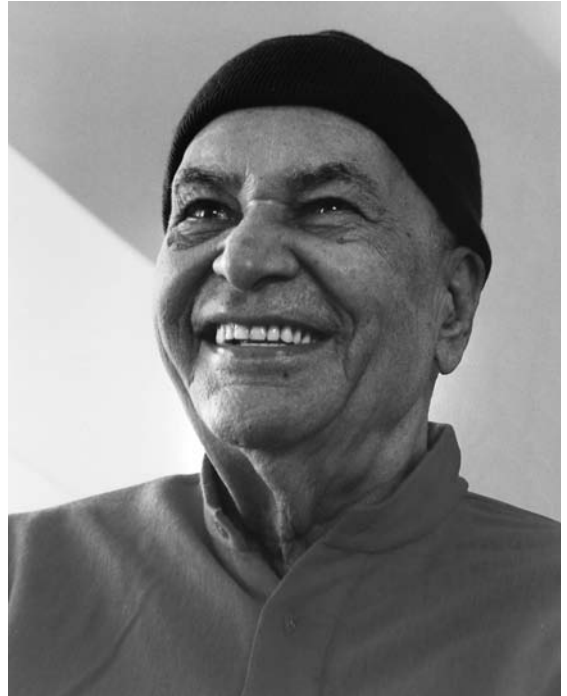
(1910–1997) *teacher of enlightenment*

Sri Harilal Poonja was a prominent spiritual teacher in Lucknow who had a number of influential students.

Born on October 13, 1910, in an area of the Punjab now a part of Pakistan, H. W. L. Poonja was part of a family of devotees. His mother was a devoted follower of the Lord KRISHNA, and his maternal uncle was Swami RAMA TIRTHA, a celebrated saint. At age eight, the boy had his first transcendental experience, became a devotee of Lord Krishna, and began a MANTRA practice day and night.

At age 20, he entered into an arranged marriage and later had two children. He served in the army for less than two years, leaving to pursue his spiritual quest. While living in his father's house with his wife and children, he received a vision of Bhagavan Sri RAMANA MAHARSHI, an enlightened master, who directed him to Ramana's ashram in Tiruvannamalai in southern India.

During the partition of India, Poonjaji moved his family from the Punjab to Lucknow, Uttar



Sri Harilal Poonja (Poonjaji), teacher of *advaita* Vedanta
(Courtesy of Eli Jaxon-Bear)

Pradesh, where he worked as a salesman and mining manager. He later became a revered teacher in Lucknow, giving daily *satsangs* (teachings). His home and a nearby community building have been visited by hundreds of spiritual seekers and students. The main characteristic of his teaching was his capacity to awaken seekers to their true Self in his presence. The American teachers of enlightenment GANGAJI and Andrew COHEN are two of his best-known students.

In 1993, the Avadhuta Foundation was set up to further the teachings of Poonjaji and to archive and distribute audiotapes and videotapes of meetings with him. He died in Lucknow on September 6, 1997.

Further reading: David Godman, *Nothing Ever Happened: Biography of H. W. L. Poonja*, 3 vols. (Boulder, Colo.:

Avadhuta Foundation, 1993); H. W. L. Poonja, *Wake Up and Roar: Satsang with H. W. L. Poonja* (Kula, Hawaii: Pacific Center, 1992).

Prahlada

Prahlada, son of the demon HIRANYAKASHIPU, whom VISHNU slew in his “man-lion” incarnation (NARASIMHA), is known as one of the great devotees of Vishnu.

The story goes that Prahlada would admit, upon being questioned by his demonic father in his father’s court, that he was a devotee of Vishnu, his father’s sworn enemy. At one point, Hiranyakashipu became enraged and ordered his courtiers to kill his “traitorous” son. But God protected Prahlada, who was not harmed by the many weapons thrown at him. Further enraged, Hiranyakashipu commanded serpents to fall upon his disobedient son. The serpents too could not harm him.

Then Prahlada was made to endure the crushing feet of celestial elephants and again was unharmed. Hiranyakashipu then sent ferocious fire upon his son, to no effect, followed by equally inefficacious poison and a fiery magical female being. Summoned to the court to explain how he had survived these ordeals, Prahlada claimed no work of magic but only the blessing of Lord Vishnu. His father resumed his efforts, having the son thrown from the top of the palace and having an enchanter put a deadly spell on him; neither attempt succeeded. Prahlada was tossed to the bottom of the ocean and covered with rocks; he did not die. Somehow after all this the father and son were reconciled, though the son continued to testify that he had Vishnu “within his heart.” When Vishnu eventually killed his father, Prahlada became the head of the demons.

Further reading: A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *Transcendental Teachings of Prahlada Maharaja* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1991); Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu*

Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, 12th ed. (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1974).

Prajapati

Prajapati, “lord of all born beings,” was a Vedic divinity of some importance. In the period of the BRAHMANAS his status rose even higher, as he was ritually identified with the cosmic PURUSHA, the source of all reality.

In the Rig Veda, the cosmic Purusha allowed himself to be dismembered to create all reality. This story was ritually reenacted each year in the AGNICHAYANA—the ritual building of the fire altar—but in the ritual Prajapati’s name is substituted for Purusha’s. Prajapati retained his aggrandized status in the UPANISHADS, but in later Hindu mythology he reverts to the status of “lord of all born beings.” In some cases, BRAHMA, the creator god, takes on his role.

Further reading: Jan Gonda, *Prajapati’s Relations with Brahman, Brihaspati and Brahma* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1989); Frits Staal, C. V. Somayajipad, and M. Iti Nambudri, *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

prakriti

In the list of 24 categories of reality in SAMKHYA and YOGA, *prakriti* refers to nature or the phenomenal universe. It is seen as an eternal reality that always existed and always will exist. That is to say, phenomenal reality is *not* a created entity but is an eternal real that always was and always will be.

Prakriti is seen as an unconscious force that creates and dissolves universes; when a universe is dissolved, *prakriti* becomes an inert unmanifest reality, which will once again come forward to produce a new creation. The task of Samkhya and most yogas is to learn how to dissociate the intel-

lect, the highest discriminatory faculty, as much as possible from the whirl of *prakriti*, phenomenal existence.

This task requires the devotee to develop an immunity of sorts to the pulls and pushes of manifest reality. Meditative practice and other yogic practices are designed to firm up the discriminative faculty against the pull of the fluctuations of reality. A yogi learns not to be influenced by either the good or the bad that comes her or his way, but to remain calm and steady in the face of all phenomena. When the highest discrimination (*viveka*) is awakened in the intellect, then the dormant consciousness or *PURUSHA* becomes fully aware that it is not of the stuff of *prakriti* or nature but is a conscious eternal entity of its own sort. Then occurs release from *prakriti* and the cycles of birth and rebirth, though one may remain in a bodily state afterward.

Further reading: Knut A. Jacobsen, *Prakrti in Samkhya-Yoga: Material Principle, Religious Experience, Ethical Implications* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Gerald Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Samkhya a Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Kapila Vatsyayan, ed., *Prakrti: The Integral Vision*, 5 vols. (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995).

pralaya See [TIME IN HINDU TRADITION](#).

pramana

A *pramana* is a criterion for valid argument in Indian philosophy. From its earliest days Indian philosophy sought to delimit the grounds upon which valid argument could be made. Different philosophical schools varied widely as to which grounds they accepted, but they all had from one to six or more explicit *pramanas*.

Examples of *pramanas* are *pratyaksha*, or direct perception; *ANUMANA*, or inference; and *SHRUTI*, or

scripture. The *CHARVAKAS*, the Indian materialists, believed that only direct perception or *pratyaksha* was valid and there is no point in trying to draw any conclusions by analogy or any other way. The *MIMAMSA* school, on the other hand, saw *shruti* or the Vedic scripture to be the most important *pramana*. *NYAYA-VAISHESHIKA*, the most philosophical school, strongly relied on inference, or *anumana*.

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *The History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971–75); R. I. Inagalalli, *Sabda Pramana, an Epistemological Analysis* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1988).

prana

Prana is the vital air or life's breath. According to older yogic theory there are five breaths or *pranas*. The breathing breath is called *prana*; the breath that goes downward out the anus is called *apana* (but sometimes *apana* is used to refer to the "out-breath" in contrast to the "in-breath" of *prana*); the digestive breath is called *samana*; the breath that is diffused throughout the whole body is called *vyana*; and the breath that goes up the throat and enters into the head is called *udana*. These five breaths, or *pranas*, resemble the humors of earlier Western medicine.

Further reading: Benimadhab Barua, *A History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970); Swami Naranjananda Saraswati, *Prana, Pranayama, Prana Vidya* (Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 1994).

pranayama

Pranayama (lit. breath control) is one of the elements in the eightfold path of *YOGA* found in *PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRA* and other sources. Watching the breath is an element of virtually every yoga that emerged in India, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain. The practice of *PRANAYAMA* is one of not only focusing on the breath but learn-

ing to control it in its three phases of inhalation (*puraka*), exhalation (*recaka*), and suspension of breath between the two (*kumbhaka*). Each must be controlled so that the three fill equal durations of time. One must gradually develop the ability to prolong all three.

Further reading: Swami Narayananda, *The Secrets of Prana, Pranayama and Yoga-Asanas*, 5th rev. ed. (Gylding, Denmark: Narayananda Universal Yoga Trust & Ashrama, 1979); Swami Naranjananda Saraswati, *Prana, Pranayama, Prana Vidya* (Munger: Bihar School of Yoga, 1994).

Prana Yoga Ashram (est. 1975)

Prana Yoga Ashram is one of several centers founded by Swami Vignanananda (Who Has the Bliss of Wisdom), who represents the lineage of Swami SHIVANANDA of Rishikesh.

Swami Vignanananda (previously known as Swami Sivalingam), a devotee of Swami SHIVANANDA Saraswati, was born in Thinnanore, Trichy District, in Tamil Nadu on June 14, 1932. He studied with Shivananda at his Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy on the banks of the GANGES River in Rishikesh, beginning his spiritual journey there with four years of intense study of HATHA YOGA, from 1959 to 1963.

Upon leaving the academy, he began mission work outside India to disseminate the teaching and practice of Sivananda. In 1963, he left on a mission to Asia, establishing Sivananda Yoga Centers in Japan and Hong Kong. After teaching in Japan for 10 years, he entered the United States in 1973 and founded the Prana Yoga Foundation in 1974, the Prana Yoga Ashram in Berkeley in 1975, the Prana Yoga Center in 1976, and the Ayodhyanagar Retreat in 1977. During 1975 he traveled to Canada and established his work there. In all, he established nine centers in North America.

Vignanananda has passed on the synthesis of yoga teachings he learned at the academy. His teaching centers on HATHA YOGA with its postures

(asanas) and the practice of PRANAYAMA (regulation of breathing patterns). Through a prescribed pattern of breathing and bodily postures, *prana* or spiritual energy is generated and dispersed throughout the nervous system. The effect is cleansing, healing, and energizing to the entire body.

The ashrams publish the periodical *Prana Yoga Life* through their headquarters in Berkeley, California.

Further reading: *Prana Yoga Centers, International*. Available online. URL: <http://www.proliberty.com/pranayoga/>. Accessed August 16, 2005; Swami Sivalingam, *Wings of Divine Wisdom* (Berkeley, Calif.: Prana Yoga Ashrams, 1977).

prasada

Prasada (to sit inclined toward someone) means “grace.” It derives theologically from VAISHNAVISM but is used in other contexts as well. In theistic Hinduism the grace of God can free one from the bonds of KARMA, the cycle of birth and rebirth. Also, grace can give one blessings in life.

Grace can be conferred by visible means in a number of ways. Most commonly food or flowers will be offered to the divinity in a temple or shrine; once the deity has partaken of and blessed the offering, it is distributed to devotees and called *prasada*. Another very common way of receiving grace is from the *arati* lamp or *PUJA* lamp that is waved before the divinity. One can put one’s hands over the flame and then touch one’s head and/or face to receive the blessing of the divinity. Things given to a person by a guru or other religious personage also can confer grace. In fact, any object placed before an icon in order to be blessed may be given *prasada*, or grace.

Further reading: R. N. Dandekar, “God in Hindu Thought,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 48–49 (1968), 433–625; Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree:*

A Study of Indian Culture and Society (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

pratyahara See [YOGA SUTRA](#).

pratyaksha See [PRAMANA](#).

Prayag See [ALLAHABAD](#).

Premananda, Swami See [SELF-REVELATION CHURCH OF ABSOLUTE MONISM](#).

prithivi

Prithivi is earth, one of the five ELEMENTS (*mahabhutas*) of reality. The word is also a name of the earth goddess in the Vedas. In the RIG VEDA and ATHARVA VEDA *prithivi*, or the “Earth,” is called the *mother*, while the sky is considered *father*. Together they are frequently called parents, or even the parents of the gods; frequently the Sun is mentioned as their child. The Earth is seen as protecting, sustaining, and nourishing but is only rarely referred to without reference to the sky. In later Hindu mythology the earth goddess was called Bhumi Devi.

Further reading: Ralph R. T. Griffith, *The Rig Veda* (New York: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992); Marta Vanucci, *Ecological Readings in the Veda* (New Delhi: D. K. Print World, 1994).

PROUT (est. 1959)

PROUT is an acronym for *PROgressive Utilization Theory*, a socioeconomic philosophy developed by Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1923–90), better known to the world as Sri Sri ANANDAMURTI, the founder of the ANANDA MARGA YOGA SOCIETY. Sarkar saw PROUT as an alternative to both capitalism and

communism, the major economic systems of the 20th century. Sarkar suggested that both capitalism and communism had failed to address the mental and spiritual needs of humankind. He called for a balance between more abstract concerns, such as economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability, and individual and collective human interests.

Sarkar assumed that humanity is heading toward the experience of a higher consciousness as part of the essence of the race’s evolution. Material and intellectual gains lose their significance unless accompanied by spiritual progress. He advocated a decentralized economy with decision making in the hands of local people. The democratization of economic power implied that there would be strict limits on the individual accumulation of wealth.

Alongside the decentralization of economic life, Sarkar saw the need for a world governance system, including a global bill of rights, constitution, and common penal code. Such a world government would institute many of the values he advocated, such as guaranteed necessities of life for all people, moral and principled leaders dedicated to the service of society, individual freedom, cultural diversity, and equal rights for women.

The PROUT system has gained some support from a few intellectuals, but has yet to find implementation on a large scale.

Further reading: Ravi Batra, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism: Can Capitalism Be Saved?* (Richardson, Tex.: Liberty Press, 1990); ———, *Great American Deception: What Politicians Won’t Tell You about Our Economy and Your Future* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996); Dada Maheshvarananda, *After Capitalism: PROUT’s Vision for a New World* (Washington, D.C.: Proutist Universal Publications, 2003); Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *Universal Humanism: Selected Social Writings of P. R. Sarkar*. Edited by Timothy G. Anderson (Washington, D.C.: Proutist Universal Publications, 1983).

puja

Puja, or “worship,” is perhaps the central ceremonial practice of Hinduism. A *puja* minimally entails an offering and some MANTRAS. It can take place at any site where worship can occur, either of a divinity, a GURU, or SWAMI, a being, a person (such as a wife, husband, brother, or sister), or spirit. It can take place in a home or a temple, or at a tree, river, or any other place understood to be sacred.

Incense, fruit, flowers, leaves, water, and sweets are the most common offerings in the *puja*. Also, common is the *arati* or waving of a lighted lamp. The most elaborate *puja*, the temple *puja* before the icon, includes the following elements accompanied by the appropriate mantras (usually in SANSKRIT): invitation to the deity, offering of a

seat to the divinity; greeting of the divinity; washing of the feet of the divinity; rinsing of its mouth and hands; offering of water or a honey mixture; pouring of water upon it; putting of clothing upon it (if it has not been already clothed for the day); giving of perfume, flowers, incense, lamps, or food; prostration; and taking of leave.

In temples the iconic image of the divinity is always treated as a person of royalty would be treated. Therefore, a *puja* will be done in early morning accompanied by songs to awaken the deity. The deity is then bathed, dressed, and fed, and then more fully worshipped. *Pujas* go on throughout the day to the deity, as local traditions require.

In the Jain tradition temple *puja* is actively done only among the SHVETAMBARAS, but it can take on a different aspect. When the *puja* is done to the main image of the temple, a TIRTHANKARA or ARHAT (saint), no grace can be expected in exchange, as the Tirthankara is a released being only and not a god. Shvetambara Jains do other *pujas* to subsidiary gods and goddesses and spiritual personages other than the *arhats*, which can confer desired results.

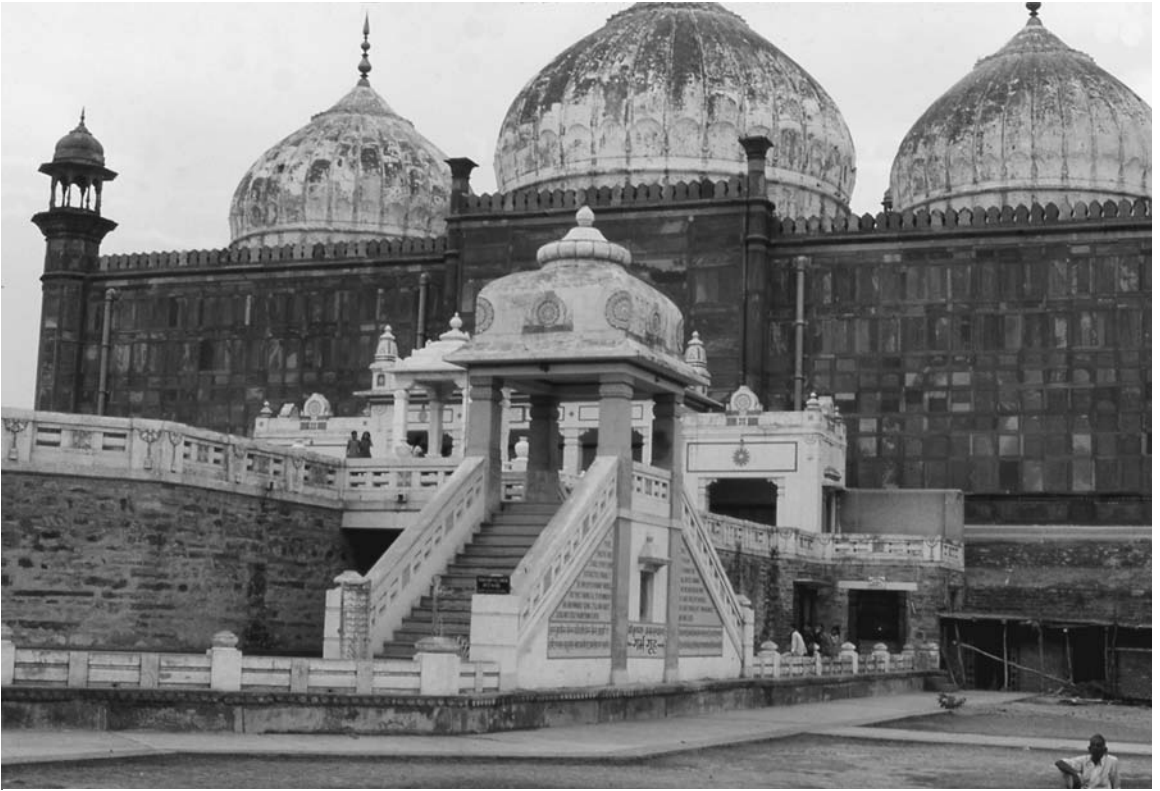
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punya

Punya is karmic merit. Its opposite is PAPA, sin or karmic demerit. This is a pervasive and important concept in Indian culture. *Punya* originally was accrued by sponsoring or performing sacrifices, by giving to BRAHMINS, or by giving of appropriate charity to others. As Hinduism developed, fasting and pilgrimages became additional means of



Brahmin priest performing *puja* to Lord Vishnu, in Belur, Bengal (Constance A. Jones)



Lord Krishna's birthplace, where his *puranic* tale begins, in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (Constance A. Jones)

acquiring *punya*, along with general good works. Generally *punya* was accrued in order to gain a better birth in the next life, although it could also help in the longer path to liberation. The term is used in a general sense in the Jain tradition, too, where the term *punya-karma* is used to mean “wholesome karma.”

Further reading: Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans., *The Laws of Manu* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

puraka See [YOGA SUTRA](#).

puranas

A *purana* is a story about the deeds and life of a divinity. These stories supply a rich backdrop to Hinduism, and, together with the epics, the RAMAYANA and MAHABHARATA, form the mythological infrastructure of the culture. Jains have their own *puranic* literature, but it dwells on the lives of the great teachers, the TIRTHANKARAS and other holy personages who have broken the bonds of karma, rather than on the gods.

There are 18 traditional *puranas* in Hinduism, all written in SANSKRIT. Though their names could be taken to indicate a sectarian focus (as, for example, the Shiva Purana), most often they contain both SHIVITE and Vaishnavite stories. At times stories outline the supremacy of the GODDESS,

such as those in the Markandeya Purana, but even these are juxtaposed with stories from the other two sects.

Included in the category of *purana* are very important local stories, usually in Sanskrit, but sometimes in local languages. In particular, the Tamil language of South India contains many stories like this. These *sthala puranas*, or *puranas* of “place,” tell the origin stories of the vast number of local divinities who populate the Indian landscape. An example of this would be the Tiruvilayadal Puranam, written in Tamil in the 16th century, which tells the story of MINAKSHI from the Brahminical point of view, showing how she became subordinated to SHIVA, who became her husband.

Further reading: Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Work with Special Reference to the Epic and Puranic Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002); David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Pururavas and Urvashi See [APSARAS](#).

purusha

The term *purusha* has two meanings. In the ancient RIG VEDA, X. 90, the Purusha (usually spelled in English with a capital P) is the divine being who existed before time and was sacrificed to create both the transcendent and the material realms. The major Vedic ritual, the AGNICHAYANA, was seen as a reenactment of this primordial creation, and Purusha was seen as being sacrificed once again to mirror the myth. In that context the Purusha began to be called PRAJAPATI.

The second sense of the word *purusha* is found in the SAMKHYA and YOGA traditions, where *purusha* is the individual self. In the early understanding the *purushas* were infinite in number and all eternally distinct from one another. In the later understanding, affected by VEDANTIC thinking, the

purushas merged with the ultimate self, or ATMAN, when they achieved liberation. In current yoga, the term *purusha* is just another term for atman or “worldly self.”

Further reading: S. N. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971–75; Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974).

purusharthas See [ENDS OF LIFE, FIVE](#).

Purvas (c. 700 B.C.E.)

The Purvas are 14 Prakrit (a language derived from SANSKRIT) language works that are understood to be the original texts of the Jain canon; they are no longer extant. BHADRABAHU (c. 300 B.C.E.) is said to be the last Jain teacher to know all 14 of these texts by heart. Brief descriptions of the Purvas appear in later literature. They must have included cosmology, speculations on the karmic substance that holds a soul in transmigration, polemics, astrology, astronomy, and disquisitions on esoteric powers and YOGAS. The Purvas were transmitted orally and preached by MAHAVIRA, the last TIRTHANKARA (saint) of our half-era.

Further reading: Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jain Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

Pushan

Pushan is a Vedic divinity associated with the Sun. He is the guardian of travelers and herd animals. He is frequently linked in the VEDAS to SOMA (who in addition to being a divine drink taken by BRAHMINS at the Vedic ritual is also the god of the Moon). Pushan is known to be an escort on the path to the next world. He is often listed as one of the 12 ADITYAS.

Further reading: Samuel Atkins, *Pusan in the Rig Veda* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941); Jan Gonda, *Pushan and Sarasvati* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1985).

Pushkara

Pushkara (Blue Lotus) is the site of the only large shrine to the god BRAHMA, the creator god. (A smaller shrine to Brahma exists at Itar on the border of Rajasthan and Gujarat). It is located at a blue lotus pond near Ajmer in Rajasthan in western India. The site was referred to in the MAHABHARATA as a place for the worship of Brahma; thus, it has probably been a pilgrimage site for nearly 2,000 years.

Some sources consider Pushkara a premier pilgrimage place, visiting which is equal to visit-

ing all other pilgrimage sites. The current shrine appears to have been built in the 1970s. It is known today for its huge annual camel festival, held on the full Moon in the month of Karttika (October–November). Thousands of camels are taken to the site to be consecrated, displayed, and raced.

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R



Radha

Radha is a popular female figure in Hindu mythology and literature. She is usually presented as the primary consort of KRISHNA; their passionate love has served as a spiritual model and inspiration in Indian culture.

Radha appears in association with Krishna in textual fragments dated as early as the third century C.E., although she is not mentioned by name in the authoritative Vishnu Purana (c. fifth century C.E.) or in the equally important BHAGAVATA PURANA (10th century C.E.). By the 12th century, however, her role as Krishna's consort was assured, as in the magnificent *GITAGOVINDA* of Jayadeva.

The more Krishna became associated in the devotional literature with a divine "sweetness," the more his sweet, poignant love of the cowherd woman Radha and her reciprocal love became the guide for devotees to the god everywhere in India. As the *Gitagovinda* describes Radha's shifting moods of love, anticipation, pique, disappointment, and eventual union, the writer evokes a passion that seems to extend to the elements of nature, the trees, the wind, and the Moon. Radha is love incarnate.

Theologically, the *Gitagovinda* presents Radha as an energy, a SHAKTI (the Hladini Shakti), of

Krishna himself. In the Bengali Vaishnavite tradition, which eventually extended its influence to BRINDAVAN and beyond, one has the sense that Krishna too cannot exist without the love of his counterpart. The devotee becomes, in effect, essential to God. Sometimes the tradition goes so far as to say (in devotional hyperbole) that it is better to worship the devotee than God himself.

Occasionally, in the Vaishnavite tradition, Radha is actually portrayed as Krishna's wife and partner. This attempt to sanitize their relationship distorts it: the power of their attraction is theologically understood to reside in her unavailability: she is married to someone else. Krishna and Radha are eternal paramours and not spouses. It should not go unsaid that Radha is not just a cowherd woman, but the goddess herself. Some elements of the great GODDESS (Mahadevi) can be found in her literary image.

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Radha, Swami Shivananda (1911–1995) *kundalini yoga teacher*

The German-born Swami Shivananda Radha helped to spread KUNDALINI YOGA and other Indian teachings in Canada. She founded the Yasodhara Ashram Society in British Columbia, an important spiritual center.

Sylvia Hellman was born in Berlin, Germany. Before World War II, she established a successful career as a dancer and writer. She and her husband helped the persecuted escape Nazi Germany during the war. Her husband eventually lost his life in this cause. After the war Hellman remarried, but misfortune struck again when her second husband had a sudden stroke and died in 1949. Distraught over her losses, Hellman relocated to Montreal, Quebec, in 1951 with the intention of starting a new life. It was during this period of mourning that Hellman began questioning the meaning of life and pursuing a spiritual practice. In 1954, while at the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP, founded by Paramahansa YOGANANDA, she experienced a vision of Swami SHIVANANDA SARASWATI. Feeling compelled by this vision, she traveled to RISHIKESH, India, in 1955 to meet and study with the swami. After only a few months, Swami Shivananda gave her MANTRA initiation and gave her the name Swami Shivananda Radha. From that moment forward, she devoted herself completely to studying Indian wisdom and introducing what she had learned to the West. While in Rishikesh, she encountered the eternal yogi BABAJI, the famous guru in Yogananda's line of KRIYA YOGA gurus, and received an intense experience of light and expanded consciousness.

After six months in Rishikesh, Swami Radha returned to Canada at the request of her guru. In 1956 she formed the Shivananda Ashram in Vancouver, British Columbia, which was later to become the Yasodhara Ashram in Kootenay Bay, British Columbia. The ashram has served as a major center in the West for the teaching of KUNDALINI practices and has remained independent of the various branches of Shivananda's Divine Life Society.

Swami Radha's teachings rely on practical techniques that make spirituality accessible to modern everyday life. Kundalini and other forms of yogic practice are used to direct individuals toward holistic development and independence. Radha taught what she learned from encounters with Babaji; her methods used visualized healing and divine energy. She often merged yogic teachings with Western psychology and symbolism, effecting an understanding between the Eastern and Western mind.

The Yasodhara Ashram Society publishes an internationally recognized yoga magazine called *Ascent*, which Swami Radha instituted in 1969. Timeless Books publishing company was established by Radha in 1978. Located today in Spokane, Washington, Timeless Books publishes works on kundalini, MEDITATION, mantras, and dream analysis.

In 1992, Swami Radha oversaw the completion of the Temple of Divine Light Dedicated to All Religions located in Kootenay Bay. She also founded the Association for the Development of Human Potential, dedicated to helping individuals achieve their spiritual path. Over 100 members have joined the Yasodhara Ashram Society with affiliated centers called Radha houses located throughout Europe and North America. The centers serve as a continuing resource for Swami Radha's teachings.

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Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli (1888–1975) *philosopher and political figure*

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was one of the great philosophers and thinkers of modern India. He wrote prolifically and held distinguished academic positions in both the East and the West. As was the case for many of his compatriots, he participated in the movement for India's independence and held several distinguished positions in the new government of independent India, including the post of president of India.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on September 5, 1888, at Tiruttani, near Madras (Chennai), in South India. His early years were spent there and in Tirupati, both famous as pilgrimage centers. As was the custom, he married young, at the age of 16; he and his wife, Sivakamuamma, had five daughters and one son. He graduated with a master's degree in arts from Madras Christian College in 1908. In partial fulfillment of his M.A. degree, Radhakrishnan wrote a thesis, *The Ethics of the Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions*, which was a reply to the charge that the Vedanta system had no room for ethics. This thesis was immediately published as a book, when he was still only 20 years old.

In 1909, Radhakrishnan took a position in the Department of Philosophy at the Madras Presidency College. In 1918, he was appointed professor of philosophy in the University of Mysore. Three years later, he was appointed to the most important philosophy chair in India, King George V Chair of Mental and Moral Science in the University of Calcutta (Kolkata).

Radhakrishnan represented the University of Calcutta at the Congress of the Universities of the British Empire in June 1926 and the International Congress of Philosophy at Harvard University. In 1929, he took a post at Manchester College, Oxford, and from 1936 to 1939 served as Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford. In 1939, he was elected fellow of the British Academy. From 1939 to 1948, he was the vice chancellor of Banaras Hindu University.

S. Radhakrishnan later held distinguished positions in government. He was the leader of the Indian delegation to UNESCO during 1946–52 and served as ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1949–52. He was the vice president of India from 1952 to 1962 and the president of the General Conference of UNESCO from 1952 to 1954. He held the office of the chancellor at the University of Delhi from 1953 to 1962. From May 1962 to May 1967, he was the president of India. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan passed away on April 17, 1975. In India, September 5 (his birthday) is celebrated as Teacher's Day in his honor.

Radhakrishnan devoted his life to making India's philosophical and religious riches known to the world. As had the great *ACHARYAS* of *VEDANTA* before him, he translated and commented on the *UPANISHADS*, *VEDANTA SUTRA*, and *BHAGAVAD GITA*; all of those works remain in print.

Radhakrishnan, by training, was the rare philosopher who could genuinely appreciate and compare Eastern and Western philosophy. In nearly every book he wrote he included detailed comparisons of various philosophical views, with the understanding that all spiritual paths have certain commonalities at their core. Part of his mission was to assess and evaluate both traditions on their own terms. He always remained, however, a true student of the Vedanta and saw the limits of approaches that do not at some point transcend the rational.

As did his compatriot *MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI*, Radhakrishnan believed in an India that was spiritually aware and grounded in its ancient

spirituality, but not bound by inherited social conventions destructive of freedom and justice. As others did, he criticized Indian traditions such as the caste system and customs that degraded women, and he fought to establish a pluralistic and democratic society that would fulfill the highest ideals of Indian tradition.

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Radhasoami Movement (est. 1861)

The Radhasoami Movement began in Agra, India, in the 1860s with the teachings of Swami Shiv Dayal Singh. He himself reflected a variety of Hindu influences, including devotion to KABIR, SIKHISM, NATH YOGA, and the Vaishnavite tradition. Each of these emphasized the importance of sacred words and the guidance of a spiritual master in transforming the self.

Singh became known as Soamiji Maharaj, because he was believed to be the incarnation of the Supreme Being Radhasoami Dayal (or Merciful Radhasoami). In 1861, Shiv Dayal Singh began holding *satsangs* (gatherings) in Agra, preaching *Radhasoami* as the true name of God. Although Singh himself was greatly influenced by Guru NANAK, the founding teacher of Sikhism, the Radhasoami movement is not to be understood as an offshoot of Sikhism. It is often considered heretical by orthodox Sikhs because it does not adhere to the *Adi Granth*, the Sikh scripture, as the only guru. Orthodox Hindus treat the movement with suspicion because of its disregard of caste.

The Radhasoami tradition blends progressive leadership with esoteric beliefs and spiritual practices, a contradiction that gives this movement a unique personality. Radhasoamis practice a type of yogic meditation known as *surat-shabd* (spirit-sound), which they believe is based on scientific principles alone, not faith. The experience of *shabd*, or sound current, is an internally heard vibration from God that allows for spiritual evolution. The movement accepts a hierarchy of leadership with one major teacher in charge at all times; a Sant Sat Guru is considered to be a human being who has taken birth from the highest spiritual plane and has reached an exalted state by practice of *surat-sabd* yoga. A Sadguru is next in this structure, having received understanding from the Sant Sat Guru and practice of *surat-sabd* yoga. A Satsangi is a follower who learns the practice of *surat-sabd* yoga under the direction of a Sadguru.

Singh's students were mostly members of the urban merchant caste community, both householders and ascetics. After his death in 1878, there were many splits in the movement due to the lack of a clearly established method for selecting a successor. The succeeding masters gave birth to over 20 Radhasoami lineages, most of which have disappeared. Today the most famous branches include Radhasoami Agra, Radhasoami Dayal Bagh, and Radhasoami Beas.

Radhasoami Agra occupies the original site at Soami Bagh in Agra, where a memorial shrine for the founder, Soamiji Maharaj, has been in construction since 1904. Soamiji Maharaj's fourth successor, Babuji Maharaj, died in 1949, leaving the community to await the coming of the sixth Sant Sat Guru. A spacious residential colony and institution are administered by the movement's Central Administrative Council, which was originally established in 1902 by Maharaj Saheb (second successor).

The Dayal Bagh branch was founded by Kamta Prasad Sinha at Ghazipur in 1907. In 1913 Sinha's successor, Anand Swarup, moved the organiza-

tion's headquarters to Agra, directly across from Soami Bagh. The two communities have remained separate, each maintaining a large residential colony, shops, post office, and bank. *Satsangs* (gatherings) are held every evening, drawing crowds in the hundreds.

The Beas branch was created in 1892 under Baba Jaimal Singh and is located in Punjab. Further splits in this group have produced the Ruhani Satsang founded by Kirpal SINGH, known as Kirpal Light Satsang; the movement became popular in the United States under the leadership of Kirpal's successor, Thakar Singh. The colony at Beas is a utopian city unto itself and draws thousands of attendees annually. *Satsangs* of this group gather near the Beas River and in Delhi and Bombay with thousands of people in attendance.

The movement at large claims over 1 million initiates in South Asia and tens of thousands more throughout the rest of the world.

See also [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#).

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rajas See [GUNA](#).

rajasuya

The *rajasuya* was an important VEDIC ritual used for the installation of a king (*raja*). It proclaimed the sovereignty of the king and invoked the fealty of his subjects. A number of SOMA offerings were made that could take as long as two years to complete. The king would take symbolic steps in four directions to assure sovereignty everywhere. He would ride a chariot about and shoot at a mock-up of a rival, to show his kingly prowess. The

rite ended with a throw of the dice; the winning throw would assure the king's good luck in the future. A losing throw would make him cautious in his rule.

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raja yoga See [YOGA SUTRA](#).

Rajneesh, Bhagwan Sri (1931–1990) guru who taught a syncretic path to enlightenment

Sri Bhagwan Rajneesh was a controversial guru whose syncretic teachings and antinomian philosophy attracted a wide following in India and the United States. Legal problems eventually led to expulsion from the United States.

Born Rajneesh Chandra Mohan on December 11, 1931, in Kuchwara, a small village in central India, Rajneesh was the eldest of 12 children. His parents, Swami Devateerth Bharti and Ma Amrit Saraswati, practiced JAINISM, and Rajneesh remained a strict vegetarian throughout his life in consonance with Jain teachings. Interested since childhood in philosophical questions and the matter of death, he developed critical skills and studied philosophy at Jabalpur University. After receiving a master's degree in philosophy he taught for several years at Madhya State University.

In 1966, Rajneesh received enlightenment and began to travel throughout India instructing students and gaining a following. From 1969 to 1974 he taught at Mount ABU in Rajasthan. In 1974 he opened the Rajneesh Ashram in Poona. Here many Americans and other Western devotees attended his *satsangs* (gatherings) and lived in residence. Some have estimated that 50,000 sought enlightenment with him in Poona. In 1981, he fled Poona because of tax evasion

charges and opened an ASHRAM on the 65,000-acre Big Muddy Ranch near Antelope, Oregon, in the United States, which he named Rajneeshpuram. Trouble dogged the ashram, including charges of poisoning, arms stockpiling, and antinomian sexual practices among top aides, although not by Rajneesh himself. The ashram was closed and Rajneesh sought sanctuary in North Carolina but was arrested there for visa violations. He was given a suspended sentence and a fine on condition that he leave the United States. He returned to Poona, where his health continued to fail. Here he abandoned the name of Rajneesh and adopted Osho, a name derived from the expression *oceanic experience* coined by William James. He died in Poona on January 19, 1990.

Rajneesh was well versed in the scriptures and teachings of many world religions. He created a syncretic spiritual path that combined elements of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Greek philosophy, humanistic psychology, and modern forms of therapy and meditation. Basically he taught the non-dualism of ADVAITA Hinduism, believing that all reality is one in essence. Consistently with *advaita*, he taught that souls experience REINCARNATION until they receive enlightenment and the realization of the God that is within each person.

He was known as the “sex guru” because he espoused open sex and freedom from inhibitions. He initiated his disciplines into “neo-sannyas” that did not require the total renunciation of traditional Hindu *sannyas*. Men were given the title *Swami* and women were called *Ma*. He favored dismantling the nuclear family and wanted it replaced with alternate forms of community and methods of child care. Prior to 1985, disciples wore red robes and a *mala* (necklace) of 108 beads with a picture of Rajneesh attached.

The movement at its peak claimed about 200,000 members and 600 centers around the world. It was targeted by anticult groups as an evil organization bent on mind control. Before his

death, Osho appointed a group of 21 individuals to administer the meditation resort in Poona and the organization. They now operate 20 meditation centers worldwide and publish the *On Line Osho Times* newsletter. The current organization, Osho International, sponsors a number of Web sites and local communities.

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Rakshabandhan (Rakhibandhan)

The Raksabandhan festival, which takes place on the full Moon of the lunar month of Shravana (July–August), is one of the most popular in India. On this day sisters tie an amulet of red or yellow threads on their brother's wrists to guard them for the year. If they are more learned, they may utter a well-known SANSKRIT MANTRA. The brothers then offer them presents. The observance is said to have originated after INDRA, king of the gods, was defeated in battle by the *asuras*, or antigods. It is said that he was able to regain his sovereignty when his wife, Shaci, put an amulet on his hand after performing some austerities.

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Rama (Ram)

Rama is a god worshipped over all of India. He is considered to be an AVATAR or descended form

of Lord VISHNU. Rama's full story is told in the RAMAYANA epic.

In that famous epic, the gods ask Vishnu to incarnate in the world as a man, in order to kill the demon Ravana, who was tormenting all the worlds. Ravana has a boon that he cannot be killed by any god or demon, but, in his arrogance, he never imagines he can be killed by a human. Thus the avatar of Rama is arranged.

Rama is born to Dasharatha, king of AYODHYA, and his wife, Kaushalya. In his youth Rama is sent to the sage Vishvamitra's hermitage to help

defend it from beings who are trying to disrupt the sacred Vedic rites. There he slays the female being Tataka who was tormenting the sages. He receives certain celestial weapons and is obliged to kill the demons Marica and Subahu.

Rama later wins a contest to bend the bow of SHIVA; as his prize he wins the hand of SITA, daughter of the king of VIDEHA. In Ayodhya another wife of Dasharatha, Kaikeyi, plots to have her son, Bharata, put on the throne in place of Rama. As a result Rama is forced into exile for 14 years. His wife, Sita, and his brother, Lakshmana, follow him.



Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, with his wife, Sita (right), and his brother, Lakshmana (left) (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

During his exile Rama's wife, Sita, is abducted by the demon king Ravana and taken to the island of Lanka. Making friends with a group of monkeys, including the faithful HANUMAN, Rama carries out his divine duty in defeating Ravana and winning back his wife. When he doubts her faithfulness, Sita passes a trial by fire. She is taken back, and the rule of Rama begins in all its perfection. Some versions of the Ramayana, such as the Kambaramayanam in Tamil, end at this point.

In other versions the story continues. New questions are raised concerning Sita's faithfulness, and Rama has his brother Lakshmana take her to the forest. He does not realize that she is pregnant with twins. Rama's sons Kusha and Lava are born in the forest ASHRAM of Valmiki. Eventually, they end up in a war with Rama's troops and defeat them.

At this point Rama realizes he has sons and wants Sita to return to live with him. She goes before him and in disgust at her two rejections asks the Earth to swallow her up. Rama continues his just rule and dies, as all avatars must, being human forms of the divinity. Rama is worshipped throughout India and celebrated in regional folklore and high culture alike. Sita is always included, and Hanuman and Lakshmana are rarely omitted in any iconographic or pictorial presentation.

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Rama, Swami See [HIMALAYAN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE](#).

Ramacharaka, Yogi (1862–1932) *yoga popularizer*

The American-born Yogi Ramacharaka was a popular author in the New Thought movement in the United States. He later became the first major popularizer of Hindu thought in America.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, to William and Emma Atkinson, William Walker Atkinson was an important and influential figure in the early days of the New Thought movement, which included a number of religious organizations devoted to the application of metaphysical principles to healing. He married Margaret Foster Black of Beverley, New Jersey, in 1889 and they had two children. He pursued a business career from 1882 onward, and in 1894 he was admitted as an attorney to the Pennsylvania Bar. The pressures of his profession caused a complete physical and mental breakdown and financial disaster. He sought healing, and in the late 1880s, he discovered New Thought, through which he attained health, mental vigor, and prosperity. By the early 1890s Chicago had become a major center for New Thought, mainly through the work of Emma Curtis Hopkins, and Atkinson decided to move there, where he became an active promoter of the movement as an editor and author.

In 1889 Atkinson's article "A Mental Science Catechism" appeared in Charles Fillmore's new periodical, *Modern Thought*. In 1900, he became editor of *Suggestion*, a New Thought periodical, and he continued to write for and edit another periodical, *New Thought*. He founded a Psychic Club and the Atkinson School of Mental Science and became a prominent metaphysical writer, publishing ten books on psychic, occult, and New Thought topics between 1901 and 1911. His Mental Science included lessons in personal magnetism, psychic influence, thought-force, concentration, will-power, and practical Mental Science.

While performing his *New Thought* editorial job, Atkinson became interested in Hinduism. He met a pupil of the late Yogi Ramacharaka, Baba BHARATI, who had become acquainted with Atkinson's writings. Atkinson and Bharati shared similar ideas. They collaborated, and with Bharati providing the material and Atkinson the writing talent, they wrote a series of books, which they attributed to Yogi Ramacharaka as a measure of their respect. Beginning in 1903, Atkinson eventually wrote 13 books under this pseudonym. All the titles were published by the Yogi Publication Society in Chicago; they reached a wider audience than Atkinson's *New Thought* works ever had. All of his books on yoga are still in print; their continued popularity is a credit to both Baba Bharati and Atkinson.

Under the name Yogi Ramacharaka, Atkinson became the first popularizer of Hindu thought and practice in the United States. He also continued his career as an attorney, being admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1903, and he continued to write well-received books on *New Thought*. In 1916 he began writing articles for Elizabeth Towne's magazine *The Nautilus*, and from 1916 to 1919 he edited the journal *Advanced Thought*. For a time he was honorary president of the International *New Thought* Alliance.

William Walker Atkinson died on November 22, 1932, in California.

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Ramakrishna, Sri (1836–1886) influential mystic and priest of goddess Kali

Recognized as one of the greatest spiritual geniuses of modern Hinduism, Sri Ramakrishna was influential through his own example and through the work of his disciple Swami VIVEKANANDA.



Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886), Bengali mystic and famous exponent of universal religion (Courtesy Vedanta Society, San Francisco)

Sri Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836, as Gadadhar Chattopadhyay to a poor Bengali BRAHMIN family. He had his first spiritual experience at the age of six or seven and entered into trancelike states throughout his childhood. He neglected his studies, preferring to spend his time in solitary MEDITATION, singing, and performing of Hindu stories. For much of his life he served as priest at the KALI Temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta, living a life of renunciation, but he stopped performing priestly functions when the “divine madness” took over his conscious awareness.

Sri Ramakrishna married SARADA DEVI, whom he viewed as the GODDESS incarnate; she looked

upon her husband as her GURU, or spiritual teacher. He did not found a movement or establish an organization, although he was the inspiration of a generation of Indian Hindus. His influence spread throughout the world through the VEDANTA SOCIETIES/RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION, founded by Swami Vivekananda.

He remained devoted to the goddess Kali throughout his life, and he was also initiated into tantric practice (see [TANTRISM](#)). His teacher Tota Puri taught him *ADVAITA VEDANTA* and the practice of absorption in the formless, which he quickly achieved. His whole life was an uninterrupted contemplation and union with God. His life and teaching appeal to seekers in all religions, as he taught that the revelation of God can take place at all times and that God-realization is not the monopoly of any one religion or faith. He took up various disciplines associated with other religions, specifically Christianity and Islam, and taught that all paths lead to the same God-realization. His message of the harmony of religions was based on unity in diversity and a fellowship of religions based on their common goal of God-consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna died on August 16, 1886.

His famous disciple Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur Math, near Calcutta (Kolkata) to propagate the teachings of his guru. Sarada Devi, his widow, also began to assert the leadership role that Ramakrishna had specified for her, and she became known as the mother of the movement that Ramakrishna inspired. These missions offer spiritual, medical, and educational services to the people of India. Outside India, in 18 countries on five continents, the same organization is known as the Vedanta Society and is headed by swamis initiated and trained at Belur Math.

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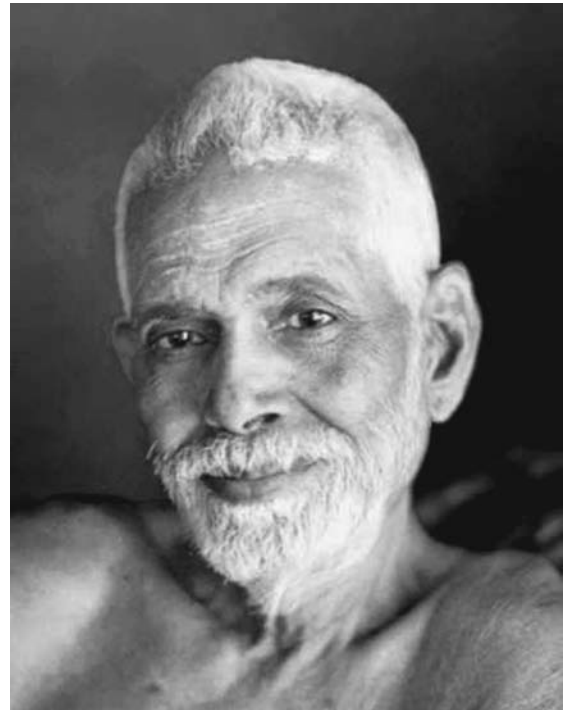
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Ramakrishna Math and Mission See [VEDANTA SOCIETIES/RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION](#).

Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) *advaita Vedanta teacher and mystic*

Ramana Maharshi was a GURU of international renown from southern India who taught the non-dual philosophy of *ADVAITA VEDANTA*.

Ramana was born on December 30, 1879, as Venkataraman Ayyar at Tiruchuli near Madurai



Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), widely recognized teacher, mystic, and foremost exemplar of *advaita* (non-dual) consciousness (Courtesy Sri Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu)

in the state of Tamil Nadu. He was the son of Shundaram Ayyar, a scribe and country lawyer. The family was religious, giving ritual offerings to the family deity and visiting temples. As a child, Ramana was largely uninterested in school; throughout his life he showed a marked inclination toward introspection and self-analysis.

In 1896, at age 17 he entered an altered state of consciousness that had a profound effect on him. He experienced what he understood to be his own death and return to life. Without any training by a teacher or any personal discipline, he attained a profound experience of the true Self and realized that the body dies but consciousness is not touched by death. He saw the real “I” as immortal consciousness, as a powerful living truth experienced directly. Thereafter, all attention was drawn to this “I” or Self and he remained conscious of his identity with the absolute at all times. All fear of death was permanently extinguished.

Ramana ran away from home to the holy mountain Arunachala near Tiruvannamalai. He spent 10 years in silent Self-absorption at the temple there, at the foot of the mountain, and in various caves on the mountain. Throughout these years he remained silent and maintained disciplines of spiritual purification and nonattachment. Against the pleas of his family, he refused to return home. His absorption in higher consciousness was so deep that he neglected care of his body and was at times famished and chewed by insects. Disciples began to gather around him to take care of his physical needs and to gain awareness of his non-dual state of consciousness. His disciples gave him sacred books, and he became conversant with the religious traditions of South India.

When Ramana broke his silence, he responded to questions about Self-consciousness. His teaching was given largely through conversations with guests who visited him on the mountain, where his ASHRAM began to develop. His advice to those who sought SELF-REALIZATION was to direct them to the question “Who am I?”—a self-inquiry that he

insisted be used tirelessly as each student discovered deeper and deeper levels of awareness. The aim of this inquiry was for each person to find an awareness of non-duality, in which the oneness of the Self and cosmos could be perceived. He taught that a person who is not attached to the results of action can live in the world as an actor who plays a role in a drama but is immune to emotional disturbance, because the person realizes that action is only play acting on the stage of life.

Ramana remained at Arunachala for the duration of his life, welcoming visitors from East and West, while becoming a living example of non-dual consciousness. He died there of cancer on April 14, 1950, sitting in a lotus position.

The Ramanashramam exists today as a sanctuary that houses Ramana’s grave, his cave residence, and accommodation for many visitors.

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Rama Navami

Rama Navami is a special day of worship of Lord RAMA. It takes place on the ninth day of the bright half of the lunar month Chaitra (April–May), considered the birthday of Lord RAMA; he was born at noon. All devotees of Rama must perform this worship, and others may do it optionally. It is accompanied by a vow of fasting beginning the previous night. If one performs the veneration properly, one is said to have one’s sins destroyed and may even acquire *MOKSHA* or release from birth and rebirth.

Rama Navami is a popular observance. After a night of fasting, the following day the devotee

performs worship before an image of Rama and makes a fire offering for Rama in a small specially created shrine; the celebration continues with a *japa*, or repetition of the MANTRA to Rama, the second night. Once the observance is complete the image is given to a learned BRAHMIN.

Only the most orthodox perform the full ritual these days. It is, however, observed en masse in places significant for Rama such as AYODHYA and Rameshvaram.

Further reading: C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Anita Ganeri, *Hindu Festivals Throughout the Year* (Mankato, Minn.: Smart Apple Media, 2003); Swami Harshananda, *Hindu Festivals and Sacred Days* (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 1994).

Ramanuja (Ramanujacharya) (1077–1157 C.E.) (dated by his tradition from 1017 to 1137) philosopher of Vedanta

Ramanuja was the founder of the philosophical school known as Vishistadvaita or “special non-dualism.”

Ramanuja was born in the city of KANCHIPURAM near present-day Chennai (Madras). His father was a Vedic BRAHMIN who was known as a brilliant student of the SANSKRIT scriptures. His first GURU, Yadava Prakasha, had a system that was not to the liking of this student genius. It soon became clear that he would develop his own system, which would challenge that of his teacher. Ramanuja’s guru is said to have arranged to have him killed, while luring him on a PILGRIMAGE to the holy city of BENARES (Varanasi) on the GANGES. Ramanuja was miraculously saved and eventually his guru bowed to his feet and accepted Ramanuja himself as his teacher.

Ramanuja’s system of VEDANTA combines the view of a unitary divinity found in the UPANISHADS with the theism of later Hinduism. For Ramanuja the divinity is endowed with innumerable auspicious attributes, as opposed to the view of SHAN-

KARA, who saw the ultimate reality or BRAHMAN as completely beyond characteristics or characterization. Where as Shankara’s *brahman* was an inert, transcendental reality upon which the world was lain as a false conception, Ramanuja’s *brahman* was the Lord VISNHU, who was the soul to the universe, which was seen as his body.

Along with many philosophic works in Sanskrit, Ramanuja wrote incisive Sanskrit commentaries on the BRAHMA SUTRAS and the BHAGAVAD GITA in his effort to refute the earlier and well-accepted school of Shankara. In his work, he validated the mystical vision of the Vaishnavite saints of Tamil Nadu, the ALVARS, whose Tamil songs were later collected as the main text for Tamil Vaishnavites, the *Nalayiradivya prabandham*.

The movement in India that follows the teachings of Ramanuja and the Alvares is known as Sri Vaishnavism. It is a tradition of temple worship, in which both Tamil and Sanskrit scriptures are recited in the temples. The most important site for this tradition is the temple to Lord Ranganatha (Vishnu) at Shrirangam in Tamil Nadu. There is a secondary shrine in the smaller community of Sri Vaishnavites at Melkote in Karnataka.

Further reading: John Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974); Julius J. Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Mean and Metaphysics in the Vedantic Theology of Ramanuja* (Houndmills, England: Macmillan, 1986); Swami Tapasyananda, *Bhakti Schools of Vedanta* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, n.d.); P. B. Vidyarthi, *Divine Personality and Human Life in Ramanuja* (New Delhi: Oriental, 1978).

Rama Tirtha, Swami (1873–1906) devotee of Krishna and Vedanta philosophy

In his brief life, Swami Rama Tirtha managed to spread the teaching of Vedanta philosophy and spirituality in India and around the world.

Gossain Tirtha Rama was born at Murariwala, a village in the district of Gujranwala in

the Punjab, to a family of Gosain BRAHMINS, distant descendants of the famous author of the RAMAYANA, Gosain TULSIDAS. When he was only a few days old his mother died and young Rama was reared by his father, his aunt, and his elder brother, Gossain Gurudas. Throughout his childhood he demonstrated unusual intelligence, a contemplative nature, and a love of solitude. He listened to recitations of scripture and discussed spiritual topics with religious teachers. At age 10, Rama was put under the care of his father's friend Bhakta Dhana Rama, a teacher who taught simplicity and purity to the young Rama.

A good student, Rama demonstrated a love of mathematics and achieved high marks at the undergraduate and master's levels. After completing college, he served as professor of mathematics at Forman Christian College in Lahore and, for a short time, reader at Lahore Oriental College. He began to read the BHAGAVAD GITA and became an ardent devotee (*bhakta*) of Lord KRISHNA. He could read Persian, English, Hindi, Urdu, and SANSKRIT literature. He studied VEDANTA with Sri Madhava Tirtha of the Dwaraka Math. His meeting with the famous Swami VIVEKANANDA in Lahore was decisive in turning Rama toward the vow of SANNYAS (renunciation) and wearing of the ochre robe.

In 1900, he went to Brahmपुरi, on the banks of the GANGES near RISHIKESH in the foothills of the Himalayas, to become a forest dweller with his wife, his two children, and a few others. Because of ill health, his wife soon left the forest with one of the children. In the forest, he realized the all-inclusive bliss of SATCHITANANDA, or SELF-REALIZATION. Then he returned to the plains to teach Vedanta. He traveled to Japan, America, and Egypt and spent a year and a half in San Francisco, where he founded the Hermetic Brotherhood, dedicated to the study of Vedanta. In St. Louis, he spoke at the Religious League of the St. Louis Exhibition. Hailed as a torch of divine knowledge, he lectured in Christian churches all over the United States.

On his return to India, he continued to teach in the plains, but his health grew worse. He returned to the Himalayas and took residence at Vasishtha Ashram, where he died at age 33 on the banks of the Ganges River on October 17, 1906.

Considered a saint of modern India, Swami Rama taught the oneness and all-pervasive nature of God. He began as a devotee of BHAKTI YOGA, devoted to the image of Krishna, but he became more and more an ascetic and mystic who experienced the non-dual nature of reality consistent with Vedanta.

Under the guidance of a direct disciple of Swami Rama, Sri R. S. Narayana Swami, the Rama Tirtha Publication League was established in Lucknow; it has published most of Swami Rama's writings in several volumes.

Further reading: Rama Tirtha Publication League, *Swami Rama: Various Aspects of His Life by the Eminent Scholars of India* (Lucknow: Dayal Printing Works, 1939); Swami Rama Tirtha, *In Woods of God-Realization: The Complete Works of Rama Tirtha*, 19 vols. (Lucknow: Rama Tirtha Publication League, 1909–48).

Ramayana

The Ramayana, the story of the “adventures” (*ayana*) of RAMA, is one of the two great Hindu epics. It was composed originally in SANSKRIT in an epic of about 25,000 verses. The author, VALMIKI, is called the “first poet” of India and the Ramayana is considered the first long poem composed by humans (as opposed to the VEDAS, which are much older and are considered to be eternal and uncreated).

The SANSKRIT Ramayana dates to 600 to 400 B.C.E. Told in seven chapters, the story is in brief as follows: the gods ask VISHNU to take a human incarnation in order to fight the demon king RAVANA, who gained powers by extreme austerities and cannot be defeated by a god. Vishnu agrees to incarnate as RAMA. Rama is born to King Dasharatha and his wife, Kaushalya. Dasharatha

has three other sons: Bharata, Lakshmana, and Shatrughna.

While Dasharatha is joyfully preparing to retire from the world and leave the kingdom to his virtuous oldest son Rama, a second wife of his, Kaikeyi, demands, as the fulfillment of a boon he had given her, that her own son, Bharata, be raised to the throne and that Rama be exiled in the forest for 14 years. Dasharatha, true to his word, must grant her wish, but he dies soon after of a broken heart. Rama, the most obedient of sons, accepts his father's request with equanimity and prepares to go to the forest. Lakshmana, his younger brother, will go with him. Sita, his wife, is asked to stay behind, as travel in the forest will involve great travail, but she argues strongly that she wants to be at her husband's side. Rama relents and allows her to go with him.

As they enter the forest, they are found by Bharata. Bharata insists he has no desire for the kingdom and asks that Rama give him his sandals to put on the throne during his absence, as a sign that it is Rama who is king. Wandering in the forest, Rama and Lakshmana meet Shurpanakha, sister of the demon king Ravana. She becomes smitten with Rama and changes her horrific form into that of a beautiful maiden.

Rama sees through Shurpanakha's guise, but to play a joke on his brother he tells her that while he himself is married, Lakshmana is not. When she approaches Lakshmana with passion, Lakshmana enters into the joke by sending her back to Rama, saying he is unworthy of her. Shurpanakha then returns to Rama and jealously tries to kill Sita. At this Lakshmana cuts off her nose and ears.

Eventually, Surpanakha persuades her brother Ravana to try to steal Sita away from Rama. Ravana has the demon Maricha take the form of a golden deer. When Rama chases after the deer, by means of ruses Ravana carries off Sita in his flying chariot and takes her to his island kingdom of Lanka.

In a frantic search for Sita, Rama and Lakshmana befriend the monkey Sugriva and his friends, including the virtuous and faithful HANUMAN. Hanuman is sent to Lanka to reconnoiter. He finds Sita but is caught by the demon Rakshasas. They put a cloth on his tail and set it afire, but he escapes and burns Lanka by jumping from building to building with his tail in flames.

Hanuman returns to Rama, and they make a plan to defeat Ravana and his demon hordes and get Sita back. They are successful and Sita returns, but Rama and others question her fidelity. She offers to undergo a trial by fire, passes the test, and joins Rama on the throne.

The last and final chapter, omitted in some vernacular versions, tells of the origin of the *rakshasas*, the demon hordes, and the history of Ravana. It also tells of Hanuman's childhood and other diverse tales. Sita's faithfulness, however, is once more questioned.

Sita is forced to flee to the forest while pregnant with Rama's two sons. She goes to live at the ashram of none other than Valmiki himself, the author of the RAMAYANA story. Some years later, while Rama is conducting an *ashva medha* (HORSE SACRIFICE), Valmiki arrives with his two disciples, Kusha and Lava, the sons of Rama. They recite the Ramayana story for Rama and he learns of their existence. He calls Sita back to court, where she admonishes him and asks the Earth to swallow her up rather than that she return to a husband who has wronged her.

The Ramayana story is an ocean from which a vast array of stories, myths, plays, and celebrations have emerged in Sanskrit and every vernacular. It is one of the central narratives of Indian culture; every region of the country has a variety of sites for pilgrimage and visitation that are connected to its characters—Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and the others.

Celebrated versions of the Ramayana have been written in nearly every Indian language, including the Islamic-associated Urdu. Among

such notable and beloved vernacular Ramayanas are the Krittivas Ramayana in Bengali, the Tulsidas Ramcaritmanas in Old Hindi, the Tamil Kambaramayana, the Pampa Ramayana of Nagachandra in Kannada, Ranganatha's Ramayana in Telugu, and the Vilanka Ramayana in Oriya. Numerous Sanskrit versions of the story have also been composed, including the Adhyatma Ramayana and Yogavasishta Ramayana.

Tales in Sanskrit about the Rama dynasty both before and after the events in the Ramayana have proliferated, such as *Raghuvamsha* and *Uttararamacharita*. The Jains as well tell stories of Rama, Ravana, and other characters from the Ramayana in Sanskrit and other languages. Every year in northern India the Ram Lila festival is celebrated, culminating in a grand burning of the effigies of Ravana, his son, and his brother.

The Ramayana story also traveled widely outside India. Thai and Indonesian versions are still popular.

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Ram Chandra, Sri Maharaj (1899–1983) *teacher of raja yoga*

The boy who became Sri Ram Chandra later in life was born in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh state on April 30, 1899, into a BRAHMIN family. Following in the footsteps of his scholarly father he began his education with a particular interest in philosophy, literature, and geography. Reports indicated that he was not an outstanding scholar but could hold his own intellectually. He joined the judicial services, married, and raised children.

On July 3, 1922, he sought out Guru Sri Ram Chandra of Fategarh, who preserved and followed an ancient form of yoga called Pranahuti (divine transmission), which the younger Ram Chandra perceived to be superior to the newer methods. He himself had been practicing a form of PRANAYAMA or breathing technique for the previous seven years, but he abandoned this and adopted the spiritual practices of his new guru, who died in 1931.

Sri Ram Chandra felt that he had absorbed the teachings from his spiritual leader and was qualified to carry on his inspiration. He believed that he and his guru had spiritually merged. In 1932, he received a powerful transmission of spiritual energy from his guru. In 1944, he had a vision of white light that revealed Lord KRISHNA's true nature. He knew that his mission was to carry on the work of his master.

Sri Ram Chandra founded the Sri Ram Chandra Mission in 1945 in honor of his guru and in 1976 built an ashram in Shahjahanpur. Throughout these years he taught raja yoga and gave spiritual guidance to many.

Sri Ram Chandra Maharaj died on April 19, 1983, after many years of service to raja yoga. The lineage is preserved through his disciple Sri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari of Madras (Chennai), who assumed the mantle at his bedside and is now the president of Sri Ram Chandra Mission. He is affectionately known as "Chariji."

Further reading: Sri Ram Chandra, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, Vol. 1 (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Sri Ram Chandra Mission, 1989); ———, *Down Memory Lane*, Vol. 1 (Shahjahanpur: Sri Ram Chandra Mission, 1993); ———, *Truth Eternal* (Shahjahanpur: Sri Ram Chandra Mission, 1986).

Ram Das See [SIKHISM](#).

Ramdas, Swami (1884–1963) *devotee of Ram and founder of Ananda Ashram*

The child Vittal Rao was born in 1884 at Hosdrug, in the South Indian state of Kerala, to a devout couple, Sri Balakrishna Rao and Srimata Lalita Bai. As a child, he exhibited an extraordinary luster in his eyes and considerable wit. Largely uninterested in formal schooling, he completed high school but did not pursue higher education. With his marriage in 1908 he became a householder, and he remained so until age 36. As a young husband and father, he vacillated between periods of employment as a spinning master in a cotton mill and periods of unemployment and idleness.

In 1920, in response to a number of trials and challenges in his worldly life, he began to inquire into the meaning of life and to chant the name of God, RAM. An intense spiritual transformation occurred: he realized the futility of worldly pursuits and the higher need for everlasting peace and happiness. He became convinced that God alone can give eternal peace and happiness. He decided on a life of self-surrender, as attachments to family, friends, and business dropped away. At that time, his father gave him the Ram MANTRA, *Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*, to recite, and his detachment from worldly pursuits increased as the mantra took a place in his life. He then renounced the life of the world and became a wandering mendicant, a SADHU. He began his life of pilgrimage in December 1922, vowing to accept everything that happened as proceeding from the will of Ram alone. At Srirangam, he bathed in

the CAUVERY RIVER and offered up his old white clothes to the river. He donned the ochre robes of a SANNYASI and took the name *Ramdas*. He never referred to himself in the first person again.

In 1922, he met the sage of Arunachala mountain, RAMANA MAHARSHI, and spent 20 days near Ramana in a cave there, chanting his mantra. He emerged from the cave and saw a strange light with a landscape completely changed: everything was Ram.

In 1931, after his years of traveling in faith, his devotees established Anandashram for him in Kanhangad, Kerala, where he lived with Mother KRISHNABAI, a realized saint of South India. Together they worked to improve the living conditions of the local people, founded a children's school, established a medical clinic, and formed a cooperative for weavers. They toured India together and conducted a world tour in 1954–55, with the purpose of sharing a message of universal love and service. Swami Ramdas died on August 2, 1963.

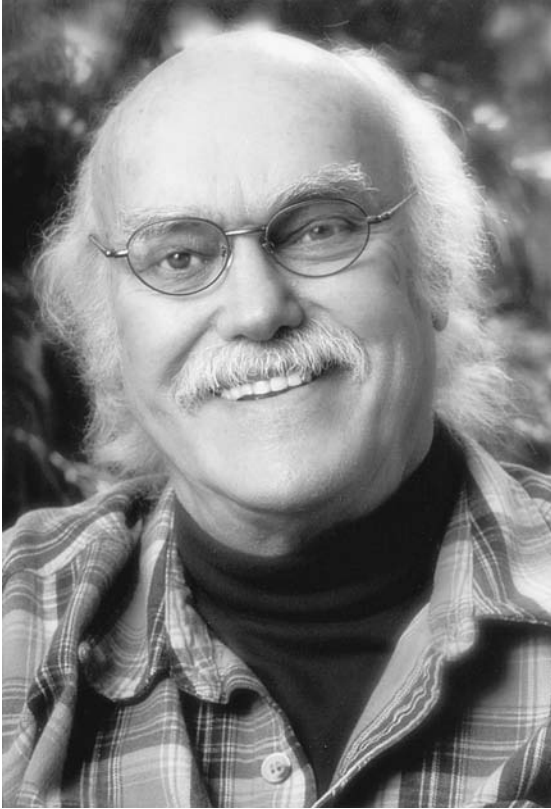
Ramdas wrote many books, all currently in print.

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Ram Dass (1933–) *American psychologist and teacher of Hinduism*

Ram Dass was an important figure in the American counterculture of the 1970s. He drew wide public attention to yoga and Hindu spirituality and has continued his teachings since.

Richard Alpert was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 6, 1933, the son of a prominent corporate attorney who also served as president of the New York–New Haven Railroad and was a



Baba Ram Dass (b. 1933), popular American guru and founder of Hanuman Foundation (Photo by Richard Alpert. Courtesy of Hanuman Foundation)

founder of Brandeis University. Richard grew up on the New Hampshire estate of his father.

A student of psychology, Alpert received a B.A. degree in 1952 from Tufts University, an M.A. from Wesleyan University in 1954, and a Ph.D. in 1957 from Stanford University. From 1958 to 1963, Alpert taught and conducted research at the Department of Social Relations and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. In 1961, he first took psilocybin with his Harvard colleague Timothy Leary (1920–96) and became an integral part in the Harvard Psilocybin Project. With Leary and

Ralph Metzner, he wrote *The Psychedelic Experience*, a recapitulation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* intended to be a manual for establishing an appropriate setting for experiencing psychedelic drugs such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin, mescaline, and dimethyltryptamine (DMT). While at Harvard, Alpert began research into human consciousness and, with Timothy Leary, Aldous Huxley, Allen Ginsberg, and others, conducted research into LSD and other psychedelics. Because of the controversial nature of this research, Alpert and Leary were dismissed from their teaching positions at Harvard in 1963.

Alpert continued his collaboration with Leary on psychedelics. He became involved with attempts to realize a utopia as presented in *Island* by Aldous Huxley, and the *Glass Bead Game* by Hermann Hesse. He participated in utopian organizations, including the Zihuatanejo Project and the International Foundation for Internal Freedom. During the mid-1960s he lived for a while at the Millbrook estate in New York, a center for psychedelic religion, together with Leary and Swami Abhayananda (Bill Haines).

In 1967, he traveled to India, where he met Baba HARI DASS (b. 1923) and NEEM KAROLI BABA (d. 1973), both noted gurus who provided disciplined study on a spiritual path. They became role models for him and he replaced his attraction for drugs with a higher spiritual calling induced through MEDITATION and yoga. Neem Karoli Baba, also called Maharaji, gave Alpert his spiritual name *Ram Dass* (servant of God) and taught him *raja* yoga, a form of yoga that utilizes meditation as the primary means of moving from mundane reality to the invisible supersensible world of higher consciousness (*SAMADHI*). Ram Dass says that Neem Karoli allowed him for the first time to see his life in spiritual terms. Overall, he spent nearly two years with Neem Karoli before Neem Karoli's death in 1973. His *Miracle of Love* is a collection of stories about Neem Karoli, from the homely to the miraculous. Not a devotee of any one particular philosophy or method, Neem

Karoli tried to inculcate in others the path of love and service.

Upon returning to the United States, Ram Dass wrote his most famous book, *Be Here Now* (1971), which suggested that one can live only in the present moment. The past has vanished into history and the future is not yet here. In order to be fully present in one's life, Ram Dass advocated the simple proposition of residing in and being aware of the present moment and position in the world. Ram Dass believes that all people are on a spiritual path to enlightenment. Each has individual needs, including GURUS (teachers) of different kinds; some gurus may not be in the physical body, but meditation allows one access to the invisible world and communication with those gurus who no longer have a physical body. His book offered an alternative to psychedelics in his emphasis on gurus and spiritual pathways to guide one out of immersion in the drug culture. *Be Here Now* propelled Ram Dass into a role as a major teacher of the New Age counterculture and remains in print to the present time.

In the 1970s, Ram Dass took on a vigorous schedule of speaking, teaching, and traveling from his base in New Hampshire. Various organizations emerged around his many interests. For example, he and Bo Lozoff developed the Prison Ashram Library, which distributed literature to prison populations. It particularly taught lessons in meditation for inmates who wanted to live a life of service while incarcerated. This service has grown to include halfway houses and mental health programs.

In the mid-1970s, Ram Dass had become involved with several female gurus—Hilda Charlton (d. 1988) and Joya Santana (now known as Ma JAYA SATI BHAGAVATI of the Kashi Ashram). His interaction with them led to a spiritual crisis that he discussed in a famous *Yoga Journal* article, “Egg on My Beard.” He assumed a low profile for a brief period but soon reemerged as a major writer and speaker. Before the decade was out, he had produced three important books: *The Only Dance*

There Is (1976), *Grist for the Mill* (1977), and *Journey of Awakening* (1978).

Ram Dass instituted the Hanuman Temple in Taos, New Mexico, to implement worship of HANUMAN, the god of service, and to honor his guru, Neem Karoli Baba.

In pursuit of the goals of KARMA YOGA, Ram Dass initiated several organizations devoted to service and community development. In 1974, he organized the HANUMAN FOUNDATION inspired by the devoted servant of the Hindu god RAM in the RAMAYANA, which is the organizing vehicle for Ram Dass's lectures and workshops and administers many social projects, including the Prison Ashram Project, designed to help inmates grow spiritually during incarceration, and the Living Dying Project, designed to foster conscious dying.

He is cofounder, with Larry Brilliant (b. 1946), and board member of the Seva Foundation, an international organization dedicated to relieving suffering in the world (*seva* means “service” in SANSKRIT). Seva sponsors diverse activities, including programs in India and Nepal to erase curable blindness, Guatemalan programs to restore the agricultural life of impoverished villagers, and programs in the United States to call attention to the issues of homelessness and environmental degradation.

On February 19, 1997, Ram Dass suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhagic stroke in his left brain. The stroke left him with extensive right side paralysis, expressive aphasia, and a number of recurring and threatening health problems. Since this event he has returned to a limited schedule of appearances and talks. He lives in San Anselmo, California, and Hawaii.

Mickey Lemle's documentary *Ram Dass: Fierce Grace* documents the biography of Ram Dass through friends' and family members' reminiscences and archival footage of his days of communal living. It shows the physical and psychological effects of the stroke and the spiritual lessons he has learned from his disability.

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Rameshvaram

Rameshvaram is an island off the coast of Tamil Nadu whose name, “Rama the god,” indicates its sacred status. It is told in the RAMAYANA that Lord RAMA, wishing to purify himself after killing his enemy, the demon king RAVANA, stopped at Rameshvaram. He sent HANUMAN, the monkey god, to BENARES (Varanasi) to get a SHIVA LINGAM for him to worship. While Hanuman was gone, Rama’s wife, SITA made a lingam out of sand and began to worship it. When Hanuman returned, Rama ordered him to get rid of the sand lingam and install his own. Hanuman could not dislodge the lingam created by Sita. The second lingam then was set up beside the first so that both could be worshipped.

Rameshvaram is one of the most visited PILGRIMAGE sites in India and is accepted in Hinduism as one of the four major sites in India to visit (along with BADRINATH, Puri, and DWARAKA). The main temple on the island is dedicated to Shiva and is said to have been established by Rama himself. Historically, the present temple bears the architecture of the seventh through 13th centuries. There are a number of sacred places on the island associated with Rama, including

the spot from which Rama allegedly shot his bow to destroy the bridge to Lanka after the war.

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Ram Lila See NAVARATI.

Ramprasad See SEN, RAMPRASAD.

Ramsuratkumar, Yogi (1918–2001)

enlightened yogi from South India

The revered South Indian beggar saint Yogi Ramsuratkumar attracted a large following through his ascetic piety and God-intoxication.

Ramsurat Kunwar was born on December 1, 1918, in a small village on the GANGES River five miles from BENARES (Varanasi) in Uttar Pradesh. The son of a devout rural BRAHMIN family, he was a natural mystic and brilliant student, who graduated from Ewing Christian College in ALLAHABAD with a B.A. in English literature in 1939. Pressured by his family to assume the responsibilities of family life, he was married in 1938. For some years he taught high school English in Bihar state, but he was consumed by a passionate longing for the divine that finally compelled him to make, in 1947, the first of many trips to South India to search for his GURU.

Yogi Ramsuratkumar said he had three “spiritual fathers” who initiated him into the spiritual path: Sri AUROBINDO, RAMANA MAHARSHI, and Swami (Papa) RAMDAS. After the deaths of the first two, Ramsurat returned to Swami Ramdas at Anandashram in 1952. At that time Ramdas initiated him



Yogi Ramsuratkumar (1918–2001), enlightened beggar yogi of South India (*Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram, Tiruvannamalai*)

into the MANTRA, *Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram*; after a week of repeating the mantra, Ramsurat was permanently cast into a state of God-intoxication. Referring to this permanent annihilation of his personal identity in the divine, he often said, “In 1952 Ramdas killed this beggar; this beggar is no more.”

Swami Ramdas sent Ramsurat Kunwar away from Anandashram, telling him, “You cannot live in the ashram. . . . Remember, under a big tree, another big tree cannot grow. Go and beg.” A divine madness similar to that of Sri CHAITANYA had taken over Ramsurat Kunwar, and at the cost of great personal anguish, he was compelled to enter the life of a wandering mendicant beggar. For seven years (1952–59) he traveled throughout India, finally arriving in 1959 at the foot of holy Mount Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

Ramsurat would often visit Ramanashram, the ashram of Ramana Maharshi. One of Ramana Maharshi’s senior disciples, T. K. Sundaresan Iyer, recognized the divine state of the unusual 40-year-old beggar and gave him the name *Yogi Ramsuratkumar*. For many years Yogi Ramsuratkumar was a “hidden saint,” living on the streets of Tiruvannamalai and subsisting entirely on the

food and clothing that were given to him by local people who recognized his radiance and sanctity. The sublime countenance of the beggar yogi, his spontaneous outbursts—ecstatic song, chanting of the name of God, and blessing of all who were drawn to him—began to capture the hearts of seekers. By 1980 he had become widely recognized by countless numbers of people, including the American spiritual teacher Lee LOZOWICK, who became an ardent disciple.

In 1994 the Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram at Tiruvannamalai was built by his devotees. Dressed in the ragged shawls and stained *dhotis* of a beggar, with nothing but a country palm fan and coconut bowl, Yogi Ramsuratkumar gave *DARSHAN* twice a day in the temple of his ashram from 1994 through 2001. He did not teach by linear discourse, but through transmission of divine presence, instructing his disciples to repeat the name of God, using his name, Yogi Ramsuratkumar, as a mantra to invoke divine blessings. His vision of the unity of all life was often given in his words “My Father alone exists! There is nothing else, nobody else—past, present, future—here, there, everywhere, anywhere!

Today, *darshan*, chanting, Vedic rituals, and celebrations are regularly observed at the Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram. The *mahasamadhi* (tomb) of Yogi Ramsuratkumar is housed there. Farther south, a temple complex dedicated to Yogi Ramsuratkumar is situated near the ocean at Kanya Kumari in the small village of Kanimadam. Completed in 1993, this temple conducts daily *BHAJANS*, worship, and Vedic rituals.

Lee Lozowick has established ashrams in the United States, France, and India where the name of Yogi Ramsuratkumar is chanted.

Yogi Ramsuratkumar died on February 20, 2001.

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rasa

Rasa (taste) is an important Indian aesthetic concept applied to literature, drama, and occasionally mythology. Literally, *rasa* is the taste, savor, or essence of something. In aesthetics *rasa* is the essential sentiment embedded in a work of art that evokes a corresponding emotion in the reader, listener, or viewer.

Works of art are often classified according to their predominant *rasa*. The literature variously lists eight to 11 of them. The most common listed are 10: *shringara* (love), *hasya* (mirth), *karuna* (pity), *raudra* (anger), *vira* (heroism), *bhayanaka* (fear), *bibhatsa* (disgust), and *adbhuta* (wonder); some add *shanta* (tranquillity) and *vatsalya* (parental fondness).

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rasa lila

The *rasa lila*, “round of passion” or “play of passion,” is the circle dance performed by Lord KRISHNA with the cowherd women (*GOPIS*). Krishna stood at the center of the circle and multiplied himself so that he could dance individually with each of them. Devotees of Krishna understand this dance as a metaphor for the relationship between God and the individual soul. God is complete and isolated unto himself, while also residing intimately at the center of everyone’s soul.

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Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) (est. 1925)

The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps) was for decades the most important organization advocating cultural and political HINDU NATIONALISM. It still wields influence and has been involved in a number of violent disputes with ethnic or religious minorities.

The RSS was first formed in 1925, but the movement has its origins in the ideology of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was convicted of murdering several British officials at the turn of the 20th century. Tilak had been influenced by the reformist goals of the reformer Rammohun ROY, but not by the liberal means that Roy championed.

The RSS was formed as a cultural and social organization, whose goal was to transform India from a secular state into a Hindu nation. Some call it “Hindu fundamentalist,” but in actuality the ideology of *Hindutva*, or Hinduness, only relates to certain aspects of Hinduism. For example, while the RSS extols many of the achievements of the Indian past, its doctrines are not based on the four VEDAS, the most ancient Hindu sacred texts.

The RSS has argued that India fell under British rule because it lacked discipline and aggressiveness. It promotes a hypernationalistic, militaristic agenda seeking the expulsion of Muslims and the establishment of Hindu supremacy in India.

RSS rejects the pluralism found in traditional Hinduism. Instead, it has a goal of creating a single Hindu doctrine for India. It also wants to eliminate Islam and opposes Buddhism and JAINISM. It opposes preferences that the Indian government has extended to the lower CASTES; some of its support can be attributed to a reaction by higher-caste

Hindus to the government's equalization policy. In fact, its supporters generally are from the upper castes. While they criticize the distortions of the caste system (which they blame on Muslim influence), critics believe they really want to return to a time when caste was rigidly enforced.

RSS members conduct daily drills of martial arts wearing khaki uniforms, mimicking the Italian and German fascists they have long admired. Their disciplined members are often the first to arrive at the site of natural disasters, a practice that earns them support. The women's wing of the RSS is the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti; its structure is not unlike the male sections.

The political wing of the RSS is the BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY. It was founded in 1951 on a platform of an undivided India and aimed to unify all Hindus under a single doctrine, whereas in the past Hindus have tolerated a wide diversity of thought, and has rejected what it sees as European influences on modern Hindu thought and practice. At first it also rejected industrialization, but that orientation was eventually discarded.

During the 1940s M. S. Golwalker transformed the RSS into the most powerful of all the nationalist movements in India. Their influence expanded over time through missionary work. In February 1983 the RSS was implicated with nationalists and local police in Assam in a massacre of Muslim immigrants. The rioters also killed local Hindus who coexisted with the Moslems.

The RSS was also involved, along with the SHIV SENA movement and Bharatiya Janata Party, in the controversy that arose around the Babri Masjid Mosque in the Uttar Pradesh city of AYODHYA. This mosque was built in 1528 on a site that is believed to be the birthplace of RAMA, the AVATAR of VISHNU.

As early as the 1940s RSS members managed to erect an image of Rama in the mosque. Later the government sealed off the mosque to try to dampen the dispute. In the 1980s, the RSS started to protest the very existence of the Babri Mosque. Lal Krishnan Advani, a leader of the VISHVA HINDU

PARISHAD (another nationalist group) led the protests; he was recently indicted for his role in the affair. The RSS protesters eventually attacked and destroyed the mosque in 1992. Nationwide communal riots resulted, in which 3,000 people were killed.

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Rati

In Indian mythology Rati, Desire, is the wife of the god of love KAMADEVA. Some stories say that she was created from the sweat of the RISHI DAKSHA, SHIVA's future father-in-law. Other stories make her the daughter of BRAHMA, who killed herself when Brahma, ashamed of his own lust, killed himself. Both were revived by Vishnu and she then was given to Kamadeva, the god of love, in marriage.

Rati's most celebrated achievement was to persuade Shiva to revive her husband, after he had burned him to ashes with his third eye. In the best known version of this story, Shiva restores Kamadeva to life but makes him invisible. In other versions, Rati tries to revive her husband by feats of asceticism but is stopped by the rishi NARADA, who forces her to serve as a demon's housemaid,

under the name Mayavati. In still other versions, Rati, in the guise of Mayavati, raises Kamadeva to life and they are married once again.

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Ravana See [RAMAYANA](#).

Rawat, Prem (Guru Maharaj Ji) (1957–) *head of Divine Light Mission and creator of Elan Vital* Prem Rawat, or Guru Maharaj Ji, is a teacher in the Sant Mat tradition who won a large following in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Prem Rawat was born on December 10, 1957, near Dehra Dun in Uttaranchal state, India, the youngest son of Sri Han Maharaj Ji, an established spiritual teacher. Prem received formal education at St. Joseph's Academy, but his spiritual direction was from his father. At age three, he began speaking to audiences about inner peace. When his father died in 1966 he became spiritual leader of the Divine Light Mission (DLM), a foundation Sri Han had established in the 1930s.

Under his leadership the mission continued to teach his father's main techniques, derived from the SANT MAT tradition. The tradition teaches that knowledge, as the energy and source of life, is obtained through four forms of MEDITATION, each of which focuses attention on inner life. Maharaj Ji presented the teaching as a cultivation of inner peace through maintaining silence, watching the process of breathing, and focusing the senses inward. Devotees who take initiation into DLM are said to "gain knowledge" and are called "premies."

Many members of the counterculture in the United States were impressed by Maharaj Ji's message of peace during his tours in the later 1960s, when he was still a teenager. In 1971, after his visits to Los Angeles and Boulder, Colorado, the United States DLM was established in Denver, Colorado. By 1972 the movement spread across the country. Ashrams were established in major cities and the publications *Divine Times* and *It is Divine* distributed.

In 1973 the DLM rented the Houston Astro-dome for a gathering of peace coinciding with the birthday of Sri Han. The event failed to generate large attendance and became a financial loss. Programs and ASHRAMS were soon closed in order to pay off debt and many premies began to leave the movement. In 1974 Guru Maharaj Ji married a Western premie named Marolyn Johnson, a marriage that created conflict between Maharaj Ji and his mother. The fracture caused further troubles for the DLM when his mother returned to India and reestablished the DLM under her eldest son's name.

In the late 1970s the DLM reorganized and moved its headquarters to Miami, Florida. Maharaj Ji distanced himself from the religious association to make his teachings more universal. In the 1980s he encouraged followers to leave the monastic life and to regard him simply as a humanitarian leader. By 1983, he had ordered all Western ashrams to close.

In the mid-1980s, the DLM was renamed the Elan Vital and discarded all religious affiliation. Guru Maharaj Ji changed his name to Prem Rawat, believing that the divinity ascribed to him obstructed his message. Elan Vital became a much smaller organization. He increased his speaking engagements and produced video and sound recordings to spread his ideas.

Elan Vital, now headquartered in Agoura Hills, California, retains its status as a charitable organization, organizing events for Prem Rawat, raising funds, producing and distributing tapes of his messages, and archiving the history of his work.

Supported largely by volunteer staff and sales of his products, Elan Vital is active in the United States, Britain, and Australia.

At present, Rawat continues to give talks on knowledge throughout the world. According to the Elan Vital, his teachings have spread to more than 80 countries and its publications are available in 60 languages.

Prem Rawat lives with his wife in Malibu, California.

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rechaka See [PRANAYAMA](#).

reincarnation/rebirth

The Indian belief in the “cycle of lives” has ancient origin. Souls are believed to cycle through human or animal lives until they are liberated and merge with a higher reality. On rare occasions the tradition refers to reincarnation into a plant or stationary object.

The concept appears to have emerged in late Vedic times. Some argue that the idea was present in the Vedic tradition from the beginning, but little evidence can be found in any of the Vedic collections of MANTRAS, and only very occasional references are found in the BRAHMANAS, the explanatory portions of the Vedic collections. By the time of the UPANISHADS the notion of reincarnation seems to have become centrally important.

Some sects in ancient times appear to have believed that every soul must travel through a fixed number of births; one text puts the num-

ber at 8,400,000. The Ajivika sect believed that these births were all inevitable and could not be escaped; one could reach liberation only after they were all completed.

Many early sects adopted extreme ascetic practices, avoiding any taint of worldly passion, in order not to add to the accumulation of KARMA that had occurred from previous lives. Later Hinduism, as well as Buddhism and JAINISM, made the notion of reincarnation central to spiritual and religious practice, enshrining the notions of karma and SAMSARA (the round of birth and rebirth) in Indian culture and practice.

In these traditions, reincarnation results from one's actions in one's previous life, one's karma. In the process of time one might endure a huge number of highly undesirable births; *samsara*, or worldly existence, was thus a trap one tried to escape.

Such escape of rebirth has been the primary obsession of all practice in nearly all Indian traditions (except Islam) up to the present day. MOKSHA or NIRVANA, the liberation or release from this cycle, became the highest goal in all the major traditions. Release could occur in several ways. One path was severe, world-denying asceticism; even today there are such practitioners hidden away in mountain caves. Meditative yoga was seen as another way, which allowed one's mind or consciousness to remove itself from attachment to worldly life and thereby pave the way to liberation. Alternatively, a focus upon God could earn the grace of the divinity and God could help break the bonds of karma. Traditionally it has been said in Hinduism, too, that a true GURU can literally strip away one's karma, and thus devotion to gurus has become a strong feature of Hinduism.

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Rig Veda

The Rig Veda is the earliest of the four VEDAS central to the Brahminical tradition. According to tradition it was compiled by VYASA. It is usually dated from 1500 to 1000 B.C.E., but since it is an anthology, some of its more than 1,000 hymns might well be older. The great majority of the hymns are from five to 20 lines in length; very few exceed 50 lines in length.

The Rig Veda contains hymns of praise to a pantheon of divinities. It also includes some cosmogonic hymns—hymns that tell of the creation of the universe—that are extremely important for the development of later Hinduism. By far the greatest number of the hymns of the Rig Veda are devoted to INDRA, king of the gods, a deity connected with the storms and rain who holds a thunderbolt, and AGNI, the god of fire. The rest of the hymns are devoted to an array of gods, most prominently MITRA, VARUNA, SAVITRI, SOMA, and the ASHVINS.

Less frequently mentioned in Rig Veda are the gods who became most important in the later Hindu pantheon, VISHNU and RUDRA (one of whose epithets was SHIVA, the benign). A number of goddesses are mentioned, most frequently USHAS, goddess of the dawn. ADITI (she without limit) is a goddess who is said to be the mother of the gods.

The Rig Veda, as are the other Vedas, is understood to be “composed by no man” (*apaurasheya*). It was considered to be an eternal text that is rediscovered during each new cosmic era. Commonly, the Rig Veda is divided into eight cycles, or mandalas, but in it is also traditionally learned in 10 books.

The RISHIS, poet-sages, are said to be responsible for “seeing” or hearing the verses in their divine form and recording them. Each Rig Vedic hymn has a *rishi*’s name attached and some full books or partial books are said to have been received by a single *rishi*. Prominent among the *rishis* are Vishvamitra, Atri, Bharadvaja, Vasishtha, Kashyapa, Jamadagni, and Gautama.

Many of the other *rishis* are descendants of these major *rishis*.

Book III of the Rig Veda, for instance, is said to be received by Vishvamitra and his descendants. Nearly all the hymns of book VI are said to be from Bharadvaja. All the hymns of book VII are from Vasishtha. Most of book IV is said to have been received by the *rishi* Vamadeva, the son of the *rishi* Gotama. All of book II is said to have been received by the *rishi* Gritsmada. There were apparently some women who received Vedic hymns, including Apala of the Atri family; Ghosha, grand-daughter of Dirghatamas; Romasha; and Shashvati. The great majority of *rishis* were Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the two highest castes, but some verses were received by others.

Scholars believe books I and X were recorded later than the others. Book X contains several cosmogonic hymns such as the PURUSHA Sukta, the Hymn of the Divine Man (Rig Veda X. 90), which highlight the theme of cosmic unity. The hymns were very influential in later Indian thought. Most hymns of the Rig Veda, however, are not philosophical; rather, they are directed toward various divinities as part of a ritual cult, which is explicitly detailed in the BRAHMANAS. There are very few hymns of the Rig Veda that do not involve reference to some ritual.

The Rig Veda, as the other Vedas, was passed down from mouth to ear for millennia. It was forbidden to write them, as they were the exclusive preserve of those authorized and qualified to use them properly. Much as in a shamanistic tradition, the Vedas were shared only among initiates who learned from a Vedic GURU. The earliest written texts appeared around the 15th century C.E.

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Rishabha

Rishabha was the first Jain TIRTHANKARA (saint) of our half-era (see [JAINISM](#)). He was followed by 23 others, the last of whom was MAHAVIRA.

Rishabha's life was marked by four auspicious events, which all took place when the Moon was in conjunction with the same star: he entered the womb after a previous life in a heavenly realm, he was born into the world, he left the life of a householder, and he attained infinite knowledge.

In the land of Kosala, he entered the womb of Marudevi, wife of Nabhi, a member of a warrior class family on the fourth day in the dark half of the month of Ashadha (June–July). His mother, as was customary for those who would bear a future ARHAT, an enlightened being, had had 14 auspicious dreams, such as seeing a white elephant and an ox. In the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Chaitra (March–April), he was born. Gods, goddesses, animal divinities, and others descended to greet this great birth and showered down jewels, gold, and silver.

Rishabha lived as a prince and as a monarch for thousands of years. Even as a monarch he was known for his many virtues and for his great teachings of the various arts. In his kingly life his children included the famed BHARATA and BAHUBALI.

In the month of Chaitra (March–April), he gave away all his wealth, mounted his kingly palanquin for the last time, and went to his place of renunciation to become a monk. He sat under a sacred tree; took off all his clothes, finery, and ornaments; and pulled out all his hair in five tufts, as was the custom for one who was to become a Jain monk.

For 1,000 years Rishabha ignored his body in every way, enduring every hardship without complaint or acknowledgment. He would walk very slowly, talk very quietly, and move about very lightly so as not to harm any being visible or invisible. He saw offal and gold as the same and would accept only that which had not been prepared specially for him.

Rishabha spent 1,000 years contemplating himself and doing penance in right conduct on the road to liberation. Finally, taking water only once every four days, he sat under a tree and reached the ultimate insight of full knowledge. Thereupon he became a spiritual victor, a *jina*, and became omniscient. At this time the gods and all other beings went to listen to him preach the Jain doctrine in an awesome and beautiful pavilion they built.

It is said that the Tirthankara Rishabha had 84 disciples who were very close to him and another 84 who assisted him. He had a total of 84,000 monks and 300,000 nuns. He remained seating in a lotus position, omniscient, for 100,000 years. Finally he met his death and his soul ascended to the top of the universe to exist there in eternal effulgence and bliss.

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rishi

A *rishi* in its most ancient Vedic sense was a seer and an inspired poet. The original *rishis* were those who saw or called forth the eternal verses of the VEDAS. The Vedas were not seen as written by anyone; the *rishis* were conduits for them. Most of the Vedic MANTRAS include the name of the *rishi* who recorded them. Seven of these ancient *rishis* are seen as the starting points for the orthodox BRAHMIN lineages: Kashyapa, Atri,

Vasishtha, Vishvamitra, Gautama, Jamadagni, and Bharadvaja.

In the later epics and Puranas, or mythical lore, *rishis* inhabited ASHRAMS or retreat places in the wilderness, where they performed their austerities. These *rishis* were sages, not necessarily connected with the transmission of the Vedas. Some of them were composers or compilers of the epics, such as the *rishi* VALMIKI who compiled the RAMAYANA, and the *rishi* VYASA who gave us the MAHABHARATA. The *rishis* encountered in this later literature often are known for the frightening curses they imposed upon those who had not treated them with due deference and respect.

Rishi today is an honorific term, for instance, in the case of MAHARISHI (great *rishi*) Mahesh Yogi, who founded the TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION movement. Few such people today are considered comparable to the great *rishis* of the past.

See also [SAPTA RISHI](#).

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Rishikesh

Rishikesh (the *RISHI*'s hair, or possibly a corruption of, *Hrishikesh*, an epithet of ARJUNA) is an important Indian PILGRIMAGE center. Many SWAMIS taught or lived there, including SWAMI SHIVANANDA and the MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI, who founded the TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION movement.

Rishikesh lies in northern Uttar Pradesh in the foothills of the HIMALAYAS, on the GANGES. At the Triveni Ghat, the steps down to the Ganges, many offerings are made and ablutions done, for the Ganges is the purest of rivers, and at Rishikesh its water is very cold and fast. At sunset there is a custom there of setting little lamps adrift on the Ganges in worship to Ganga Devi, the river GOD-

DESS. Rishikesh is filled at all times with swamis, SADHUS, mendicants, and peregrinating pilgrims who seek this holy shrine for purification and devotion. Rishikesh is not far from HARIDVAR and is a waystation for pilgrims going farther up the Himalayas to BADRINATH.

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rita

Rita is a VEDIC concept that means "cosmic order." VARUNA was most specifically charged with its maintenance, but many other gods such as AGNI and INDRA were sometimes also said to maintain *rita*. It was understood that the Vedic rituals were necessary to maintain the cosmic order. In fact the greatest of the ancient Vedic rituals, the AGNICHAYANA, or fire ritual, was seen to re-create the entire cosmic order each year. The concept of *rita* is most important as a precursor to the notion of DHARMA, although the latter was extended into social law and social organization as well.

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Roerich, Nicholas and Helena See [AGNI YOGA SOCIETY](#).

Roy, Raja Rammohun (1772–1833) *founder of Brahma Samaj*

Rammohun Roy was a central figure in the Bengal Renaissance of the late 19th century and

the founder of the reform movement BRAHMO SAMAJ.

He was born in Radhanagar, Bengal, on May 22, 1772, to a Bengali BRAHMIN, but religiously diverse family. His father worshipped VISHNU, while his mother was a devotee of the GODDESS. He was raised in Patna, a center of Muslim learning, and was influenced by Islamic teachings against images. Later, in Calcutta (Kolkata), he was exposed to Christianity. A scholar, he knew Bengali, SANSKRIT, and other Indian languages, as well as Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. With his liberal education, he was inclined to reject the traditional orthodoxy of Hinduism



Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), “Founder of Modern India” and creator of the Brahmo Samaj movement (Victoria and Albert Museum/London/Art Resource, NY)

and to accept the common aspects of different faiths, including Buddhism, JAINISM, Hinduism, and Christianity.

Although he read many of the world’s scriptures in their original languages, he sought a way to free his own tradition, Hinduism, from superstition and prejudice. He claimed that the unifying doctrines he sought were contained in the UPANISHADS. With this renewed appreciation of the teachings of the Upanishads, he advocated that Indians learn their own tradition as well as science, philosophy, and modern perspectives. He adamantly rejected image worship, burning of widows (SATI), and the power that the Brahminic priesthood had over the populace. These practices he considered superstitious, prejudiced, and contrary to rationality. Once he became acquainted with Unitarianism through missionaries in India, he allied his movement with the principles of Unitarian philosophy.

Known for his work toward the abolition of *sati*, the immolation of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyre; the disadvantages of polygamy; and challenges to the authority of the Hindu priesthood, Roy became a voice of tolerance and a continuing influence on traditional Indian practices. The first president of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, called Roy a “pioneer of modern India,” and Swami VIVEKANANDA extolled Roy’s love, which extended to Muslims as well as Hindus.

In 1831, he traveled to the United Kingdom and visited France. He died on September 27, 1833.

See also [UNITED KINGDOM](#); [UNITED STATES](#).

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Rudra

Rudra, “the howler,” is the father of the MARUTS, the storm gods of the RIG VEDA, but is also known for causing disease and for healing. The epithet SHIVA, “the benign,” is given to him in the Rig Veda (though he is most often fierce), and thus he is conflated in Indian tradition with Shiva himself. In scholarship the term *Rudra-Shiva* is commonly used in the description of Shiva. The explicit identification of Rudra and Shiva as Lord is first made in the SHVETASHVATARA UPANISHAD of perhaps the fourth century B.C.E.

Uncharacteristically honored alone and not in concert with other divinities, as so many Vedic divinities are, Rudra causes diseases of cattle and men with his bow and arrows and is propitiated and appeased rather than loved. In his fierceness he is associated with desolate and distant places.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Stella Kramrisch and Praful C. Patel, *The Presence of Siva* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Rudrananda, Swami (1928–1973) *American teacher of Shaivism and Siddha Yoga*

Swami Rudrananda, a Brooklyn-born disciple of the Shaivite GURU NITYANANDA, was a popular spiritual teacher in the United States.

Born Albert Rudolph in Brooklyn, New York, Swami Rudrananda grew up in the Depression era without a father. He relates that as a child he demonstrated psychic gifts and could go into trance and tell fortunes. At the age of six he saw two Tibetan lamas materialize and prophesy that the spiritual gifts they were implanting in him would be realized at age 31. As a young adult, he owned and operated an Oriental art shop in New York City.

In 1958 at age 30, Albert traveled to India to find a spiritual teacher. There he met his guru, Swami NITYANANDA, at Ganeshpuri, near Bombay

(Mumbai). The meeting with Nityananda was to change the course of his life. Nityananda was a *mahasiddha*, always in a state of bliss and trance, who did not write or found any organization. His teachings were his direct transmission of spiritual force, and his utterances given in a profoundly immersed state were recorded by his pupils. Nityananda transmitted the creative life force or SHAKTI directly to disciples. Through this transmission or *shaktipat*, the power of kundalini was aroused in the disciple, who could experience an identity with the divine.

Albert had many extraordinary experiences with Nityananda, who even after his death appeared to Rudi and transmitted Shakti to him. However, it was Swami MUKTANANDA, one of the primary disciples of Nityananda, who initiated him into SANNYAS in 1966 and gave him the name *Rudrananda* (affectionately shortened to *Rudi*). Rudi was Muktananda’s first Western disciple, and it was Rudi who took Muktananda to the United States. In 1971 Rudi broke with Muktananda, who wanted him to turn over his ASHRAMS and students.

Rudi’s practice, as was that of Nityananda and Muktananda, was in essence *Shaivite*, although he did not focus on the philosophical aspects. Instead he was concerned to extract the content from the container. His entire teaching was centered on providing spiritual nourishment to his students, to insist that they develop a real practice so that they could create their own internal spiritual mechanism and connection to higher spiritual forces. Rudi was known for assuming his student’s KARMA or spiritual tension, a negative energy that prohibits spiritual growth. This appropriation of others’ karma he called *spiritual cannibalism* (the title of his autobiography). Rudi was said to have removed cancer from one disciple by taking on that person’s karma.

In 1973 Rudi died in the crash of a small plane, en route to a lecture.

Rudi taught from his own center in New York City and opened his first ashram in the United States in Big Indian, New York. Eventually nine

Rudrananda Ashrams were established in seven states. He directly initiated several persons to become teachers in his practice, including Swami Khecaranatha, Swami CHETANANANDA, and Stuart Perrin.

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Swami Rudrananda (Arlington, Mass.: Neolog, 1984); J. Mann, *Rudi: 14 Years with My Teacher* (Cambridge, Mass.: Rudra Press, 1987).

Ruhani Satsang See [RADHASOAMI MOVEMENT](#).

Rukmini See [KRISHNA](#).

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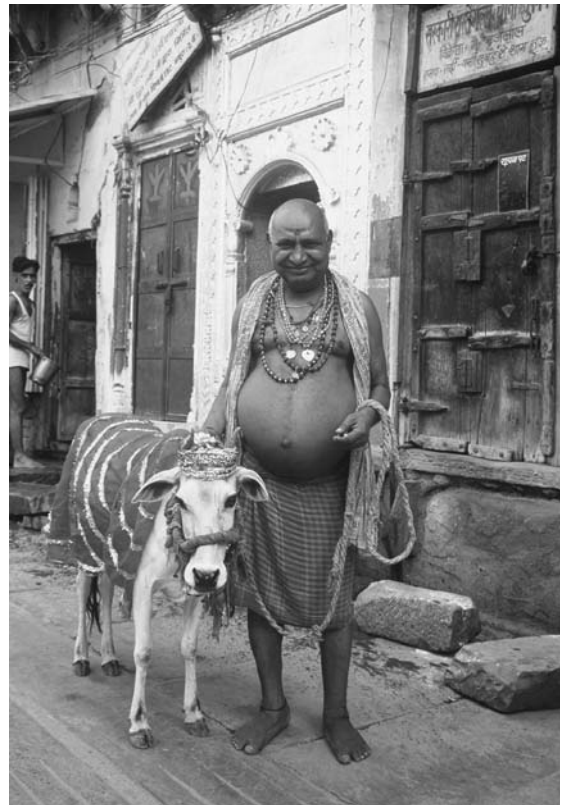


sacred cow

The English idiom *sacred cow* was coined with reference to the veneration of cows that is common in India, but it reflects a degree of misunderstanding. Hindus do venerate and respect cows, but they do not regularly worship them; nor do they consider them in the category of icons or sacred objects. Bulls do have some sanctity, as a bull is the iconic vehicle of Lord SHIVA.

The weight of academic evidence shows that in VEDIC times (c. 1500–800 B.C.E.) bulls and barren cows were sacrificed by BRAHMINS, who then ate the animals. Other Indians also regularly ate beef. It was the Jains, and to some extent the Buddhists, who impressed Indian tradition with the notion of AHIMSA, the avoidance of harm to any being. Only gradually did society, led by the orthodox Brahmins, embrace VEGETARIANISM as the ideal diet and abandon the eating of meat almost completely.

The only Hindus who still regularly eat beef are the Dalit (UNTOUCHABLE) carrion gatherers. As *ahimsa* became the ideal the cow began to assume an iconic role and could not be killed. Since ancient times cow's milk has been a food staple; cow's milk and clarified butter are still used in ritual worship.



A sadhu and a sacred cow dressed for a festival in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (*Gustasp Irani*)

The mythological wish-giving cow Surabhi is an indication of the magic inherent in the species. A late Atharva Vedic hymn (c. 300 B.C.E.) does treat the cow as holy, proclaiming it the universe itself—the Sun, the Moon, the rain. The imagery recalls the first verses of the BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD, which gives sacred, cosmological meaning to the HORSE SACRIFICE as an object of MEDITATION.

No one knows exactly how the cow gained its special status in India, but it is believed that the development of *ahimsa* combined with the near-totemic status of the cow made the animal inviolable. Cows are often allowed to wander the streets to forage. Extreme consequences occur when a cow is struck by a vehicle (the driver might be physically attacked), so cows are scrupulously given the right of way on the somewhat anarchic Indian roadways. Even ownerless bulls are given similar deference.

India, because of its monsoon climate, possesses no pastureland to compare with that of North America, Europe, Argentina, or Australia. As a result, the raising of beef is not economical (although many ecologists claim that feeding grain directly to people is more efficient anywhere than converting it to beef). Therefore, the preservation of all cows for the dairy industry (and for their dung) has local economic logic. When cattle die they are considered carrion and may be taken away and eaten by Dalits (untouchables), who may be desperately poor, lack other food sources and process the skin for leather.

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sacred thread

The sacred thread is a cord worn by upper-caste Hindu males over the right shoulder, running

across the chest and around the left side of the body. It consists of three strands before marriage and six or more thereafter. This thread can be worn by any of the three upper castes (*jatis*), BRAHMIN (priestly), KSHATRIYA (warrior), or VAISHYA (merchant). In practice, Brahmins (the priestly caste) commonly wear the thread, while Kshatriya (warriors) and Vaishya (merchants) wear it less often.

For Brahmins the investiture of the thread traditionally marks the beginning of the “student life” and is a very important ceremony. It is usually done at a young age (eight–12 years) and is considered a “second birth.”

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sadhaka

A *sadhaka* (from the SANSKRIT root *sadh*, complete, accomplish) is anyone who is accomplished in a special skill, or striving to be so. For example, one may be a “literary *sadhaka*.” The term is often used to describe a spiritual seeker. In certain contexts the term is translated as “adept,” but “spiritual aspirant” is also a good translation. The term is particularly used in TANTRA, where it refers to someone who is devoted to the path, but other traditions use it as well, for example, the tradition of SRI AUROBINDO and THE MOTHER.

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sadhana

Sadhana (from the SANSKRIT root *sadh*, complete, accomplish) is used generically for any spiritual practice but is most frequently used to refer to Hindu TANTRIC practice.

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sadhu

A sadhu (from Sanskrit *fisadhvi*, “good”) is a renunciant, most commonly a mendicant who wanders in search of alms. Such people are regarded as good, pure, and religiously devoted. The terms sadhu and SANNYASI (more rarely their feminine forms *sadhvi* and *sannyasini*) are generally used interchangeably for wandering mendicants. The name SWAMI is also sometimes used.

Customs and characteristics vary greatly among sadhus and depend upon the sect to which they belong. They may be devoted to any divinity or to the BRAHMAN, the ultimate reality. Celibacy is universally required. Sadhus who worship Lord SHIVA may freely partake of hashish and marijuana to inspire their devotional chanting; for all others such drugs are strictly forbidden. Sadhus are very often devoted to a particular GURU (almost always a man) and follow his dictates strictly.

The sadhu or wandering mendicant is a very familiar feature of the Indian landscape and a distinctive aspect of Hinduism. While they are typically welcomed, there has always been some skepticism about their authenticity as well.

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Sahadeva See PANDAVAS.

Sahaja Yoga Center (est. 1970s)

Sahaja Yoga was founded by Sri Mataji Nirmala Devi (b. March 21, 1923), an Indian girl born to a Christian family in Chindawara, India. Her parents, Prasad and Cornelia Salve, were direct descendants of a royal household in India. She is said to have been born with complete self-realization and to have known from childhood that she had a spiritual mission to help humankind. Early in her life, she displayed great wisdom, intelligence, and an understanding of the human nervous system and its energetic components.

Her parents were active in the Indian independence movement. Her father was a renowned scholar, a close associate of MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, who served on the Assembly of Free India; he helped to draft India's Constitution. As a child, Nirmala lived with her parents in Gandhi's ashram and served as a youth leader in the independence movement. Gandhi recognized her spiritual gifts and often engaged with her in conversation about the principle of Sahaja Yoga (the union with the divine innate in all people). Both agreed that fundamentalism and religious competition were obstacles to SELF-REALIZATION.

Nirmala studied medicine and psychology at the Christian Medical College in Lahore, Pakistan. In the late 1940s she married C. P. Srivastava, a member of the Indian Civil Service and later a diplomat. They had two daughters.

In May 1970, Nirmala had a transformative experience. She felt an opening in the crown CHAKRA at the top of her head. The KUNDALINI energy coiled at the base of the spine began to uncoil and to open the other energy centers along the spine. Empowered with this spiritual energy,

she decided to assume the role of GURU and teach others how to experience this divine energy. She is believed to be a direct channel for divine power and energy, which flow directly through her. In her teaching she offers self-realization as a beginning process of spiritual or yogic practices. She is said to cause the rising of kundalini in her students when they are in her presence, triggering the awakening of the kundalini spiritual power in masses of individuals simultaneously. The goal of her personal appearances is to guide the individual practitioner to immediate and spontaneous enlightenment.

Since 1970, Nirmala has traveled the world to teach the techniques of Sahaja Yoga meditation. She does not charge fees for her lectures or for the experiences that students have in her presence.

The Sahaja Yoga Center has locations in the United States, Canada, India, and England and issues a periodical, *Nirmala Yoga*. Nirmala has created a number of nongovernmental organizations, including an international hospital in Bombay (Mumbai), an international cancer research center there, an international music school in Nagpur, and a charity house for the poor in Delhi.

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sahasrara chakra

The *sahasrara* (*sahasra*, thousand; *ara*, petaled) CHAKRA is not, properly speaking, a chakra (energy center along the spine). This “eighth chakra” in the KUNDALINI YOGA system represents the highest transcendent state that a practitioner can reach. It is depicted as a lotus with many petals floating 12 fingers above the head.

Sahasrara chakra is the meeting place of the divine feminine in the form of the kundalini with *paramashiva*, or highest SHIVA. Here the full inte-

gration of the transcendent and the earthly takes place, and the yogi can experience all of reality as divinity. The deity of this chakra is *paramashiva*. The SHAKTI is *mahashakti*, or the highest form of the GODDESS. The 1,000 petals are said to be of every color.

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Sai Baba of Shirdi (c. 1856–1918) *revered ascetic*

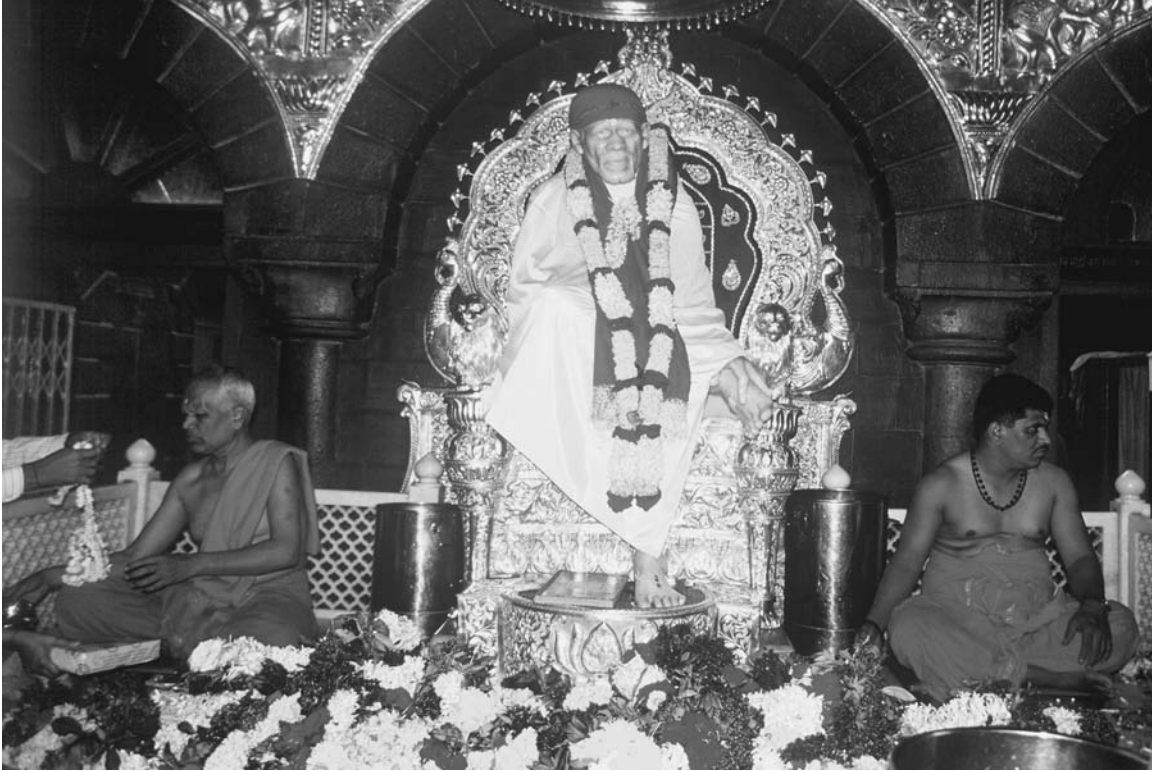
Sai Baba was a highly charismatic ascetic and teacher of the early 20th century, whose influence carries to the present.

The early life of this Indian holy man is almost completely unknown. It is believed that he was born to a BRAHMIN family in a village in Hyderabad state, India, but the particulars of his family and lineage have not been discovered. He left home when he was eight to follow a Muslim teacher. When this teacher died, he associated with a Hindu guru named Venkusa. At age 16 he appeared in Shirdi, a village in Maharashtra state, where he kept to himself, remained silent except in response to questions, and begged for food.

After he had for some years appeared in public in Shirdi, people reported miracles and spontaneous ecstasy in his presence. He reportedly visited people in their dreams and healed the sick. In 1908 he began to be worshipped as a god.

Sai Baba’s teaching emphasized devotion to a guru. He advocated VEGETARIANISM, taken from Hinduism, but also used Muslim MANTRAS and prayers. He advised all to remain in the faith in which they were born but to attend the festivals of other religions.

Sai Baba’s grave in Shirdi is a shrine and place of pilgrimage. He is considered one of India’s



Sai Baba of Shirdi (c. 1856–1918), the shrine of a holy man and miracle worker in Maharashtra (*Gustasp Irani*)

most famous holy men. His influence extends through several spiritual teachers who were influenced by him. MEHER BABA spent time with both Sai Baba and one of Sai Baba's followers, Sri Upasani Baba. SATYA SAI BABA considers himself the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Both Meher Baba and Satya Sai Baba have worldwide movements.

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Saiva Siddhanta

Saiva Siddhanta is a form of SHAIIVISM practiced in Tamil-speaking regions, particularly Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka. It is based on the 28 Shaivite AGAMAS, authoritative texts that interpret and extend Vedic knowledge, and on the teachings of the 63 NAYANMARS, the Tamil Shaivite saints. Other authorities include MANIKKAVACAKAR, who wrote the beloved TIRUVACAKAM (Sacred utterances) (c. 10th century), and Meykanda, with his Sivajnanabodham (Awareness of the knowledge of Siva) (c. 13th century).

Saiva Siddhanta focuses on the three categories of *pati*, *pashu*, and *pasha*. *Pati* is SHIVA, transcendent and pristine. Though he takes on a manifest aspect to enter the world, the world

is always and eternally separate from Shiva. One can realize one's Shiva nature at the core of one's soul, but souls are eternally separate from one another and separate from Shiva. In this sense Saiva Siddhanta is a completely dualistic system. *Pashu* is the individual self that strives to realize its "Shiva nature." *Pasha* are the bonds of KARMA that hold one. Knowing one's Shiva nature confers liberation from birth and rebirth. Shiva can be realized only by worship, knowledge, and the aid of a GURU.

Saiva Siddhanta is characterized by its abject devotion and the sense of helplessness of the individual self in the face of a supreme that it can only understand, but with which it can never merge. Grace plays an important role in Saiva Siddhanta. There is an element of the system that speaks of Shiva/SHAKTI, or the divine masculine/divine feminine, which constitutes the totality of Shiva; this differs from the similar tantric idea, in which there is a complete identity between the level of the soul and the ultimate.

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Saiva Siddhanta Church (est. 1957)

Founded in 1957 in San Francisco, California, by Satguru SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI (1927–2001), the Saiva Siddhanta Church promotes temple worship and propagates the teachings of SHAIVITE Hinduism through a temple/school complex.

The church serves Shaivism worldwide by initiating monks, publishing the writings of Subramuniyaswami and other Shaivite teachers, leading pilgrimages to holy sites of Shaivism, and promoting the study of Hinduism among Hindus and non-Hindus. Since 1957, centers have been established throughout the world. The Sri Subra-

muniya Ashram in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, begun in 1949 by Subramuniyaswami, serves the needs of the Shaivite community near Jaffna.

In the first years of the church in San Francisco, monastics lived in apartments near the church on Sacramento Street and were self-supporting. Later, as the church grew, monks were able to live lives of cloistered study.

At their inception, the temple and school in San Francisco offered Hindu education through classes taught by Subramuniyaswami. The church transcribed and printed the lectures and sermons of their leader and disseminated these in a series of lessons, called the San Marga Master Course. As part of its mission to promote contemporary understanding of Shaivism's scriptures and teachings, the church also established the Himalayan Academy, its publishing house. Today the *SANNYASIS* (renunciants) of the church design, typeset, and illustrate the publications of the Himalayan Academy in Kapaa, Hawaii.

Temple worship is fundamental to Shaivite practice and has been central in the history of the church. Worshipers are encouraged to develop devotion (BHAKTI) to the congregation in each family's shrine room, and in daily life. In addition to the Ganesha Temple, dedicated in 1957 in San Francisco, California, Subramuniyaswami founded Kadavul Hindu Temple at Kauai Aadheenam on the island of Kauai on March 12, 1973. A number of images of deities from the Shaivite tradition are in the temples, and *PUJA* is celebrated several times each day. All major Shaivite festival days are observed through the year.

Publications include a partial translation in American English of Saint Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukural*, a book on Lord GANESHA, a progressive four-part series of premonastic and monastic vows concluding with the vow of *SANNYAS* (total renunciation), and a catechism and creed for Shaivite Hindus, which are Lessons One and Two of the San Marga Master Course.

In the early years of the church, families lived largely in and around the city of San Francisco,

but, with increasing publications and dissemination of the teaching, the church has expanded to other areas, including Hawaii, Canada, and New York. As of 1980, two Dharmasalas, formally organized groups of church families, were in existence—one in Flushing, New York, and the other in San Francisco, California. Following the patterns of the American church structure, members of the Dharmasala work together to strengthen their lives through education, religious observance, shared culture, and economic cooperation. Their organization is overseen by a senior group of elders and a council on ministries.

A core group of church members formed in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, the site of Subramuniyaswami's first ASHRAM. The ashram serves the Sri Lankan community through its children's school of religion, English classes, courses in Shaivite culture, and a full-fledged religious and cultural center for adults. At present, the church has members in many countries, including England, Mauritius, Canada, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, South Africa, and Australia. The entire church membership now is made up of approximately 70 percent born Shaivites and 30 percent converts.

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samadhi

Samadhi refers to the highest state of concentration and absorption in YOGA; the term is used in various yoga traditions. In some systems it is accompanied by a trance, whereby the yogi is completely detached from any external stimuli. *Samadhi* is a technical term in the yoga of PATANJALI, describing the next stage for the adept

after concentration skills (*dharana*) have been developed and deep involvement in MEDITATION (*DHYANA*) has been achieved.

There are two levels of *samadhi*: *samprajnata samadhi*, in which the yogi is still aware of a degree of worldly differentiation, and *asamprajnata samadhi*, in which there is a full realization of the self, or *PURUSHA*, and its consciousness, and there is no involvement in worldly differentiation. *Samprajnata samadhi* is said to retain the “seeds” of awareness of the external world of differentiation, while *aprajnata samadhi* is said to be “seedless”: it no longer engenders thoughts tied to the external world. Neither of these states can be precisely described, because both take consciousness beyond language into indescribable realms.

Samprajnata samadhi is seen by Patanjali to have four steps. At the *savitarka* step the adept can look directly into the essence of real things, but only at the gross level. This step is still bound by conventional understandings, such as that time is divided into past, present, and future.

The second step is *nirvitarka*. At this point, conventional understandings, verbal and logical associations, cease. One transcends the cognitive or perceptive act itself, and one's consciousness meets directly with true reality. However, this meeting is still at a gross and not a subtle level.

At the third or *savichara* level consciousness is able to go beyond the surface of reality to its subtle level. One is still, however, bound by a certain residue of time and space (not as a felt experience, but as categories). Experience at this subtle level engenders the fourth step in this type of *samadhi*, the *nirvichara* level, in which consciousness descends into the very essence of the real world, no longer mediated by “concept.”

Beyond the fourth stage of *samprajnata samadhi* is true *asampranjata samadhi*, in which concept is lost completely; there is a direct realization of the consciousness power of the self, with no limitation. This is sometimes also called *dharma-megha-samadhi*. Here one becomes completely aware that the self and its power of consciousness are not the

body. All “knowledge” and all “consciousness” merge into an undifferentiated awareness that is absorbed in being itself. This does not mean that the person cannot and does not exist and act in the world as before. It merely implies that that person’s awareness is no longer in any way affected or perturbed by that worldly reality. The yogi is then in the “isolated state” (*kaivalya*) and functions on a level beyond ordinary categories.

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Sama Veda

Sama Veda, or “VEDA of the sung chants,” is one of the three original Vedas that form the foundation of Hindu tradition (a fourth Veda was added sometime later). Most of its hymns are devoted to the god SOMA. This god was invoked in many Vedic rituals and was particularly honored by the preparation of a psychedelic substance that took the same name as the god: Soma. The honoring of the god and the preparation of the drug were the particular realm of the Sama Vedic priests.

Any public Vedic ritual required the recitation of passages from the Sama Veda. Many public rites also required the consumption of the Soma drug. The priests of the Sama Veda were known for their sonorous chanting, which is considered the origin of Indian music.

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Sambanthar (*Jnanasambanthar*)

(c. 570–670 C.E.) *Tamil Shaivite poet-saint*

Sambanthar (he connected to God through divine wisdom) is among the trio of most prominent Tamil SHAIVITE saints whose hymns appear in the central liturgical and literary text of the Tamil Shaivas, the TEVARAM.

Born to a BRAHMIN family in Cirkali, Tamil Nadu, near the famous Shaivite shrine of CHID-AMBARAM, Sambanthar was a child prodigy; it was said that he began composing hymns in praise of SHIVA when he was just a child. He is said to have mastered Vedic learning at age three and received by a miracle the ability to compose sacred poetry from Shiva himself.

While still quite young Sambanthar completed four great pilgrimages to shrines of the Tamil region, accompanied by other devotees. A minstrel who accompanied him on these journeys set his hymns to music—or, most likely, simply recorded the melodies that the young saint spontaneously sang; they are still sung by devotees today.

Sambanthar’s hymns frequently condemn the Buddhists and Jains (see JAINISM). He is said to have converted the Pandyan king of Madurai from JAINISM to Shaivism. Many miracles are associated with his life. Legend says that when his parents, at last, arranged his marriage, Shiva appeared as a great blaze of light and invited the saint to merge with him. The wedding party and bride joined the saint in final union with God, before his marriage could be finalized.

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Samkhya (Sankhya)

Samkhya is one of the six orthodox systems of Hinduism that were first developed in ancient times. It is traditionally believed to have originated with the sage KAPILA (c. 500 B.C.E.); its most authoritative text is the Samkhya Karika of Ishvarakrishna (c. 200 C.E.). Today the system has few adherents, and many of its ideas are preserved in YOGA traditions, including modern-day HATHA YOGA. (The word *samkhya* means “enumerate,” a reference to the precise categories within the philosophy.)

Samkhya was dualist: the everyday world of matter and the world of the soul or self were considered to be two completely separate and distinct realms. Early Samkhya was nontheistic; it did not include any divine being or god.

In Samkhya *PRAKRITI*—nature or the manifest universe—was understood to be eternal. It had always existed and would always exist, though it might from time to time contract into an unmanifest form, awaiting the next manifestation. The selves or souls, which were also eternal but shared nothing in common with nature, were called *PURUSHAS*. There was an infinite number of them, and they were all separate and distinct from one another.

Each self or soul contained an inexplicable magnetism, which drew *prakriti* to collect or aggregate around it and give it life, a body, and birth. *KARMA*, the actions committed in the previous birth, would determine each new aggregation. In spiritual terms, this was seen as a constantly renewed trap for the self; the purpose of Samkhya was to show a way to escape the trap.

With the right state of mind, one could move one’s point of view above the whirl of nature so that one’s consciousness could focus on the soul itself and not be distracted by the pull of phenomena. The earthly realm of elements was considered to be characterized by inertia (*tamas*); the organs of action such as hands and feet were seen to constitute a realm of self-binding action (*rajas*); but the senses, mind, and intellect pointed toward the

realm of purity (*SATTVA*). These three aspects of nature, the *GUNAS*, were experienced only in combination, with one or another mode predominating at any one moment.

MEDITATION could help one rise above the *gunas* or intertwined characteristics of nature. Intellect, or higher mind (*BUDDHI*), was the purest aspect of the human being and so was used as an instrument for the transcendence of matter. But even mind needed to be left behind for total release. Release occurred when the soul was freed from the body into its own self-reflective consciousness.

Yoga soon emerged as the practical way to realize the ideals of Samkhya. PATANJALI’S YOGA SUTRA showed the practices that could be used and delineated the various stages of the process. By the first century C.E. the system was practically combined into one, and called Samkhya-Yoga.

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samsara

Samsara is the round or cycle of birth and rebirth that all beings are subject to in the Hindu worldview. By extension it is often used to designate the world, where birth and rebirth are the human destiny. The term is also used in JAINISM, Buddhism, and SIKHISM.

The negative evaluation of samsara, so prevalent in Hindu belief, began to color the ancient VEDIC tradition only in the era of UPANISHADS, some of which begin to show attitudes that would directly lead to the development of world-denying philosophies. The Vedic MANTRAS themselves are life-affirming and envision a peaceful, joyful heaven as the result of merit in one’s life. There

is no trace in them of REINCARNATION, of the hopeless mire of birth and rebirth. Reincarnation appears in the Upanishads, the small texts that were appended to the prose portions (BRAHMANAS) of the Vedas, along with the first evidence of the sense of entrapment in a web of endless births. The Buddhist and Jain traditions also focus on KARMA and the hopeless trap of the world.

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samskara

Samskaras (from the Sanskrit *samskri*, refined, the source of the word SANSKRIT) are ritual ceremonies that mark and purify life cycle events. Every *samskara* requires a BRAHMIN priest to preside and includes prayers, oblations, offerings, and a fire ritual.

Rituals are performed to encourage impregnation and to obtain a male child. A special rite is performed at birth. The *annaprashana* is usually performed at the sixth month after birth to mark the feeding of the first solid food. The investiture of the SACRED THREAD, the *upanayana* ceremony, is performed for twice-born (high-caste) Hindu males when they are between ages eight and 12.

Perhaps the two most important *samskaras* for Hindus are the wedding ceremony and the *sraddha*, or death ceremony. The *sraddha* can be performed only by a male child. It ensures that a soul does not remain as a ghost but goes on either to liberation or to its next birth. A yearly ritual is performed to feed the deceased, in particular Brahmins, lest they fall from heaven. This ancient ritual of feeding the ancestor seems to conflict with the belief that nearly everyone is reincarnated, and that few proceed directly to heaven.

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samyagdarshana See JAINISM.

samyagjnana See JAINISM.

samyakcharitra See JAINISM.

sanatana dharma

Sanatana dharma (eternal way) is a term created in 19th-century India as a more meaningful synonym for *Hinduism*. The word *Hindu*, after all, was not indigenous to the culture, but was coined by ancient Persians (based on their pronunciation of *Sindhu*, the Indus River). Indian spiritual traditions had typically described themselves as “the DHARMA.” Dharma admits of many English translations; it refers to an essential set of rules and prescriptions that make up a given religious path. Those who coined the term *sanatana dharma* wanted to emphasize the Indian sense that their “way” was an eternal one that had had no beginning in time.

Because of the universality of certain Hindu notions, and the acceptance of a wide diversity of spiritual paths within the Hindu fold, the term *sanatana dharma* sometimes is taken to mean the ancient truth behind all religions (not just those of India), the truth that all seek in their own unique ways. In that sense, the *santana dharma* is not merely the religions practiced by the inhabitants of India who look upon the VEDAS as the supreme wisdom, but the “way” of all who seek the highest truth, whatever their religion.

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sannyas See SANNYASI.

sannyasi (f. sannyasini)

A *sannyasi* is a male renunciant who has “thrown everything down.” (Rarely, there will be female

sannyasinis.) Many sects in India have *sannyasis*, men who are seen as no longer a part of the everyday world (only a very few allow women renunciants). The rules or vows vary in the different traditions, but until modern times, *sannyasis* were expected to shun worldly occupations, living only through alms or in a monastic environment.

The vows for *sannyasis* all entail dietary restrictions that limit the number and size of meals, avoidance of women, prohibition on use of alcohol, and a focus on the divine at all times. *Sannyasi* is the fourth stage of life or ASHRAMA FOR BRAHMIN males, the point at which they ideally throw down all conventional life and take up a life of wandering as they focus on God or BRAHMAN.

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Sanskrit (Samskritam)

Sanskrit (*sam*, complete; *krita*, done, i.e., that which is done completely, the perfected, the refined) is the ancient liturgical or ritual language of India. In the Sanskrit language itself the language is called Samskritam.

Sanskrit is the oldest extant Indo-European language. It is linguistically related to such European languages as English, French, and German and such Asian languages as Persian. The earliest evidence for Sanskrit is in the ancient Indian texts, the VEDAS, the earliest of which, the RIG VEDA, dates from approximately 1500 B.C.E. The Vedas were received as divine revelation by seers called *RISHIS*, who recorded them. The Sanskrit of the Vedas is noticeably different from its classical form, as defined authoritatively by the grammarian Panini around 450 B.C.E.

After Panini, virtually no changes were accepted into the language. Today Sanskrit is still spoken by *pandits* (scholars) and those learned



An ochre-robed wandering *sannyasi* in Benares (Varanasi) (Constance A. Jones)

in Indian philosophy. There are several Sanskrit universities today in India, where all classes are conducted in that language. There are a few million Indians who can truly speak Sanskrit today in a population of over a billion or more; none of them speaks Sanskrit only.

There are many theories regarding the Sanskrit language; the different philosophical schools and sects in India have developed their own viewpoints. Most of them believe that the Vedas themselves are eternal and always existed; therefore, Sanskrit itself is similarly eternal, rather than an arbitrary language created by humans; it is the “language of the gods” (*devavani*).

When JAINISM and Buddhism began to develop scriptures and liturgies that departed from the Vedic ritual tradition, they made use of the Prakrits, the regional vernacular languages that had begun to develop out of Sanskrit. In that era (c. 800 to 0 B.C.E.), Sanskrit was still the spoken language of the educated classes and the language of Vedic high culture. By the turn of the millennium, however, even Buddhists and Jains began to write their works in Sanskrit, an indication that the cultural force of developing Hinduism had overwhelmed these heterodox traditions at least in that respect.

Sanskrit, thus, is the cultural link language of India. It has been used as the language of high culture for nearly 3,000 years. The body of extant writing in the language is vast. The Vedas, which are basically collections of MANTRAS, are accompanied by the BRAHMANAS, the ARANYAKAS, and the classical UPANISHADS. Hundreds of later texts called “Upanishads” exist independently of the Vedas.

The Sanskrit epics, the RAMAYANA and the MAHABHARATA, were written somewhat later. The Ramayana is itself about 40,000 verses in length and the Mahabharata over 100,000 verses. Included alongside the epics are the 18 Puranas that tell the tales of the divinities. There are also 18 minor Puranas and hundreds of Sthala-puranas or local works that tell the tales of local divinities.

Other prolific genres emerged over the long history of Sanskrit. There are hundreds of plays, longer poems, and other classical literary forms. There are works on aesthetics, erotics, medicine, philosophy and theology, and logic; there are devotional hymns, dictionaries, works on astronomy and astrology, works on mathematics, ritual, law, architecture, TANTRISM, history, music, sculpture, and painting. Additionally, there is much panegyric literature and many inscriptions. Every one of these Sanskrit genres has examples in the Jain tradition as well. All told, there are hundreds of thousands of texts and manuscripts, most of which have not been studied for centuries and are not edited, let alone translated.

Sanskrit is written in the DEVANAGARI script, which is made up of 48 to 51 letters, depending on the precise system. The script appears to have been devised during the Gupta era (fourth to sixth centuries C.E.).

Most Indian languages rely on Sanskrit-derived vocabulary. Even in a Dravidian language such as Telegu, more than 50 percent of the vocabulary is derived from Sanskrit.

At about the time of the arrival of the Muslims in India in the 13th century, Sanskrit learning began to decline. The vital and central role that Sanskrit had played in Indian culture for 3,000 years began to fade, and the vernacular languages began to develop as literary alternatives. (In South India, Tamil has long had a developed literature, still extant, dating to before the Common Era.)

Even then Sanskrit did not die out. Many texts continued to be written in the language through the 18th century; in fact, many works are still composed in Sanskrit. On Indian television and radio one can hear Sanskrit newscasts and bulletins. There also are a few Sanskrit newspapers.

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Sant Mat

The Sant Mat (View of the Saints) was a heterogeneous group of travelling poet-saints dating from the 14th to 17th centuries who had a profound impact on the religion of northern and central India. These poets included KABIR, Surdas, TUKARAM, and Ravidas. Their most important characteristics were a desire for social reform and a criticism of ritualism and caste. They stressed that the pursuit of spirituality was not limited to religion. The search for truth could be guided by any authentic experience of the One, however defined.

These teachers often ignored religious boundaries and mingled easily with Muslim Sufis. The Sant spirit was carried forward in the Sikh tradition by GURU NANAK, who had gone on pilgrimage and on the Hajj to show that the true God belonged to no particular religion. The Kabir tradition, in particular, has survived to the present, although it does not have the creative vigor and openness it once had; it seems to have become another sect of Hinduism.

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Sant Mat movement (est. 1861)

The Sant Mat movement, also known as the RADHASOAMI MOVEMENT, emerged in the middle of the 19th century in the Punjab, as one of several movements that sought to revitalize the Sikh community after its government was defeated and replaced by the British. The new movement was introduced by Shiv Dayal Singh (1818–78), generally known as Soami Ji, and was distinctive because its leader was a living master, a person serving as an initiating GURU (a structure previously foreign to SIKHISM).

The new guru aimed to teach his followers *surat shabd* (sound current) yoga, as a technique to overcome *kal*, the negative forces that rule this world, and contact the divine. God had created the world by his word; therefore, through the repetition of MANTRAS (*japa yoga*), humans could establish contact with God. Soami Ji's teachings resonated with devotion to the name of God (*bhakti nam*), which had always been important in the Sikh tradition.

Shiv Dayal Singh introduced *surat shabd* yoga in 1861 at Agra, Uttar Pradesh, in northern India. He initiated some 4,000 people and then passed leadership to Rai Salig Ram (1829–98). At the same time, he also sent Jaimal Singh (1838–1903) to spread the movement in the Punjab.

The relocation of Jaimal Singh to Beas in the Punjab divided the movement; the Beas center became the larger of the two. Jaimal Singh's successor, Sawan Singh (1858–1948), built the Beas branch into the largest of what by then had become several segments of the original movement. He initiated over 125,000 people. However, his career was eclipsed by that of one of the 20th-century Beas leaders, Charan Singh (1916–90),

who was said to have initiated over a million disciples.

Throughout the 20th century, the Sant Mat movement emerged into both an important minority movement in India and a global movement with centers throughout the West. At the same time, it splintered into a variety of separate groups, each of which professed to have the true lineage from Soami Ji. More often than not, when a lineage holder died, several claimants to successorship emerged and vied for the allegiance of his following. In some cases, those who did not receive the official sanction as the successor have been able to win large followings. Such was the case for Kirpal Singh (1896–1974), founder of the Ruhani Satsang.

The Indian-based Sant Mat groups all teach largely the same doctrine. In the West, some of the more prominent Sant Mat teachers have been Darshan Singh (1921–89), Rajinder Singh, and Thakur Singh (b. 1929). The American scholar David Christopher Lane has catalogued the dozens of Sant Mat gurus and the movements they led.

Some of the most interesting developments in the Sant Mat tradition have been created by non-Indian leaders who have assumed the role of living master and have built independent movements. For example, Master Ching Hai Wu Shang Shih, one of the very few women leaders in Sant Mat, learned the teachings from Thakur Singh. She has moved on to build a Chinese Sant Mat organization and changed the name of *surat shabd yoga* to the Quan Yin Method of Sound and Light Meditation, in order to present the teaching to a Buddhist Chinese-speaking audience; as her work has grown, it has expanded to include people from a variety of backgrounds and languages.

In the United States, a Westernized Sant Mat group called ECKANKAR (ECK) was started by Paul Twitchell (1909–70), a former student of Kirpal Singh. Twitchell ignored Kirpal Singh's lineage and proclaimed himself the 971st ECK Master, the

recipient of a previously unknown tradition said to reach back into prehistory. Eckankar, Twitchell's organization, has spawned several groups. A somewhat similar group is the Movement for Spiritual Inner Awareness, formed by John-Roger Hinkins. "JR," as he is affectionately known, mixed elements of Christianity and Western esotericism with the Sant Mat teachings, resulting in a new eclectic perspective.

Indian religions have been carried into Africa in a similar manner by immigrants throughout the 20th century. A new branch of Sant Mat emerged in Uganda in 1957. It was founded by Dr. Jozzewaffe Kaggwa Kaguwa Kaggalanda Mugonza, more popularly known as simply Bambi Baaba. While he traveled to India and met with various Sant Mat teachers, he claims an entirely independent revelation of the teachings in a direct manner. In the 1970s, under the government of Idi Amin, he was charged with introducing a foreign religion in the country and forcing his members into a VEGETARIAN and alcohol-free diet.

Another interesting Sant Mat teacher in the West is Guru Maharaj Ji (PREM RAWAT) (b. 1957), who entered the United States in the early 1970s while still a teenager. His organization, originally called Divine Light Mission, now is identified as Elan Vital. He sees his teachings as independent of cultures, religion, beliefs, and lifestyles. Though adopting a secular overlay, he continues to present the Sant Mat teachings and to offer people initiation into the secret knowledge revealed only to initiates.

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saptamatrika

The *saptamatrika* (*sapta*, seven; *matrika*, mothers) are a grouping of seven goddesses found in the VEDAS, and possibly cited on seals of the ancient INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION. They are worshipped in both India and Nepal and have their own iconography. Their names only appear in the post-Vedic period. Six of the seven are considered wives of Hindu gods, as reflected in their names: Brahmani, Maheshvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, and Indrani are married, respectively, to BRAHMA, SHIVA, Kumara (KARTTIKEYA), VISHNU, VARAHA, and INDRA. CHAMUNDA, the seventh, is most often seen as a form of DURGA.

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sapta rishi (saptarshi)

The *sapta rishi* were a grouping of seven (*sapta*) RISHIS (seers), who are said to have received some of the most important books and verses of the VEDAS. They are considered to be the progenitors of the orthodox BRAHMIN lineages (GOTRAS). They are usually listed as Kashyapa, Atri, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra, Gotama, Jamadagni, and Vasishtha. (There is another tradition that lists the chief *rishis* as Marici, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Kratu, Bhrisu, and Vasishtha; in that tradition, they are not necessarily the source for the Brahminical lineages.)

Those in the first list are frequently encountered in the epics and PURANAS, the Indian mythological literature. In the month of Bhadrpada (August–September) the seven *rishis* are honored on the fifth day of the bright half of the month, when the Moon is waxing. The ritual in their honor can be performed by anyone. Worship is offered to images of the seven, and celibacy and a vegetarian diet are observed for the celebration. The images of the *rishis* (often fashioned by hand)

are offered to Brahmins alongside seven pots. This observance guarantees happiness, progeny, and freedom from sin and other difficulties.

The second list of *rishis* are usually worshipped in the seven days that begin on the first day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March–April), the New Year's month. Fruits, flowers, and cow's milk are offered to the *saptarshi*. A single meal is to be taken, only after sundown.

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Sarada Devi, Sri (1853–1920) incarnation of Holy Mother

Sri Sarada Devi, wife of the Kali priest Sri RAMAKRISHNA, was a very popular teacher in her own right, considered to be an incarnation of Holy Mother. She became an important activist in helping the poor and in advancing educational opportunities for women.

Sarada Devi was born in the rural village of Jayrambati, west of Kamarpurkur in Bengal, on December 22, 1853. The eldest of seven children of Ram Chandra Mukhopadhyay and Shyamasundari Devi, Sarada was raised in a poor BRAHMIN household where she assisted her parents in household duties, worked in the fields, and cared for her younger siblings. She was described as a gentle, humble, hardworking, and diligent child. When time permitted, she attended school and learned to read and write.

At the age of five, Sarada married Sri RAMAKRISHNA, a Bengali priest of goddess KALI who was 17 years her senior. By that time, Sri Ramakrishna had experienced his first vision of the divine mother, the goddess KALI, and was living in an ecstatic state of communication with the divine. His mother, concerned with his strange behavior, sought to restore him to worldly life by finding



Sri Sarada Devi (1853–1920), wife of Sri Ramakrishna, incarnation of Holy Mother, and inspiration for Sarada Math/Monastery (Courtesy Vedanta Society, San Francisco, California)

him a suitable spouse. She found Sarada Devi in a neighboring village. After the marriage, Sarada Devi returned to her family and Sri Ramakrishna continued his spiritual practice and priestly duties at Dakshineswar Temple near Calcutta (Kolkata).

At the age of 18, hearing rumors that her husband was suffering from mental illness, she went to him at the temple. Finding him deeply engaged in spiritual disciplines, she became his first disciple and began her own spiritual journey under his direction and care. He instructed her in the spiritual life as well as the importance of household duties and their role in the meditative life. Ramakrishna considered her an embodied representative of the Divine Mother. From this time forward, Sarada Devi became known as the Holy Mother and spent the rest of her life sharing the wisdom and insight of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to all who went to her.

Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886, leaving the 33-year old Sarada Devi as the lineage holder of the Ramakrishna Order. In addition to teaching and caring for her disciples, she guided the activities of the Ramakrishna Organizations, spending most of her time in service to rural communities in Bengal and the disciples of the Ramakrishna Order in Calcutta. Serving the poor and disadvantaged women of Bengal, she became committed to advancing the education of women to promote women's independence and social awareness.

From 1886 until her death, Sarada Devi touched the lives of hundreds of devotees through her simple and pure devotion to the spiritual life. As Holy Mother, she never turned away anyone in need. She valued equality and did not discriminate among disciples by caste, religion, gender, or nationality. Her unconditional compassion inspired a new spiritual movement. The core of her teaching, as of Ramakrishna's, was the recognition of the divine in everything. She died in Calcutta on July 21, 1920, 34 years after the death of her husband.

The Sri Sarada Math, the world's largest independent women's monastic order, was established in 1954 as the women's complement to the VEDANTA SOCIETIES RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION, to perpetuate the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami VIVEKANANDA. The *math* is located on the bank of the GANGES River near Dakshineswar Temple, where Sri Ramakrishna served as priest. Sri Sarada Math has nuns in residence in centers throughout the world.

See also [NIVEDITA](#).

Further reading: Amalaprana, *Eternal Mother* (Calcutta: Kolkata Paperback, 2004); Atmaprana, *Sri Sarada Devi and Sri Sarada Math* (New Delhi: New Delhi Paperbacks, 2003); Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Shri Sarada Devi* (Mylapore: Ramakrishna Math, 1955); Swami Nirvedananda, *The Holy Mother* (Calcutta: Calcutta Paperbacks, 1983); Lizelle Raymond, *The Dedicated: A Biography of Nivedita* (Madras:

Samata, 1985); Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1958).

Sarasvati

The Sarasvati was one of the great rivers of RIG VEDIC times and was worshipped as a divine goddess in the VEDAS. A handful of verses in the Vedas also associate her with the stream of the dead, which is crossed by all who die.

The river Sarasvati dried up in ancient times. However, it is said still to be flowing invisibly, joining the GANGES and YAMUNA at Prayag (ALLAHABAD), one of the sites of the KUMBHA MELA festival.

In a stray verse or two of RIG VEDA, Sarasvati is seen as the goddess of knowledge—all the arts and sciences; this later becomes the primary identification of the name. She is iconographically represented as holding a *vina* or lute in her hands. She is the wife of BRAHMA. Her vehicle is the swan or peacock.

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sat See *SAT-CIT-ANANDA*.

Satchidananda, Swami (1914–2002) *founder of Integral Yoga Institutes and Yogaville*

Swami Satchidananda was a great popularizer of yoga both within India and around the world. His interfaith emphasis and his organizational efforts, especially in the United States, continue to bear fruit.

Ramaswamy was born on December 22, 1914, to a devout family in Chettipalam, near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu state. His father, Sri Kalyanasunderam, was the village's unofficial headman and his mother, Sri Velammai, entertained the visiting poets, musicians, philosophers, and astrologers who frequented the family home. As a youth, Ramaswamy met SADHUS and SANNYASIS (holy men and penitents) in his own home, as he pursued skills in agriculture, mechanics, electronics, and cinematography.

At age 28, he began a full-time spiritual quest that included meeting RAMANA Maharshi and Sri AUROBINDO. He became a disciple of Swami SIVANANDA of RISHIKESH and took SANNYAS initiation from him in 1949. He taught as a professor of HATHA and *raja* YOGA at Sivananda's Vedanta Forest Academy in Rishikesh and made extensive lecture tours throughout the world. He spread the teachings and the organization of Sivananda's Divine Life Society in many parts of Asia, particularly Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Philippines. In 1958 he completed a pilgrimage to Mount KAILASH in Tibet.

In 1966, Satchidananda made his first global tour, sponsored by an American devotee. The intended two-day visit to New York extended to five months as he was surrounded by hundreds of students, eager for his teachings and guidance. The Integral Yoga Institutes were founded under his direction, and today there are Integral Yoga Institutes and Centers throughout the world. In 1976, he became a U.S. citizen.

Satchidananda has been named patron and adviser to various organizations around the world, including the European Union of National Yoga Federations, the International Association of Yoga Teachers, Unity in Yoga, and the Temple of Understanding. He received many honors for his service, including: the Martin Buber Award for Outstanding Service to Humanity, the Juliet Hollister Interfaith Award, the B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League's Humanitarian Award, the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Award, and the U Thant

Peace Award. He was also the recipient of several honorary doctorates and honorary titles.

Satchidananda's teaching centers around the principle "Truth Is One, Paths Are Many." He sponsored many interfaith symposia, retreats, and worship services around the world. In 1986, he created a center dedicated to the light of all faiths and to world peace, called the Light of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS), located at Satchidananda Ashram at Yogaville in Virginia. Yogaville serves as the international headquarters of the Integral Yoga Institutes and Centers.

He died on August 19, 2002, in his native Tamil Nadu, South India.

Further reading: Sita Wiener, *Swami Satchidananda: His Biography* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1970).

***sat-chit-ananda* (sacchidananda)**

Sat-chit-ananda is a philosophical term used in VEDANTA and other Hindu systems; it describes the ultimate reality or the ultimate character of a god or goddess.

In Vedanta, words can convey only a conventional description of the *brahman* or ultimate reality, which is beyond any characterizing or characteristics. Nevertheless, the combination of *sat* (Being as an ultimate category), *chit* (unlimited consciousness), and *ananda* (unlimited bliss) is often used to describe the ultimate. Those who achieve the highest level in YOGA, who realize oneness with the ultimate, are believed to be capable of knowing these categories beyond the words. Therefore, many realized SWAMIS use this appellation for themselves.

The use of these terms to identify the supreme BRAHMAN began in the UPANISHADS (c. 600 B.C.E.); it became a common practice as later Vedanta developed.

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Sati

Sati is the first wife of SHIVA, later reincarnated as PARVATI or Uma. She is the daughter of the sage DAKSHA, himself the son of BRAHMA. Brahma was concerned that the human universe would not come about if Shiva did not take a wife, so he compelled Daksha to produce a daughter, Sati, who was a form of the Great Goddess. He arranged to have her marry Shiva. To seduce Shiva, who was devoted to asceticism and did not want to marry, Sati practiced austerities and won his attention. They were quickly married with Brahma serving as the marriage priest.

Daksha was not happy to have Shiva as his son-in-law. He held a great Vedic sacrifice and pointedly did not invite his daughter and son-in-law. When Sati complained to her father, he upbraided her. There are two versions of the succeeding events. In one, she immolated herself in a fire. The later Hindu practice of a widow's immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre took on the name of *sati* (suttee).

In the second version, Daksha had been under a curse, that if he were to show disrespect to his daughter, she would die; when he upbraided her she simply fell to the ground dead. Shiva rushed to the site of the sacrifice, killed Daksha, and destroyed the entire ritual sacrifice ground. Both Daksha and the sacrifice were later restored in some versions—but not Sati. Shiva lifted Sati's body and mournfully began to carry it about India. Since a dead body is considered highly polluting, Lord VISHNU followed Shiva, gradually cutting off pieces of Sati as they went along. Everywhere a piece of her fell, a shrine was established to the Great Goddess. These are variously said to number 54, 108, or some other number.

sati (suttee) widow self-immolation

Sati, the practice of burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres (as had happened with the goddess Sati), developed in post-Vedic India, as the rights of women, especially widows, greatly

deteriorated. Widows were almost considered to be dead. They had to shave their heads and dress in white with no decoration. They were considered inauspicious and were often confined to the home.

Because of the practice of marriage outside one's clan in North India, spouses generally were from distant villages. As all marriages were patrilocal, a woman whose husband had died would find herself living with unrelated in-laws, who often did not look upon her kindly. If the woman had several children and particularly a son, she might draw comfort and status from them, but if she were newly married with no children, she looked forward to a life of ascetic denial and loneliness as remarriage was strictly forbidden. As a result, many women succumbed to the social pressure of self-immolation on the fires of their husbands; it is documented that many others were coerced to do so. As an added incentive, in certain regions, the woman who became a *sati* was deified.

In the 19th century the British colonial administrators outlawed *sati*. Independent India also outlawed the practice, and it largely fell into disuse after independence. However, the debate over the practice never completely ceased. With the modern Hindu revival some have argued that this traditional practice should be encouraged; this idea has spurred furious opposition from secularists and women's groups.

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sattva See GUNAS.

satyagraha See GANDHI, MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND.

Satyananda Saraswati, Swami See INTERNATIONAL YOGA FELLOWSHIP.

Satya Sai Baba (1926–) *popular spiritual teacher and miracle worker*

Satya Sai Baba was born Satyanarayana Raju in the village of Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, to a pious KSHATRIYA family on November 23, 1926. At the age of 14 he quit school and disclosed to his parents that he was in fact the incarnation of SAI BABA OF SHIRDI, the revered South Indian saint of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He left his family and stayed in the house of a BRAHMIN neighbor during adolescence; there he began to receive devotees.

In 1950, the first ashram dedicated to the work of Satya Sai Baba was established near Puttaparthi. Later, other ashrams were established near Bangalore and Ootakamund.

Satya Sai Baba is well known for his miraculous healings and materializations, and some claim that he has even raised the dead. He is known for materializing in his right hand objects such as rings, lockets, amulets, and fruits out of season. Devotees report that his photos in their homes in different parts of the world are repeatedly covered with holy ash, *vibhuti*, even when he is not nearby.

Satya Sai Baba has built several schools, universities, and one modern hospital in India. He is responsible for a number of social work programs: colleges for both boys and girls, educational courses on spirituality, community building projects, welfare programs for the poor, and clean water projects for South Indian communities.

Claiming to be a full incarnation of KALKI, avatar of the KALI YUGA, Sai Baba says that his task is to behave in a human way so that humankind can

feel kinship with him, yet to rise to superhuman heights to protect the virtuous and destroy evil. Quoting Lord KRISHNA's words in the BHAGAVAD GITA, Sai Baba says that whenever disharmony overwhelms the world, the Lord will incarnate in human form to establish peace and to reeducate the human community.

Sai Baba's influence is considerable; active devotees and centers organized around his work and message exist throughout the world. His personal conduct, however, has been the subject of numerous charges, including sexual misconduct and fraud. His international headquarters are in Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Further reading: Roy Eugene Davis, *The Teachings of Sri Satya Sai Baba* (Lakemont, Ga.: CSA Press, 1991); Satya Pal Ruhela, *In Search of Sai Divine: A Comprehensive Research Review of Writings and Researches on Sri Sathya Sai Baba Avatar* (Delhi: Print House, n.d.); T. B. Singh, *Satya Sai Baba: Godman of India Today* (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books 1976); Brian Steel, *The Satya Sai Baba Compendium: A Guide to the First Seventy Years* (New York: Weiser, 1997).

Satyavan See SAVITRI.

Satya Yuga See KRITA YUGA.

Savitri *mythic princess*

The story of Savitri and Satyavan, told in the Mahabharata, is one of the most poignant in Indian literature. The beautiful maiden Savitri falls in love with a hermit's son, Satyavan, and marries him. Savitri learns from his father that unbeknown to Satyavan the boy has only one year to live. Savitri forebears from telling Satyavan, in order to preserve their precious days of happiness.

The pair live in great delight as the bride tries to forget the curse that threatens their love. As the

final day approaches Savitri furiously engages in prayers and penances to stave off the inevitable. On the final day she follows her husband closely into the woods where he has gone to fetch wood. Her husband soon collapses as the frightening figure of YAMA, god of death, appears before them with a noose in his hand.

Yama removes Satyavan's soul and heads toward his domain, with Savitri in desperate pursuit. Yama asks her to turn back, but she insists that she will follow him even to the underworld. Seeing her great devotion, Yama grants her any boon but that of having her husband restored to life. She takes this boon but insists on following farther. She gains two more similar boons but will not relent. Finally, Yama offers her a boon without exception and she asks that her husband be restored to life. The boon is granted and Satyavan returns to life.

SRI AUROBINDO wrote an elegant and enchanting epic poem celebrating this story, in which he outlines his conception of Integral Yoga and the power of the MOTHER to effect the complete supramental transformation of the universe.

Further reading: Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1951); Aaron Shepard with Vera Rosenberry, *Savitri: A Tale of Ancient India* (Morton Grove, Ill.: A. Whitman, 1992).

Savitri *Vedic divinity*

Savitri is one name for the Vedic god of the Sun. Several gods in the RIG VEDA seem to be associated with the Sun, probably indicating that the Sun had different names at different times of the day or seasons of the year, or for different purposes. *Savitri* was often used in conjunction with SURYA, and the two may have been interchangeable.

Savitri is used in the famous GAYATRI MANTRA, recited every morning by BRAHMINS and others. In the Rig Veda, Savitri is connected with several important rites. It is said that those who desire

heaven should do the *AGNICHAYANA*, or “building of the fire altar,” ritual for Savitri.

The name is derived from the SANSKRIT *su* (to incite or impel). Savitri thus brings to life or compels thoughts and action. This seems only natural for the Sun, who wakens the world and keeps it alive by its life-giving rays.

Further reading: Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990); P. Pandit, *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda* (Pondicherry: Dipti, 1970); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission See [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#).

Scandinavia

The Scandinavian countries were preponderantly Christian until the middle of the 20th century; the Lutheran Church had been the established religion for centuries. While a spectrum of Christian sects appeared during the 19th century, the first break in the Christian consensus appears to have occurred early in the 20th century with the spread of THEOSOPHY to Scandinavia and the subsequent formation of several esoteric groups such as the Martinus Institute, founded in Denmark in the 1940s.

Hinduism was introduced into Scandinavia in 1967 as a result of the teachings of Swami NARAYANANANDA (1902–88), a YOGA teacher from Bengal. He had been discovered by some Danes who were traveling in India and they created the first ashram for his work in Gylling, Denmark. In 1969 they erected a house for Swami Narayananda, who made his first trip to Europe in 1971. He regularly visited Europe throughout the rest of his life, and the Narayananda Universal Yoga Ashrams spread to the other Scandinavian countries.

As a youth, a Dane later known as Swami Janakananda (b. 1939) began practicing YOGA

and MEDITATION. Then in 1968 he met Swami Satyananda Saraswati (b. 1923), founder of the INTERNATIONAL YOGA FELLOWSHIP MOVEMENT, and went to India to study at the Bihar School of Yoga. He became a SWAMI, was given his spiritual name, and returned to his homeland two years later to found the Scandinavian Yoga and Meditation School in Copenhagen. Shortly thereafter he published *Yoga, Tantra and Meditation in Daily Life*, later translated into nine languages.

In 1977, Janakananda organized “Meditation Yoga 77,” an international yoga congress held in Stockholm. He invited an international list of speakers, reflecting the many Indian teachers who would visit the Scandinavian school in succeeding years. He later opened a retreat center in southern Sweden. As did Narayananda’s movement, the school spread to the other Scandinavian countries. The first affiliated Norwegian school opened in 1983. In more recent years, other yoga centers, such as the Ashtanga Yoga Center of Helsinki, have opened in major Scandinavian urban centers.

Already in the 1970s, the expansive INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS targeted the Scandinavian countries. They opened their first center in Sweden and eventually spread to Denmark and Finland. Today they maintain a large temple in Grodunge, some 25 miles south of Stockholm.

In 1974, Sri CHINMOY (b. 1931) visited Iceland and subsequently formed the only Hindu community on the island. Chinmoy, noted for his physical feats, once lifted the prime minister of Iceland as part of a weightlifting demonstration.

In the 1980s, a small number of Indians began to find their way to Denmark and Sweden. By the beginning of the 21st century, there were some 1,500 Hindus in Sweden and around 3,500 in Denmark. Wherever concentrations of immigrants settled, temples and community organizations began to appear, among the first the Hindu Union in Jönköping, Sweden, founded in 1974. The larger community in Stockholm

now sponsors two temples, both of which were opened early in the new century. The VISHVA HINDU PARISHAD has also formed as a coordinating organization for the various Hindu centers. The Hindu community is just completing its first generation in Scandinavia, and forecasting its future is difficult. It may also be noted that Indian migration to Scandinavia has also included some Sikhs; as of 2005 five *gurudwaras* were operating, two in Norway, two in Sweden, and one in Denmark.

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Sekkilar (12th century)

Sekkilar, whose given name was probably Ramatevar, is the author of PERIYA PURANAM, the 12th and final book of the Tamil Shaivite scripture, the TIRUMURAI. He was a Vellala, a high middle-caste designation. He is also known as Arunmolitevar, Sevaikkavalar, and Sekkilarnayanar (Sekkilar the saint).

Sekkilar was born in the village of Kundratur in northeastern Tamil Nadu. He was chief minister of the Chola emperor Anapaya Chola. He is said to have recited the Periya Puranam to the retired Chola king at the Shaivite sacred shrine of CHIDAMBARAM.

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self-realization

Self-realization, or living in constant awareness of the real Self, ATMAN, is considered the goal of most Hindu study and practice. Hinduism recognizes that individual abilities and interests vary considerably among people, so it acknowledges that self-realization can be achieved through devotion, study, faith, work in the world, or meditation. In this way, Hinduism includes disciplines for mind, emotions, body, and action in the world—all as valid ways to realization of ultimate reality, the atman.

See also MOKSHA; SAMADHI.

Self-Realization Fellowship (est. 1935)

The Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) is an international religious organization founded in 1935 by Paramahansa YOGANANDA (1893–1952) to introduce people of all races, cultures, and creeds to the ancient science and philosophy of YOGA and MEDITATION. Through its worldwide service, the society seeks to foster a spirit of greater harmony and goodwill among the diverse people and nations of the world, and a deeper understanding of the underlying unity of all religions.

SRF traces its beginning to 1861 and the work of the legendary mahavatar BABAJI, who is said by Yogananda to have revived the ancient science of KRIYA YOGA. According to Yogananda, Babaji chose him to take the teachings to the West. In 1917, Yogananda founded the Yogoda Satsanga Society (YSS) of India, headquartered in Dakshineswar (near Calcutta [Kolkata]). Today the YSS has more than 20 educational and medical facilities, including a college of liberal arts and business, a medical college, several schools for boys and girls, and both allopathic and homeopathic hospitals and clinics. In 1920 Yogananda traveled to the United States to attend the tercentenary anniversary of the International Congress of Religious Liberals convening in Boston. One of the last Indians to enter America before the change in immigration laws limited Asian immigration, he

decided to stay in the United States. He formed a center of the Yogoda Satsang in Boston, Massachusetts, and traveled widely in the eastern United States.

In 1924, Yogananda made his first trip across the country and founded the headquarters for his work at Mt. Washington in Los Angeles, California. He lectured in the principal cities of the United States, wrote inspirational works, and worked on a home study course on *kriya yoga*. After the founding of SRF in 1935, other centers were opened in California at Encinitas, San Diego, Hollywood, Long Beach, and Pacific Palisades, with smaller groups in other cities in the United States.



Entrance to the Self-Realization Fellowship Headquarters in Encinitas, California (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

During Yogananda's years in the United States, he initiated thousands of men and women into the teachings and methods of yoga and meditation. Central to his teaching and that of SRF is a yogic way to bliss (*ANANDA*) or *SELF-REALIZATION*, or God realization. The way to bliss is through scientific methods of concentration, including an advanced technique called *kriya yoga* as taught and passed down by the yogi Babaji. This technique is a system of awakening and energizing the psychic centers or *CHAKRAS* located along the spinal column. Through deep regular meditation, spiritual cosmic energies are focused and direct perception of the divine is experienced. The blood is decarbonized and recharged with oxygen, the atoms of which are transmuted into "life current" to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centers. The practice makes it possible to withdraw one's energy and attention from the usual turbulence of thoughts, emotions, and sensory perceptions. In the stillness that is discovered, one is able to experience peace and attunement with God. The term "Self-realization" as used by Yogananda, signifies realization of one's true Self, or soul—the individualized expression of the one universal spirit that animates and informs all life.

SRF also emphasizes the essential unity of Eastern and Western religious teachings. Services in SRF organizations include interpretations of parallel scriptural passages from the *BHAGAVAD GITA* and Christian scripture, especially the New Testament.

Yogananda was succeeded by Swami Rajasi Janakananda (James J. Lynn), who died in 1955 and was succeeded by Sri *DAYA MATA* (b. 1914), the current head of the fellowship.

SRF is coordinated by members of its monastic order. These monks and nuns serve Yogananda's vision through worldwide spiritual and humanitarian work, including over 100 meditation centers, retreats, youth programs, publishing and translating programs, temple services, and coordination of the Worldwide Prayer Circle, a network of groups and individuals dedicated to praying for those in need.

Under the direction of Sri Daya Mata SRF publishes the writings, lectures, and informal talks of Paramahansa Yogananda and of his close disciples. SRF also distributes audio and video recordings of Yogananda's teachings. SRF has a temple or center in 49 states in America and 49 countries in the world. The Yogoda Satsang Society of India has 32 centers and operates a variety of charitable facilities.

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Self-Revelation Church of Absolute Monism (est. 1928)

The Self-Realization Church of Absolute Monism was founded by Swami Premananda (1903–95), who was called in 1925 by Paramahansa YOGANANDA to move to the United States. While independent of Yogananda's primary organization in the United States, the Self-Realization Fellowship, the Church of Absolute Monism has much the same teaching focus. Both stress *ADVAITA* (non-dualist) *VEDANTA*, the life and philosophy of Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI, the unity of all religions, the practice of *kriya yoga*, and cultural appreciation. The name *absolute monism* refers to the ancient philosophy of *advaita* Vedanta, which affirms that ultimate reality is non-dual.

The church has linkages to the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Foundation and has an accent on education and culture. The current leader of the church and of the Gandhi memorial center is Sri Mata Kamalananda. She was ordained a minister in the Swami Order in 1973, and a full swami in

1978. The group publishes the *Mystic Cross* and the *Gandhi Message* periodicals.

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Sen, Keshab Chunder (1838–1884) *social reformer and philosopher*

Keshab Chunder Sen was a philosopher and social reformer, whose career reflected the variety of responses to the modern world that emerged in Hindu society.

Sen was born on November 19, 1838, into a wealthy family in Calcutta (Kolkata) who were very involved in both Bengali and Western cultural movements. He was recruited at age 19 by Debendranath Tagore, father of the poet RABINDRANATH TAGORE, to the celebrated BRAHMO SAMAJ reform movement, which attempted to purify Hinduism from practices such as caste, child marriage, *purdah* (seclusion of women), ill treatment of widows, and particularly idol worship. He became secretary of the movement in 1859. Sen broke away in 1865 because of personal disagreements and formed the Brahmo Samaj of India. This organization also split after Sen married his daughter to a maharajah when she was only 14 years old, an action that was seen as a major betrayal of the movement's principles.

In 1878 Sen formed the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. His views had changed under the influence of the teacher RAMAKRISHNA, who persuaded him to accept image worship and see the Hindu pantheon in a new light, as a way for the ordinary devotee to engage the divinity concretely.

His New Dispensation, which he announced in 1879, has often been taken as tantamount to his conversion to Christianity, but it is more complicated. He considered his movement to be

on a par with the Jewish and Christian traditions and as a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy. He also believed that his movement would lead to the harmonization of all religions. Though he referred to himself as Jesudas, servant of Jesus, he emphasized Christ's Asiatic character and saw Christ in a VEDANTIC light as the one god, who is worshipped under different names by all those who worship God.

He died on January 8, 1884.

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Sen, Ramprasad (c. 1718–c. 1780) *Bengali poet-saint and Kali devotee*

Ramprasad Sen, who is often referred to by his first name alone, was a beloved Bengali poet-saint, whose songs are known to every Bengali.

As for many of the poet-saints of India the details of his life are intermixed with myth. Similarly, as with KABIR, his name and fame impelled other writers to compose many beautiful verses in homage to his works, particularly his collection of songs known as *Padabali*. His other major attributed works are *Bidyasundar*, *Kalikirrtan*, and *Krishnakirrtan*.

Ramprasad was probably born to a higher-caste Vaidya family of traditional physicians, possibly BRAHMINS. He was educated in SANSKRIT and in Persian in addition to Bengali. He is said to have lived in the village of Kumarhatt, also known as Halishore, on the banks of the GANGES not far from Calcutta (Kolkata). It seems certain that he was patronized by the contemporary king, Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray Bahadur.

Ramprasad started out as a clerk for a wealthy household in or near Calcutta. It is said that he was constantly distracted from his duties by

thoughts of the GODDESS DURGA or KALI. Legend says that one of his employers, upon seeing his beautiful verses to the goddess in his account books, told him to cease being an accountant and offered him a salary simply to continue composing devotional verse.

Legend also says that when Ramprasad was a little over 60 years old, he announced that on the day when the goddess was going to be immersed in the Ganges (either Kali or Durga Puja day), he also would be immersed with the Divine Mother. It is said that he slowly descended into the river, singing some of his farewell songs. He died singing a song to the goddess Tara.

In one of the amazing stories associated with Ramprasad he accompanied the maharajah on a journey on the Ganges. As usual he was singing his devotional songs. The Muslim ruler of the area happened to overhear the song and was enchanted by it. The ruler requested Ramprasad to sing for him so Ramprasad sang a song in Muslim style. The Nawab, the Muslim ruler, was not pleased and asked him to sing a song to Kali. The Muslim was moved to tears and offered patronage and high rank to Ramprasad, who declined them.

Most importantly Ramprasad is a central figure in the revival of Shaktism (see SHAKTA) or goddess worship in late 18th-century Bengal. His works typically show him drunk or mad with the goddess, and he cannot live without her. His work shows strong TANTRIC influence.

Ramprasad's poems to the goddess see her as a daughter, as a fierce wife of SHIVA, as the Divine Mother, and as his own mother. His sentiment in regard to her is very close to that of another famous Bengali, RAMAKRISHNA.

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Shaiva Siddhanta See SAIVA SIDDHANTA.

Shaivism

Shaivism is the formal name for the group of traditions that worship SHIVA as the supreme divinity. A person who worships Shiva will be called a Shaiva in India or a Shaivite in academic parlance. This loose sect, which encompasses by far the large majority of Hindus, probably began to form around the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. Worship of Lord Shiva is mentioned in both the RAMAYANA and MAHABHARATA epics.

The first Shiva LINGAM authenticated archaeologically dates from about the first century C.E., but it is likely that this type of worship was already many centuries old. Scholars often point to a very ancient Indus Valley seal showing a seated figure with a water-buffalo-horned headdress and, apparently, an erect penis, both evocative of Shiva. It is called the Pashupati figure, “Lord of the Animals,” which is also a later designation of Shiva. However, there is no other evidence to indicate worship of a Shiva-like being in the INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION. Some even discern a “yogic” seating posture in the figure, although Indians do traditionally sit in that cross-legged pattern.

The Shiva lingam is actually a sexual symbol showing the coitus of the divine male with the female. The sexual organ of the GODDESS is found in the surrounding circular stone that almost always encases the lingam. It is probably because of this primordial association of Shiva with the goddess that from his first appearance in mythology he is seen with a wife, SATI, who tragically dies. She is afterward reincarnated as PARVATI. At times Shiva is also associated with DURGA and KALI. With Parvati the divine family develops with an older son, the elephant-headed GANESHA, and a younger son, KARTTIKEYA.

The first formal Shaivite text may well be a Tamil text relating the worship of the younger son of Shiva, Murugan, another name of Karttikeya, dating from approximately the third century C.E. The first known Shaivite saint, a female ascetic, Karaikkalammai, dates from around the fourth century. Not long after, stone temples were built to Shiva in South India, around the sixth century. As later all around India the central shrine was almost always a Shiva lingam.

In a challenge to the Jains in Tamil Nadu, a group of great Shaivite saints began to wander from shrine to shrine and temple to temple singing the praises of Lord Shiva. The three great saints associated with the Tamil Shaivite scripture TEVARAM date to the sixth to eighth centuries. They helped make Shaivism the most influential tradition in the region. The pattern repeated itself farther north in later centuries, as poet-saint devotees spread the word of Lord Shiva and popularized devotional worship.

Shaivite *puranas* were first written in SANSKRIT around the sixth century. They told extraordinary stories of the ascetic-erotic Lord Shiva, the chaotic Lord, who resisted household life and children and made trouble for the world and the gods. These *puranas* form the Sanskrit backbone for the Shaivite cult.

By the 12th century Shaivism (as had VAISHNAVISM) in the Tamil country had fully assimilated the Sanskritic tradition of the north into the local traditions. Thus Shaivism developed a clear sense of continuity with northern Vedic Brahminism. Both Sanskrit and Tamil were honored as holy languages. Shiva undoubtedly had a northern Indian provenance. All the shrines that the southern Shaivite saints frequented were originally associated with local divinities, whom the saints recognized as forms of Shiva.

Farther north, the VIRASHAIVA tradition developed in the 12th century in Karnataka. The Virashaivas did not accept icons and eschewed Vedic worship entirely. They were devoted only to Shiva as a formless indefinable divinity. Each Virashaiva

would simply wear a lingam around the neck to show devotion. Caste was outlawed and women were made equals to men in the tradition. Their path was devotional, and their desire was to realize the divine truth that was Shiva.

Shaivite icons and temple artifacts appear much later in the north than in the south, but Shaivism was flourishing earlier nonetheless. Smaller shrines with Shiva lingams were apparently the norm, places where mendicants gathered, often to smoke hashish and sing the praises of the Lord who was everywhere.

Between the eighth and 12th centuries the NATH YOGIS became prominent among the Shaivite wandering mendicants. Famed among these was the great GURU GORAKHNATH. These wild, ascetic mendicants were antisocial and often frightening in appearance, carrying begging bowls made of skulls and smearing themselves with human ashes to mimic the chaotic Lord himself. They practiced alchemy in an attempt to achieve immortality. When in the south an organized literature, liturgy, and temple culture had already emerged, North India Shaivism seemed to move along different lines. The Shaivite temple cult began to develop in North India around the ninth or 10th century, but truly dramatic temples were not built until some 600 years after they had appeared in the south.

In the 12th century the great ABHINAVAGUPTA wrote his texts outlining KASHMIRI SHAIVISM, a TANTRIC tradition that relied on personal transformation and ritual to realize the total oneness of Shiva, rather than on a temple culture. His texts were no doubt based on traditions that had been maturing for centuries.

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Shaivite (Shaiva) See [SHAIVISM](#).

Shakta

The term *Shakta* refers both to the practitioner/devotee and to the faith, a female-centered religious tradition that evolved out of prehistoric Mother Goddess worship found in civilizations across the globe. The word *Shakta* derives from the divine feminine power or SHAKTI and indicates a worshipper of the Goddess primarily. Evidence of this Earth-based and female-centered tradition on the Indian subcontinent dates back perhaps as early as the INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (3500 B.C.E.–1500 B.C.E.), where numerous Harrapan seals portraying female figures associated with vegetative symbolism have been found.

The pre-Vedic Hindu tradition, with its Goddess-centered worldview, is often traced to the art and archaeological remains of the Harrapan and Mohenjo-daro civilizations. Although the point is contested, many scholars believe these findings definitively point to an early Earth-based, female/goddess-centered religious tradition.

Evidence for this tradition is clear as early as the fourth century, although Shakta itself is a relatively late post–eighth century term applied to those cults, scripture, or persons associated with the worship of the Goddess as Shakti. Before this time the term used for this type of Goddess worship was *kula* or *kaula*, a word also used to refer to clans of a female lineage, as well as to menstrual and female sexual fluids. It seems that this belief system whether called *Kaula* or *Shakta*, centered on the Goddess and her YONI, or sexual organ, as the primordial force of Earth and cosmos.

A Shakta views the female principle as the animating, dynamic force behind all existence while

the male principle, especially in the later medieval tantric traditions, is considered to be the quiescent, receptive force. In the Shakta tantric worldview, the masculine principle is a complementary force to the all-pervading female power. “Shiva without Shakti is but a corpse, it is said.”

Central to Shakta theology is recognition of the interrelationships among the agricultural, lunar, and female reproductive cycles. All of existence is conceived as the power, wisdom, knowledge, and action of a Great Goddess. Shaktas perform magical rites in order to ensure the continuation of both humans’ and Earth’s fertility. Stones, trees, water, and iconic and aniconic images all are worshipped as embodiments of Shakti or the power of Goddess. Ritual practices also focus on placating deities in order to prevent natural disasters and illness. To a Shakta, the mysteries of death as well as birth are considered the Goddess’s domain, stemming from the belief that we all originate from and will eventually return to the great Mother Goddess.

From earliest times Shaktas have worshipped deities in multiple as well as singular form; they believe that the collectives are ultimately just different aspects or manifestations of the supreme Goddess herself. These deities have strong associations with the natural and human landscape: trees, mountains, hills, bodies of water, and the female body—in particular the sex organs and sexual fluids. *Yakshis* and *YAKSHAS* (tree and nature spirits), *Grahanis*, *Matrikas*, and *Yoginis* (goddesses and semigoddesses who are always depicted with animal totems/vehicles) embody both benevolent and malevolent qualities. These deities are connected to the threshold experiences of women’s existence: childbirth, menstruation, sex, illness, and death.

Devotees share the belief in the great goddess, Mahadevi, who assumes many forms to defeat any forces that are threatening the natural equilibrium of the Earth and cosmos. Each of these forms carries benevolent as well as malevolent qualities and all have crucial roles in the birth,

fruition, preservation, and inevitable destruction of existence.

Within the Brahminic fold, Shaktas today worship goddesses such as PARVATI, Gauri, Ganga, LAKSHMI, SARASVATI, and Uma for their pacific natures. At the same time the wrathful, often destructive goddesses such as DURGA, KALI, CHAMUNDA, and the *Matrikas* and *Yoginis* are propitiated, revered, and especially held in awe.

Within the Shakta worldview all women are regarded as inherently divine. The ebb and flow of women’s menstrual cycles in accordance with the 28-day lunar cycle are important to this tradition. The potency of *kula*, menstrual blood or other female fluids, plays a central role in rites and practices. The blood is revered for its vibrational potency and is offered to deities such as Kali, Durga, and the *Matrikas* as a means to pacify as well as worship.

Although in orthodox practices animal sacrifice has in some cases apparently replaced menstrual blood offerings, no female animals are offered to the deities. In many of the tantra texts relevant to this tradition, one finds descriptions of women that honor and revere their female nature; for example: “Women are divinity, women are vital breath. Women are goddess, women are life. Be ever among women in thought.” This is the nature of a Shakta. Contrary to the later Brahminic traditions’ immaterial conception of the universe as *BRAHMAN*, the Shakta views the divinity as both immanent and transcendent.

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Shakti

Shakti is the primordial creative, sustaining and destructive power of all existence. Although conceived as female in nature, Shakti is not an individual goddess, but rather a dynamic quality that all goddesses (and even all women, at least within the SHAKTA TANTRIC tradition) are said to possess. Unbridled, uncontainable, spontaneous, ecstatic, blissful, and fierce, Shakti flows from manifestation to dissolution. She is the power to give forth and to withdraw.

The concept of Shakti is an ancient one and has pre-VEDIC, prepatriarchal origins. She is often traced to archaeological discoveries from the INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (3500–1700 B.C.E.) and to other prehistoric cultures throughout western and central Asia. In India the belief and worship of her all-pervading nature were pushed underground during the Vedic period. Shakti regains importance in classical and medieval Hinduism, in which in many cases this primordial power is personified as Devi, the GODDESS, and held in even higher regard than the male deities. Epic texts such as the Devi Bhagavata, Devi Purana, Kalika Purana, Markandeya Purana, and Mahabhadgavata Purana accept and worship Shakti as the supreme nature of reality.

From earliest times the concept of Shakti appears in discussions of fertility as well as in reverence of the divine as mother of nature and cosmos. In the RIG VEDA the term *Shakti* is not mentioned; however, various goddess manifestations (Ratri, USHAS, ADITI, PRITHIVI, Vac-Sarasvati, goddesses) indicate the presence and influence that would later develop into the central figures of the Shakti cult (KALI, DURGA, Ambika, Uma) that are worshipped today.

The later Shakta Upanishads and tantras (see TANTRISM) contain philosophical references to Shakti that equate her with BRAHMAN. In these texts the dynamic, all-pervading nature of *brahman* and Shakti as the fabric underlying all existence cannot be separated into two. In the Shakta UPANISHADS as well as in the later Shakta tantras we

find references to Shakti's independent omnipotent nature where the complementary receptive qualities of the masculine force as Shiva are "but a corpse" without her activating power.

In the epic RAMAYANA, Shakti does not have the independent cult status that we find in the later epics; however, she is held in high regard. In the MAHABHARATA, Shakti once again regains the agency and importance that are evident in the prepatriarchal traditions. Here we learn of her invincible power as Durga and the Matrikas. She is also referred to as Kalika, Ambika, Bhadrakali, Parvati, Mahadevi, and by other names.

Shakti continues to gain importance in the *puranic* texts, the earliest of which, the Markandeya Purana, with its 13 chapters called the Durga Saptasai and Devi Mahatmya, elaborate the primordial all-pervading power of Devi. Here she is philosophically conceived as pure consciousness; the creator, preserver, and destroyer; the one and the many manifestations of supreme divinity. Shakti is both immanent and transcendent, illusive and manifest, moving and unmoving. She is knowledge, will, and action behind all existence. Here we find Goddess as the absolute reality, and yet she incarnates from time to time to help the gods to carry out her divine work. She also appears to help her devotees conquer the bonds of human suffering and the limitations of the physical realm in order to achieve liberation.

In the Markandeya Purana, the goddess is identified with PRAKRITI, the natural sustaining power of existence. She takes on various roles as mother, nurturer, warrior, lover to experience the LILA (play) of her divine consciousness. In the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Shakti is divided into three forms or qualities of existence: *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), *tamas* (inertia).

As Mahasarasvati, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali, the Goddess takes the universe from creation to destruction and back to creation again. The Goddess's distinct iconographic forms are expressions of her multiple nature. She has both benevolent and pacific as well as wrathful and terrifying

qualities. Her benevolent manifestations include Uma, Gauri, Parvati, Lakshmi, Sarasvati; her terrifying ones include Chamunda, Kali, Durga, the Mahavidyas, the Yoginis, and Matrikas.

In the Shakta tantras Shakti becomes Parashakti, the supreme reality who before manifesting through the physical world remains in a state of unmanifest repose. In this respect she is ineffable and indescribable. She is worshipped as Mahamaya or Mahadevi in addition to the numerous epithets that emphasize the myriad facets of her all-pervading nature.

The acknowledgment and worship of the nature of reality as female, as the mobilizing energizing primordial force called Shakti, speaks strongly to the inherently autonomous nature of women. This concept of divinity as female ultimately lies in the biological reality of the female body, in particular the power of the womb. Today statues, *YANTRAS*, and other iconic objects of Shakti worship are not mere representations of Goddess and her ultimate power, but rather embodiments of her Shakti.

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shaktipat

Shaktipat (*pat*, descent, of *Shakti*, spiritual energy) is an act found in *TANTRISM* and tantric-derived traditions such as that of Swami MUKTANANDA'S SID-

DHA YOGA, in which the GURU confers the grace of spiritual transformation upon the adept through touching. This touch is intended to awaken and make the KUNDALINI force rise from the base of the spine. The touching is usually done by the hand, but sometimes with a feather or other object, upon the adept's head.

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shakti pithas

Shakti pithas (seats or altars of the SHAKTI) are sites sacred to the divine mother that are embedded in the Indian landscape. Legends around these sites can be found in the *puranas* and tantras (see *TANTRISM*), however, the stories and number of actual *pithas* vary; most commonly *shakti pithas* are located in India, Nepal, Tibet, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The most popular story of how these *pithas* were created is found in the Puranas and tantras (Devibhagavata, VII, ch. 30; Kalika Purana, XVIII) and dates to the late medieval period. In this later development of a much earlier legend, the god DAKSHA is hosting a *YAJNA* (fire sacrifice) but does not invite his daughter, SATI, because she has married the ascetic god SHIVA, and Daksha does not approve of Shiva's antisocial qualities.

When Sati learns that all the other deities have been invited to this ceremony and only she and her husband have been excluded, she is outraged and confronts her father at his temple. Staying true to his socially defiant ways, Shiva shows no concern about this family insult and refuses to go with her.

Sati arrives alone and confronts her father. According to this version of the myth, Daksha grossly insults both his daughter and her wayward

husband. To assuage her grief, Sati throws herself on the fire. She dies but her body does not burn up in the flames. Hearing of the loss of his wife, Shiva becomes mad with grief. Inconsolable, he wanders the Earth carrying his beloved on his shoulder.

In order to stop Shiva's dance of destruction and to relieve him of the burden of his grief, the gods BRAHMA and VISHNU decide someone must intervene. Vishnu, the great preserver, follows Shiva and cuts away at Sati's body. The fallen pieces of her body and limbs create over 50 *shakti pithas*, which today are worshipped as sites sacred to one of the many manifestations of DEVI such as Kameshvari, Tara, Ambika, and Gauri. A *bhairava* or fierce form of her beloved Shiva is often associated with each of these sites. These *pithas* have also been associated with the 51 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

The earliest mythological explanation of the *pithas* can be found in the RIG VEDA (X.61.5–7). Here we find the earliest association between the sacrifice and desecration of body parts that later is central to the Sati dismemberment myth.

Other legends tell of four important *pithas* that are associated with the four cardinal directions. These four sites (Kamarupa, Uddiyana, Jalandhara, Purnagiri) have been important pilgrimage centers to yoginis and yogis. Some legends speak of seven *pithas*; others speak of as many as 108 across the subcontinent.

Clearly these sites point to local cults of worship of the goddess in various manifestations. Today many of these places have become pilgrimage centers to the goddess as Shakti: Ambika, Parvat, Sati, Durga, Kali, and others. The various legends in the tantras and Puranas are later mythological explanations for what were originally sacred Goddess sites.

For millennia the Goddess has been embedded in the natural landscape. Lakes, ponds, or pools have been conceived as her *yoni*; double hills or mountains, her breasts. The *pitha* associated with the Goddess's breasts at Jalandhara-

giri, and her *yoni* or sexual organ at KAMAKHYA remain two of the most frequented and revered sites for contemporary pilgrims. To ancient peoples the Earth itself was the divine mother, and the popularity of these sites reflects an attempt of later cultures to integrate these earlier traditions into their worship in order to attract more followers.

At the *pithas* the Goddess is usually worshipped in an iconic form. Often she is revered as a stone that has been painted red (red is the color of Shakti). Sometimes eyes and other anthropomorphic features are added. Originally these sites were worshipped under various names of the local tribal deities that later became syncretized into the Brahminic fold of goddesses. This is evident, in part, from the great variations in the lists of *shakti pithas* and the names connected with them.

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Shakuntala See [KALIDASA](#).

shalagrama

The *shalagrama* is a small stone sacred object, usually three or four inches across with several holes, used by devotees of VISHNU in their home worship. It is made of black ammonite, from Mount Gandaki in Nepal. A story in the BHAGAVATA PURANA (c. 1200 C.E.) explains why this black stone is used for worship; another account is in the TULSIDAS Ramcharitmanas (c. 1600 C.E.).

In the worship, water is dripped on the stone and collected beneath. The water is later drunk by the worshipper. Sometimes the *shalagrama* is shown to dying persons to ensure that they go to Vishnu's heaven Vaikuntha, as it is seen to have sacred power.

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Shankar, Sri Sri Ravi See [ART OF LIVING FOUNDATION](#).

Shankara (seventh century C.E.) *founder of Vedanta philosophy*

Shankara was the great seventh-century philosophical genius who created the first widely known school of VEDANTA. He is also known as Shankaracharya.

Shankara was born in Kerala to a family of Nambudiri BRAHMINS, a strict Vedic group. Legend has it that when he was eight years old he wanted to become a renunciant, but his mother would not hear of it. Not long afterward, he was attacked by a crocodile. He cried out to his mother to allow him to renounce the world a moment before death so that he could reach liberation from birth and rebirth. His mother consented, and Shankara was miraculously released from the mouth of the crocodile.

He then proceeded to tour India and debate all those whom he encountered. Eventually he became known as the most brilliant philosopher of his time. Following the lineage of his GURU's guru Gaudpada, he argued that the BRAHMAN of the UPANISHADS was the only reality. He saw the world as a mere trifle, an illusion, or MAYA, unreal from the point of view of the ultimate.

Shankara wrote commentaries on the VEDANTA SUTRA, the Upanishads, and the BHAGAVAD GITA. In a thoroughgoing analysis he found that they all expressed the understanding that only the path of knowledge, the true knowing of the *brahman*, could lead to liberation. Devotion and works were only secondary pursuits. He initiated a tradition of renunciant yogis (the SHANKARACHARYA

ORDER) who sought the full realization of the *brahman* in a state of being, consciousness, and bliss (SAT-CHIT-ANANDA). Shankara's name is also connected strongly to SHAIIVISM and to the worship of the GODDESS, through texts that were later attributed to him.

Shankara's system of Vedanta is known as the ADVAITA, or non-dual, VEDANTA, or more properly, Kevala (absolute) *advaita* Vedanta.

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Shankaracharya Order (est. seventh century C.E.)

The Shankaracharya Order is an order of renunciants said to have been founded by the great seventh-century VEDANTA philosopher SHANKARA (also known as Shankaracharya). It is formally known as the Dashanami (10 Names) Order, because its renunciants or SANNYASIS all take one of 10 names: Aranya, Ashrama, Bharati, Giri, Parvata, Puru, Sarasvati, Sagara, Tirtha, and Vana. They also add the affix ANANDA (transcendent bliss). Examples would be Brahmananda (he who has realized the bliss of BRAHMAN) Sarasvati and Agehananda (he who has realized bliss in homelessness) Bharati.

Shankaracharya's aim was to establish a rigorously disciplined, intellectually capable group of mendicants who could challenge and defeat the Buddhists of his time and who would debate the theistic Hindus who clung to Vedic orthodoxy. He established four centers or MATHS in four parts of India for this purpose: the Vimala Pitha at Puri in Orissa, the Jyoti Matha in BADRINATH in the HIMALAYAS, the Kalika Pitha in DVARAKA in

Gujarat, and the Sharada Pitha in Shringeri in Karnataka.

It is still said that the Dashanamis of the Shankaracharya Order are the most respected group of religious mendicants in India. They are highly learned in SANSKRIT and VEDANTA philosophy and often are educated in English as well. The order is devoted to noninjury and nonviolence; however, they hired militant mendicants carrying tridents to defend them against attacks by militant Vaishnavite SADHUS or mendicants. Battles between these groups are famous for their carnage. There are currently six “regiments” of Dashanami NAGAS, special naked renunciants who defend the faith.

The heads of the four *maths* are all named *Shankaracharya*. They oversee extensive organizations with schools and social outreach centers. These schools rely on a network of locally trained Sanskrit *pandits*, experts who train students in the traditions of Hinduism, making these *maths* a valuable cultural resource.

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shanti

Shanti (peace or calm) is an oft-repeated word in Hindu texts. The reference is not to world peace, but to the spiritual peace that is understood to accrue to an individual with MEDITATION and even more so with higher realization. Many MANTRAS in SANSKRIT end with the chant *om shantih shantih shantih*, or “OM, peace, peace, peace.”

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Shanti Mandir (est. 1987)

The Shanti Mandir (Temple of Peace) was established by Swami Nityananda (b. 1962), brother of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, not to be confused with Swami Nityananda, the guru of Swami MUKTANANDA, in 1987, to promote the Shaivite teachings of Swami Muktananda, head of the popular Siddha Yoga Dham. Shanti Mandir now has centers in Atul, Gujarat, India; Kankhal, Uttaranchal, India; and Walden, New York.

Prior to his death in 1982 Muktananda had chosen a brother and sister team—Nityananda and Swami CHIDVILASANANDA, to coadminister the huge worldwide organization he had built. In 1986 Nityananda withdrew from Siddha Yoga Dham amid tension, controversy, disruption, and questions about his ability to administer the group. He renounced his vows of SANNYAS, entered private life, and set up a MEDITATION practice in California.

In July 1987, he established Shanti Mandir (Temple of Peace), over the objections of Siddha Yoga Dham devotees who questioned his authenticity and authority. After two years of building Shanti Mandir on December 26, 1989, Nityananda took a quick plunge in the GANGES near HARIDVAR and reaffirmed his vows of *sannyas* and commitment to Muktananda.

The Mandir in all three of its locations offers courses and meditation intensives and initiates students, using the chanting of MANTRAS as a primary practice. Nityananda also holds seminars, retreats, and workshops in the United States, Australia, and Europe.

Further reading: “Nityananda, One of Swami’s Muktananda’s Successors, Retakes Sannyasin Vows,” *Hinduism Today* 12, no. 14 (April 1990): 28.

Shanti Yoga Institute and Yoga Retreat (est. 1974)

Shanti Yoga Institute was founded in the United States by Yogi Shanti DESAI, a younger brother

of Amrit DESAI, who founded the center for KRIPALU YOGA in LENOX, Massachusetts. Both Desai brothers were students of Swami Kripalu and accomplished in yogic disciplines as well as the application of yogic principles to everyday life.

Shanti traveled to the United States to pursue graduate work at Drexel University. He was awarded his M.S. in 1964 and subsequently worked as a chemist until 1972, when he realized that yoga was his life's path. He returned to India and accepted a *SHAKTIPAT* initiation from his guru. *Shaktipat* involves an energy transfer from the guru to the student that releases the KUNDALINI believed to lie latent at the base of the spine.

Shanti Desai founded his institute upon his return from India. In Ocean City, New Jersey, he opened the doors of the Yoga Retreat, in 1974 and Prasad, a holistic health food store and restaurant in 1981. Shanti has designed his yoga teaching especially to address American perspectives. His writings are published by the Shanti Yoga Institute.

Further reading: Yogi Shanti Desai, *The Complete Practice Manual of Yoga* (Ocean City, N.J.: Shanti Yoga Institute, 1976); ———, *Meditation Practice Manual* (Ocean City, N. J.: Shanti Yoga Institute, 1981).

Shashthi

Shashthi, “the sixth,” is a GODDESS meant to represent the sixth day after the birth of a child, when it is understood that danger to both the child and the mother has ended. She is believed to protect children from evil and illness. Shashthi is best known in Bengal, where she is worshipped by married women who desire children. She is represented as a golden-complexioned woman with a child in her arms, riding on a cat.

There is a Bengali belief that women should never harm a cat because doing so will incur the anger of Shashthi. Festivals are held several times a year to honor this goddess. The husband of a family must worship her on the sixth day after a

child's birth. A wife must make offerings to her after the child's third month. Women who do not have children go to her to ask for children; many other gods are also approached for this purpose.

Further reading: Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Akos Ostor, *The Play of the Gods: Locality, Ideology, Structure and Time in the Festivals of a Bengali Town* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

shastra

Shastra (from *shas*, to order or enjoin) is a term for any authoritative scripture in the Brahminical or Hindu tradition. For example, the *ARTHASHASTRA* is an authoritative scripture on *artha* (worldly action) as it relates to a king. The *DHARMASHASTRA* is authoritative scripture concerning DHARMA (right conduct).

Further reading: A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1997); Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

Shatapatha Brahmana

The Shatapatha Brahmana (c. 700 B.C.E.) is one of the most important texts for the interpretation of late Vedic ritual (see *VEDAS*). Its treatment of certain ritual ideas may have strongly influenced later Hindu philosophical developments. This BRAHMANA is attached to the White YAJUR VEDA.

The most important part of the Shatapatha Brahmana is its elaboration on the grandest of public Vedic rites, the *AGNICHAYANA* or “building of the fire altar.” It explains this ritual as a reenactment of the sacrifice of the primordial man or *PURUSHA*, which created the universe. The ritual thus becomes a cosmic process transcending every mundane action. The various BRAHMINs performing the ritual identify themselves in turn with various aspects of the universe; one Brah-

min is water, another the Sun, another the wind, and so on.

This was the first Brahmana in the Vedas to make explicit the central notion that the ritual itself could represent all of reality, both seen and unseen. Over the centuries, as the ritual actors identified more and more with the ritual itself, an esoteric or highly secret form of ritual emerged, carried out within the body of the Brahmin rather than on a public ground. The priest (a highly initiated Brahmin) began to identify himself not only with the ritual, but with all reality. Thus was created the background for the philosophy of the UPANISHADS, in which the identity of the individual self merged with the ultimate reality, the *BRAHMAN*.

Further reading: G. V. Devasthali, *Religion and Mythology of the Brahmanas: With Particular Reference to the Satapatha-Brahmana* (Poona: University of Poona, 1965); Naama Drury, *The Sacrificial Ritual in the Satapatha Brahmana* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981); Julius Eggeling, trans., *The Satapatha-Brahmana: According to the Text of the Madhyandina School*, 5 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963).

sheaths, five

The five sheaths, also called the *pancha kosha*, are five coverings of the soul or self enumerated in the TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD. The outermost sheath, which coincides with the human body, is the “food” sheath, the grossest aspect of being. Within that in the body at a subtler level is the “breath” or “life” sheath, which assures bodily sustenance, along with food. Within that in the body at another level is the “mind” sheath, which guides grosser instinctual functions and the surface aspects of nervous activity. Within this sheath is the sheath of “understanding,” which overlooks higher and more refined mental functioning. Finally, there is the “bliss” sheath, which is the covering for the soul itself.

Some VEDANTA philosophies see these sheaths as simply “not-soul”; the spiritual process gradu-

ally rejects them in favor of the self or soul within the heart. Another, more holistic view, sees the spiritual effort as a process of full realization of these sheaths, and their integration with the realized self, the secret foundation of the sheath that consists of bliss.

Further reading: Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *Self-knowledge (Atmabodha): An English Translation of Sankaracharya's Atmabodha* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1946); S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1992).

Shesha See [ADISHESHA](#).

Shitala

Shitala is the GODDESS of smallpox. Her name in Sanskrit means “cold” and refers to chill that accompanies the fever of smallpox. Though smallpox has been eradicated, Shitala is still worshipped in India to prevent or allay any serious disease.

Shitala is understood both to cause disease and to cure it. Sometimes her worshippers paint marks on their faces to mimic the pox. In a way that is not completely clear, the disease itself is seen as grace of the goddess—and her grace removes the disease as well.

Shitala is worshipped all over northern India. In South India the same goddess is called MARIYAMMAN. Shitala's shrines are mainly found in the countryside. Her iconography is a golden-complexioned female sitting on a lotus or riding on an ass. She is dressed in red clothes. When Shitala is worshipped, presents are made to her to gain her favor. If a person is cured, a larger gift is given. Her flower offerings are sometimes put in the hair of children after worship, to protect them against disease. A seriously ill individual might be placed directly in front of the image of Shitala to aid in the cure.

Further reading: Ruth S. Freed and Stanley A. Freed, *The Two Mother Goddess Ceremonies of Delhi State in the Great and Little Traditions* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1962); Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Subrata Kumar Mukhopadhyay, *Cult of Goddess Sitala in Bengal: An Enquiry into Folk Culture* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1994).

Shiva

Shiva, “the beneficent one,” is the divinity at the center of the largest Hindu religious sect. The tradition identifies Shiva with the Vedic god RUDRA, a fierce divinity who caused diseases of cattle and men and was propitiated out of fear. Rudra was known by the epithet *shiva* (as he was known to relent).

Shiva as a separate divinity first appears in the RAMAYANA (c. 600–300 B.C.E.) and MAHABHARATA (c. 700 B.C.E.–100 C.E.) epics; he is cited in the SHVETASHVATARA UPANISHAD (c. 300 B.C.E.) as the highest divinity. Clearly Shiva has ancient roots in North India. Some see his form in a seal from the [INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION](#) (c. 2600 B.C.E.) showing a seated figure with a buffalo-horned headdress and an erect penis.

It is clear that the worship of Shiva is quite ancient, many centuries more ancient than the first extant SHIVA LINGAM, which dates to the first century C.E. The LINGAM is an erect penis; it is the aniconic form that represents Shiva in the inner sanctum of virtually all temples dedicated to him. The lingam is nearly always shown surrounded by a circular stone rim that represents the YONI, or sexual organ, of the goddess, indicating his association with the divine feminine from a very early time.

In the stories of Shiva he is found first with his wife, SATI, who tragically dies, and then with Sati’s reincarnated form PARVATI. His divine family includes the amusing elephant-headed god GANESHA, Shiva and Parvati’s elder son, and KARTTIKEYA, the eternal youth with his peacock vehicle.



The major deity Shiva as Nataraja, Lord of the Dance (HIP/Art Resource, NY)

The basic Shiva myth depicts him in his youth as a fierce, ascetic naked wanderer with matted locks and smeared with ashes from human cremation grounds. He gads about willfully, not observing any social convention.

This all changes after the gods learn that only a son of Shiva can defeat the demon that is trying to usurp their power. They send Parvati to seduce him and then send the god of love to induce him to succumb. The uncooperative Shiva simply burns the god of love to ashes.

Eventually, however, Shiva does take to Parvati, and their lovemaking is famous in the literature. As they make love in a beautiful pleasure grove, his passion is so strong that everything in the grove becomes female—including an unfortunate king who happens into the grove. Shiva’s son was actually born by accident when he spilled his semen into fire. The fire could not contain the energy and so gave the seed to the GANGES. She, with all her coolness, could not contain it either,

so she abandoned it in a bank of reeds. There Karttikeya was born, so named because he was weaned and raised as a child by a group of female stars called the Krittikas. The demon was eventually defeated.

Shiva is famed as Lord of the Dance; as such his NATARAJA form is known to all India and found in grand representation in many temples. He is also the Lord of chaos, who destroys all the universe with his final dance. But of course he may dance that same universe into existence again, if he so chooses.

Further reading: Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Shiva* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Shivananda Saraswati, Swami (1887–1963) *founder of Divine Life Society*

Swami Shivananda Saraswati was an Indian saint, YOGA teacher, and author of more than 200 books on spirituality. Through his disciples, he played a major role in spreading Hinduism and YOGA throughout the world.

Kuppuswami Iyer was born on September 8, 1887. His father was a pious Hindu government official who sent him to college and to medical school. His father died before he finished medical training and Kuppuswami was forced to leave school. Nevertheless, he maintained his interest in medicine and began a medical journal that specialized in preventive medicine and the Indian AYURVEDIC system of health. He administered a hospital in Malaya, where his meeting with a wandering holy man inspired his own spiritual search.

Returning to India he began a pilgrimage around the country. He settled in the holy city of RISHIKESH, where he was initiated into SANNYAS (renunciation) by Swami Viswananda Saraswati and given the name Swami Shivananda Saraswati. Living at Swargashram on the GANGES River, he

devoted himself to MEDITATION, study, and giving of spiritual guidance to a growing group of disciples. He emphasized BHAKTI YOGA and KARMA YOGA and opened a dispensary to serve the residents of the ASHRAM.

In 1934 he established his own ashram, Ananda Kutir (Abode of Bliss), across the river in Rishikesh. It had a dispensary and meditation rooms for silent retreats. In 1936 he founded the Divine Life Trust with the goal of spiritualizing all of India. The Divine Life Society was begun as an auxiliary to the trust, and a monthly periodical was begun. Swami Shivananda also began the Forest Academy to train students in his teaching. He died on July 14, 1963.

Although Swami Shivananda's health prevented him from visiting the West, he became one of the most influential forces in the dissemination of Hinduism and yoga throughout the world through his students and disciples. His student Swami Shivananda RADHA (Sylvia Hillman) founded the YASODHARA ASHRAM SOCIETY in Vancouver. Another student, Swami Vishnudevanda, founded a chain of SHIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTERS in the United States and Canada. In 1959, Swami Chidananda, Shivananda's successor as head of the Divine Life Society, organized the society in the United States. Another student, Swami JYOTIRMAYANANDA, founded the Yoga Research Society in 1962, and SWAMI SATCHIDANANDA created the Integral Yoga Institute in 1966. His disciple and secretary of the Divine Life Society, Swami KRISHNANANDA, although he did not travel to the West, wrote extensively and welcomed seekers from the West to the ashram in Rishikesh.

Further reading: Wami Krishnananda, *Swami Shivananda and the Spiritual Renaissance* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1959); Shiva Shivananda, *Sadhana* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1958); ———, *Science of Yoga*, 18 vols. (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1977); ———, *Yoga Asanas* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1969); Swami Venkateshananda,

Gurudev Shivananda (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1961).

Shivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers

(est. 1958)

Shivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers were founded by Swami Vishnudevananda (1927–93), based on the teachings of his GURU Swami Shivananda SARASWATI (1887–1963) of RISHIKESH. Shivananda developed an integral system of YOGA, joining the four traditional paths (BHAKTI, KARMA, JNANA, and *raja*) with the addition of *japa* (repetition of a mantra). He established an ASHRAM and dispensary in Rishikesh, India, and later established the Divine Life Society there.

Swami Vishnudevananda became a disciple of Swami Shivananda in 1947 after reading Sivananda's books. Over the course of a decade Vishnudevananda was personally trained by Shivananda and became one of his most accomplished yoga students, adept at hatha yoga and *raja* yoga. In 1957 Shivananda instructed Vishnudevananda to spread his teachings in North America. Vishnudevananda established headquarters the following year in Montreal, Quebec, and continued to found centers across the United States. In 1962 the Shivananda Ashram Yoga Camp in Quebec was formed and in 1967 Vishnudevananda established the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat in the Bahamas. He also founded the True World Order, a peace mission that began in 1969 to organize demonstrations for nonviolent struggle. The organization is known for conducting air drops of leaflets and flowers over conflict-filled areas in the world. The most notable mission occurred in Belfast in 1970.

Although Shivananda never traveled to North America, Vishnudevananda assured the spread of his message. Sivananda's system of yoga continues to be a central teaching at the Vedanta centers, with an emphasis on hatha yoga and *raja* yoga. There are currently about 80 ashrams and centers around the world, including 14 in the

United States. Over 10,000 teachers have been trained. The Shivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers have earned the reputation of preserving the quality and tradition of yoga.

Shivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers have published several books including Vishnudevananda's *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, which has sold millions of copies. The center also produces a periodical, *Yoga Life*, that is available free through the organization's Web site, www.sivananda.org.

Further reading: Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers, *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); ———, *The Yoga Cookbook: Vegetarian Food for Body and Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999); ———, *Yoga Mind and Body* (New York: D.K., 1996); Vishnudevananda, Swami, *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga* (New York: Harmony Books, 1988); ———, *Meditation and Mantras* (New York: OM Lotus, 1978); ———, *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Shivaratri See [MAHASHIVARATRI](#).

Shiv Sena (est. 1966)

Shiv Sena is a Maharastrian nationalist group founded in 1966 as a response to a wave of immigrants to the state and the city of Bombay (Mumbai) from Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Punjab. The movement tries to protect the interests of middle-class Maharashtrians in the conflict for resources and power. Shiv Sena is primarily a political and ethnic movement, not a religious movement. However, it uses some religious doctrines to support its political and ideological claims.

The founder of the movement is Balasaheb (Bal) Thackeray (he currently uses the name Don Balasaheb), who is also editor of the Marathi newsletter *Marmik*, which promotes the group's ideology. By 1968, Shiv Sena turned their struggle against communists and Muslims. Their tactics are largely political, but they have not eschewed

armed conflict. More recently Shiv Sena has begun to recruit members of the lower castes, particularly Dalits.

In 1992 Shiv Sena boasted that it played a central role in the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque in AYODHYA. In fact, Shiv Sena activists arrived after the demolition, but they were heavily involved in the riots that followed in Mumbai.

More recently Shiv Sena has formed an alliance with the BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP). Since the BJP losses in the 2004 election the alliance appears to be collapsing. As Bal Thackeray ages, much of the leadership has fallen to his sons, a condition that has weakened the group as a political force.

Further reading: Sikata Banerjee, *Warriors in Politics: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Shiv Sena in India* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000); Julia M. Eckert, *The Charisma of Direct Action: Power Politics and the Shiv Sena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Dipankar Gupta, *Nativism in the Metropolis: The Shiv Sena in Bombay* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982); Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *Ethnicity and Equality: The Shiv Sena Party and Preferential Politics in Bombay* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979).

shraddha See FUNERAL RITES.

shrauta sutra See VEDAS.

Shrirangam

Shrirangam is an island in the CAUVERY River in Tamil Nadu, near Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli), where Lord Ranganatha, a form of VISHNU, resides. The Vaishnavite saint RAMANUJA taught and oversaw the temple here, as did the saint Periyalvar, whose daughter ANDAL reached sainthood here. The site has a long tradition and is a popular PILGRIMAGE center.

Further reading: V. N. Hari Rao, *History of the Srirangam Temple* (Tirupati: Sri Venkateswara University, 1976); M. Somasundaram, *The Island Shrine of Sri Ranganatha* (Tiruchirappalli: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1965).

shruti

Shruti (from *shru*, to hear) refers to sacred texts that are received through a kind of revelation, rather than written by humans. *Shruti* texts are the primary authority in Hinduism; they are complemented, but never superseded, by *smriti*, or human-made texts.

Shruti texts are understood to be heard from a transcendent source. The VEDIC MANTRA texts and their adjuncts, the BRAHMANAS, which include in them the ARANYAKAS and UPANISHADS, are accepted by all as being *shruti*. These texts are considered to have been “heard” or “seen” by the Vedic *RISHIS* (seers). Other texts are sometimes given the status of *shruti* by certain groups or regional traditions, such as the BHAGAVAD GITA, the Tamil TEVARAM, or the TANTRIC AGAMAS.

Further reading: Kalus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*. Translated by S. Ketkar (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971).

Shudra

The term *Shudra* originates in the ancient RIG VEDA; it refers to the servant class, as the lowest group in a four-part division (VARNA) of human society. It is used in present-day India for castes that are low in the social hierarchy, such as barbers, washermen, and others who perform personal services.

Each region of India has its own notions of what constitutes a Shudra. Below the Shudras in the informal caste hierarchy (the caste system was legally abolished after independence) are the

Dalits, untouchables, who are sometimes referred to as the “fifth” and “unclean” stratum of society. Many of them are employed as sweepers, refuse removers, and leather workers (See [UNTOUCHABILITY](#)).

Further reading: Maurice Carstairs, *The Twice Born* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); R. S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980).

Shurpanakha See [RAMAYANA](#).

Shvetambara

Shvetambara is one of the two branches of JAINISM. The name, which means “one who wears white garments,” refers to the fact that its monks may wear clothing, as opposed to the DIGAMBARA monks, who are required to be nude. The Shvetambaras prevail among the Jains of northern and western India.

There is little doubt that MAHAVIRA, the great leader and promulgator of the Jain tradition, was a naked ascetic, as were his early followers, but the scriptures that are recognized by the Shvetambaras do not require nudity. The Shvetambaras accept the extant version of the early Jain scriptures, the ANGAS, and they follow, study, and preach its teachings. The Digambaras believe the authentic versions have been lost. The only text mutually accepted by both Shvetambaras and Digambaras is the TATTVARTHA SUTRA.

Shvetambaras also believe that women may attain liberation. Because women are not allowed to be naked ascetics, Digambaras believe that they cannot reach the level of detachment needed to become liberated; a woman must be reborn in a male body to reach liberation. Shvetambaras believe that Mallinatha, one of the 24 TIRTHANKARAS (saints) of our half-era (*avasarpini*), was a woman.

In general Digambaras (who predominate in southern India) and Shvetambaras are in nearly complete doctrinal agreement, but their communities developed separately and do not share

festivals or sacred events. The Shvetambaras celebrate their major festival Paryushan around the recitation of the Kalpa Sutra. In the past, the two communities have fought bitterly over control of certain shrines, but in general they live in comity in places where they overlap.

Further reading: Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992); Uttam Kamal Jain, *Jaina Sects and Schools* (Delhi: Concept, 1975); P. S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

Shvetashvatara Upanishad

The Shvetashvatara Upanishad is generally dated around the third century B.C.E., making it one of the later UPANISHADS. It is the only orthodox Upanishad that refers to a sectarian divinity, in this case RUDRA-SHIVA. It understands Shiva to be the same as the BRAHMAN, the ultimate reality, who had not previously been characterized in purely theistic terms. The text equates the terms PURUSHA, which is the person from whom the world evolved in the Vedas, ATMAN (soul or self), BRAHMAN, and God, so as to make clear the identity of all designations for the highest. The theistic quality of this text is developed in later Hindu theism and in theistic or God-oriented VEDANTA.

Further reading: Swami Lokeshwarananda, trans., *Svetasvatara Upanisad* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1994); Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanishads: Katha, Isá, Kena, Mundaka, Sv'etasv'atara, Prasña, Mandukya, Aitareya, Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya, and Chhandogya*, 4 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Early Upanisads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Siddha

Siddha ([The] Perfected) refers to a historic group of YOGIS who achieved all of the SIDDHIS, or occult powers, and attained liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth in the body (JIVANMUKTA).

The tradition of the Siddhas preserves a list of 84 masters of the lineage. Several of the names are shared in a corresponding Tibetan Buddhist Siddha tradition. The most famous Siddha master was GORAKHNATH (Gorakshanatha); his name is included in both Tibetan and Indian lists. In India he is supposed to have been born between 900 and 1200 C.E.

The Siddhas practiced alchemy, ingesting poisonous oxides of mercury to achieve bodily immortality. They were known for their extreme asceticism, antisocial behavior, frightening appearance, and supernatural powers. They were often also associated with magical healing. The Siddhas were tantric and accepted membership from any caste. The modern tradition of SWAMI MUKTANANDA refers to itself as Siddha Yoga; it reveres a lineage of Siddha masters who have characteristics in common with Siddhas elsewhere, but of course also the 84 Siddhas of tradition.

The Tamil Shaivite tradition has a body of literature dating from as early as 600 C.E. tracing what is called a Sittar tradition (the word is from the same Sanskrit root), which resembles the larger Siddha cult. The first of these Sittars was considered to be TIRUMULAR, who wrote Tirumantiram, perhaps the first important tantric text, outlining KUNDALINI YOGA and describing other tantric practices.

Further reading: George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982); John Campbell Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India* (Delhi: Oriental, 1983); David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Kamil V. Zvelebil, *The Poets of the Powers* (London: Rider, 1973); ———, *The Siddha Quest for Immortality* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1996).

Siddhaswarupananda, Jagad Guru

(1948–) *independent bhakti yogi*

The American-born yogi Jagad Guru Siddhaswarupananda was a teacher in the INTERNATIONAL

SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON) before forming his own offshoot organization.

Chris Butler was born in 1948 in New Orleans, Louisiana, but moved to Hawaii as an infant and grew up in the islands. His interest in religion in general and YOGA in particular emerged during his last years of high school. He studied with the YOGA teachers available to him and experienced SAMADHI sublime consciousness. As a young man, he founded the Haiku School of Nirvana Yoga (also known as the Haiku Meditation Center) on the island of Maui, where he taught ASHTANGA YOGA and KUNDALINI YOGA.

Around 1970 he met Srila BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPADA, the founder of ISKCON. Butler accepted Bhaktivedanta's teaching of devotional or BHAKTI yoga and his emphasis on a personal deity, as opposed to Butler's previous belief in an impersonal divinity. Butler closed his work in Hawaii and accepted an initiation from Bhaktivedanta to join his movement. He remained with ISKCON until after Prabhupada died in 1977.

In the year after Bhaktivedanta died, Butler concluded that his GURU had emerged as a non-appointed pure devotee who held his status by virtue of his own spiritual attainment, not via his relationship to the GAUDIYA MATH center. Shortly before his death Bhaktivedanta, following the example of his guru, Bhaktisiddhanta, appointed 12 men to manage the *math*. Similarly, Bhaktivedanta appointed 12 men to manage ISKCON. None of these appointees was a guru by virtue of this appointment; each could be a guru only as an unappointed, but accomplished, devotee.

Butler assumed that he was such an unappointed guru, and, in 1978, as Jagad Guru Siddhaswarupananda, he began to initiate disciples. He founded the Science of Identity Foundation as a vehicle to facilitate his teachings. He has led a rather low-key existence, traveling constantly and staying in various locations for relatively short periods as he is invited by his initiates. He has written several short books and produced a variety of video and audio materials for his followers.

The Science of Identity Foundation (originally the Hari Nama or Holy Name Society) is located in Honolulu, Hawaii. Siddhaswarupananda became a founding member of the WORLD VAISHNAVITE ASSOCIATION.

Further reading: Jagad Guru Siddhaswarupananda, *God: Supremely Lovable* (Honolulu: Science of Identity Foundation, 1989); ———, *The Holy Name Real Protection* (Honolulu: Science of Identity Foundation, n.d.); ———, *Reincarnation Explained* (Honolulu: Science of Identity Foundation, 1987).

Siddha Yoga Dham See CHIDVILASANANDA, SWAMI.

siddhi

Siddhi (attainment) is a special power attained through YOGA or refined practice. Traditionally, there are eight *siddhis*: (1) the ability to grow extremely small, (2) the ability to become extremely light, (3) the ability to become extremely heavy, (4) the ability to touch any object however distant, (5) irresistible will, (6) supremacy over body and mind, (7) dominion over the elements, (8) ability to fulfill all desires. Numerous other powers are also listed in the tradition, such as the ability to fly, physical immortality, the ability to enter another's body, and knowledge of the past, present, and future.

PATANJALI'S system and certain other yoga systems such as that of the Theravada Buddhists downplay *siddhis* as distractions from the path of liberation; adepts are warned not to indulge themselves in these powers, lest they be sidelined in their spiritual progress. Certain systems such as the TANTRA, though, encourage the attainment of *siddhi* and allow its usage to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the particular sect.

Further reading: Sri Chinmoy, *The Summits of God-life: Samadhi and Siddhi* (Jamaica, N.Y.: Agni Press, 1974);

H. C. Mathur, *Siddhi: The Science of Supernatural Powers* (New Delhi: Shree, 1998).

Sikhism

The Sikh religion emerged at the beginning of 16th century C.E. in the Punjab, a territory hotly contested by Hindus and Muslims at the time. It aimed to find the truths common to both faiths, placing less emphasis on laws and rituals and soon emerged as a third, well-organized, Indian religious community.

Though raised as a Hindu, Sikhism's founder, NANAK (1469–1539), began his adult life in the employ of a Muslim, as was his father. A thoughtful and inwardly oriented youth, he spent periods each morning and evening as a young man in MEDITATION. In his 30th year, his communion with the divine led to an intense experience of God in which he experienced God as the one creator. As a result of the encounter, he quit his job and gave away all his possessions. He began to proclaim his unique message that there is no Hindu and no Muslim. Sikhism would emerge as he began to articulate his message, drawing together what he saw as the best from both faiths. He shared the message in a set of hymns.

His message sought to discover what he saw to be the essence of the religious teachings around him. In the place of many religious acts, from praying on a prayer mat or living as a renunciant, he called upon people to cultivate the virtues these actions symbolized. For example, he suggested that the essence of asceticism was to remain pure amid impurities. He also called for a casteless society without distinctions based on the family into which one is born. He traveled from Sri Lanka to Tibet spreading his message, although Kashmir and the Punjab proved most receptive.

Before his death in 1539, Nanak selected a disciple whom he had named Angad (1504–52) as his successor. Angad would be followed by eight additional GURUS who were selected

to lead the Sikh community: Guru Amar Das (1479–1574), Guru Ram Das (1534–81), Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606), Guru Hargobind (1595–1644), Guru Har Rai (1630–61), Guru Harkrishan (1656–64), Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75), and Guru Gobind SINGH (1666–1708).

Each of the 10 gurus made his contribution to the development of the faith. For example, the fourth guru began construction on what would become the Golden Temple in AMRITSAR, the physical center of the Sikh community. The formation of the Sikh community, the Khalsa (the pure ones), was completed by the 10th guru, Gobind Singh. He saw to the baptism of new members

into the Khalsa by sprinkling with sweetened water stirred with a sword. At the time, each male adopted the name *Singh* (lion) as his family name. As a visible sign of membership in the community, each male also began to wear the five K's: (1) *kesh*, long hair; (2) *kangh*, a comb; (3) *kach*, short pants (for quick movement); (4) *kara*, a steel bracelet; and (5) *kirpan*, a knife.

Through the years, the writing of the gurus were compiled in a book, the *Adi Granth*. The fifth guru, upon the completion of the Golden Temple, formally installed the volume in the temple, much as Hindus installed statues of deities in their temples. After the death of Gobind



Sikh Gurudwara (temple) in Hong Kong (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

Singh, his contributions were added to the *Adi Granth*, and then the book was declared to be the new guru for the community. Since that time, while there are teachers of Sikhism who convey the faith to each new generation, there is no human to whom the status of *GURU* (teacher) is formerly ascribed.

Wherever Nanak traveled, he established local groups called *manjis*. Over the years, these would mature as *gurudwaras*, seats of the guru or *Adi Granth*, the worship centers in which Sikh communities gather on a weekly basis.

While it had been Nanak's goal to create a synthesis that would dissolve the differences between Muslim and Hindu, both faiths continued and Nanak's work had the effect of creating a new religion. A minority community, Sikhs were frequently forced to defend themselves and emerged with a reputation as great warriors. At times aligned with the British, they served with distinction in battles throughout the 19th century, in both India and abroad.

Since the death of the last guru, temporal authority in the community passed to the *Sri Akal Takht Sahib*, a name used to refer to both a building close to the Golden Temple and the Sikh leader who operates from the building. All the issues of import to Sikhs are debated there, and the decrees issued from it are considered binding on the entire community internationally. Another important structure in the community is the *Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (S.G.P.C.). It oversees the administration of the worship centers (*gurudwaras*) in India and carries on an extensive publication and education program. In the 1930s, the S.G.P.C. assembled the most noted Sikh scholars and theologians to produce a consensus statement on the standards of Sikh belief and conduct. The result was the *Reht Maryada*, a defining document of Sikhism, which offers guidelines for conduct both inside the *gurudwaras* and in the daily life of Sikhs.

The Sikh community declined in the 19th century, in part because of the attractiveness of

some of the new movements of the Hindu renaissance, such as the *BRAHMO SAMAJ*, which shared many affirmations (such as the idea of one God) with the Sikhs. Many Hindus looked upon the Sikhs as just another sect of Hinduism, a position not accepted by most Sikhs. Several revitalization efforts appeared, including the *NIRANKARI* and *SANT MAT* movements, but with limited appeal. However, it was the *Singh Sabha*, the governing body that oversees Sikh communities, that seemed to have the greatest effect with its calling the entire community to a new understanding of itself and its heritage. It called for a new allegiance to the writings of the gurus and an end to encroachments by Christianity and Hinduism into the *gurudwaras*.

The reemergence of the Sikh community was viewed with alarm in some quarters. Some saw it as a challenge to government authority (i.e., British rule). The growing popularity of Sikhism set the stage for the development of Sikh nationalism, with its demands that the Punjab, territory in which the Sikhs predominated, be separated from Hindu India. In the decades since World War I, the tension between the Sikhs and the British, and later the Indian, government has waxed and waned. More extreme elements among the Sikhs responded to government attempts to suppress nationalist aspirations with violence, followed by retaliation by the Indian government.

The most significant event in the ongoing battles between the government and the Sikh community occurred in June 1984. *Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale*, a militant Sikh leader, and his followers took refuge in the Golden Temple. Unable to persuade him to surrender, under orders from Prime Minister *Indira Gandhi*, the Indian army invaded the temple, with significant damage to the sacred property and loss of life. The event was a call to arms for the community. Among other consequences, Sikhs living outside India formed the *World Sikh Organization*. Then in October, Sikhs who served as *Indira Gandhi's* bodyguards turned on her and assassinated her. Though the

assassins were later executed, they became heroes to Sikhs.

Sikhs had largely been confined to India until the 20th century. Their migration outward was in part motivated by the same factors that sent other groups to the West, but was also stimulated by the tensions created in the Punjab as the community revived. Many Sikhs targeted by the government for their activity as Sikh nationalists migrated to continue their efforts from a base outside India. Before immigration was curtailed, several thousand Sikhs immigrated to western Canada and the United States. Others took advantage of regulations that allowed free movement through the British Commonwealth to settle in the United Kingdom.

Migration by Sikhs into the United States increased considerably after anti-Asian immigration laws were rescinded in 1965. Today, several hundred thousand Sikhs reside in North America. American Sikhs hosted Sikh leaders in 1984 for the founding of the World Sikh Organization, which took place in New York City. As the American Sikh community grew, it organized the Sikh Foundation in the 1970s, which has more recently been succeeded by the Sikh Council of North America. The council seeks to coordinate and provide communication among the many *gurdwaras* across the continent.

As the Sikh community expanded in the 1970s, it was faced with a new and different phenomenon. A man popularly known as Yogi BHAJAN arrived in Los Angeles and claimed to be a Sikh teacher, but also a teacher of HATHA and KUNDALINI and TANTRIC yoga. He organized a movement of mostly young adult men and women, which he called the Sikh Dharma, though it was better known through its educational arm, the HEALTHY, HAPPY, HOLY ORGANIZATION (3HO). After a period of controversy, the Sikh Dharma was recognized as a valid expression of Sikhism, but because of its growth through conversion of individual members, rather than growth through heredity, it has remained a separate organization.

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Singapore

Indian migrants began to arrive in what was British Malaya during the 19th century, primarily with the intent of finding employment on the sugarcane and rubber plantations that British entrepreneurs had established. The Crown Colony of Singapore served as an initial point of arrival for Indian migrants, most of whom quickly moved north. However, many chose to stay on the island. Most were from lower-caste families, and more than 60 percent from Tamil Nadu state. By 1900 some 16,000 had arrived.

By the beginning of the 20th century, four Hindu temples had been established in Singapore. The oldest of these, Sri Mariammam, was started in 1827; the present structure was erected in 1843 and dedicated to the goddess MARIYAMMAN, revered for her healing powers. In 1905, after complaints of mismanagement affecting a variety of religious institutions, administration of the temples was turned over to the Mohammedan and Hindu Charitable Endowments Board. That board continued to exist until 1969, when it was split into two boards, one for each religion. In 1915, a second structure, the Hindu Advisory Board, was established to advise the government on Hinduism. Both boards continue to the present. In the meantime the number of temples had grown to around 30 and the number of Hindus of Indian extraction had risen to about 225,000. The Indian community is now the third largest ethnic group in Singapore behind the Chinese and Malays.

Hindu activity in Singapore is dominated by the majority Tamil-speaking community. Local temples tend to be home to devotees of both SHĀIVISM and VAISHNAVISM and the major deities each reveres. It is also not uncommon to see Buddhist and even Christian images in the temples. This syncretism is promoted in line with official government policies focused on building religious harmony in the very diverse religious community of Singapore. In 1978, the community established the Hindu Center to facilitate the transmission of Hinduism to the younger generation.

The annual life of the community in Singapore is punctuated by several festivals, all of which have become public events attended by many non-Hindus. Especially notable is the annual Thaipusam festival, a Shaivite festival celebrating the birthday of Lord Subramaniam, the younger son of Lord SHIVA, which occurs toward the end of January each year. Interestingly, this festival was outlawed in India for many years because of bloody hook swinging and body piercing and Singapore is one of the few places where it survives. The week-long festival culminates in an all-day procession in which young men carry a heavy structure honoring the deity from one temple to another through Singapore.

Since the 1930s, the Hindu community in Singapore has witnessed impulses for reform, including resistance to BRAHMIN domination of the temples, elevation of the status of women, and the social equity of different castes.

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Singh See SIKHISM.

Singh, Charan See SANT MAT MOVEMENT.

Singh, Guru Gobind (1666–1708) *10th Sikh guru*

Guru Gobind Singh was the 10th and final Sikh GURU in the lineage of Guru NANAK, the founder of SIKHISM. He established the beliefs and practices that the community follows to this day, including the devotion to scripture as the only GURU.

Gobind Rai was born on December 22, 1666, to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, and Mata Gujari in Patna in Bihar state. The young boy was taught the language of Bihari and Gurumukhi script as a child and was schooled in the life and deeds of the previous gurus. He was given a comprehensive education of India: the historical, social, religious, and political context. In keeping with the Sikh tradition he was also trained in music, prayers, and the use of weapons. He was raised in a family who held close relations with both Hindus and Muslims. He spent much of his childhood playing on the banks of the GANGES River and was said to be bold, with all the makings of a leader.

Guru Gobind's father met a violent death when the boy was less than 10 years old; Sikhs claim he was executed by Emperor Aurangzeb, Mughal ruler of India, as part of a campaign to convert India to Islam. Controversy surrounds the details, but the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur remains part of the Sikh belief system.

In 1675, the family made a long journey to Punjab, and in November of that year Gobind Rai was initiated as the 10th Sikh guru. Although still a child, he was said to be very self-aware. He continued to train in philosophy, politics, and weaponry. The popularity of the Sikh tradition continued to spread across India, drawing both Muslim and Hindu disciples.

Guru Gobind Singh had three wives. His first marriage was to Mata Jeeto of Lahore, who gave birth to three sons, Jujhar, Zoravar, and Fateh. He later married Mata Sundari of Lahore, who gave birth to another son, Ajit. She survived Singh and was revered as a great teacher by Sikhs after her husband's death. His last wife, Mata Sahib Devi of the Jehlam District, went to Guru Gobind after vowing to marry no one else. He did not wish to marry but agreed to a platonic relationship in which she could share her life with him.

Singh taught the oneness of humankind, love and worship of God, self-awakening, and social justice, all part of the Sikh heritage. His unique contribution, however, was to organize the Khalsa (pure ones) order in 1699, probably in response to his father's martyrdom decades before. The purpose of the Khalsa was to promote sacrifice for DHARMA, the right way of living. Members were enjoined to resist any form of slavery based on class, caste, or religion and to prioritize their commitment to social justice. Guru Gobind even advocated the use of arms when in resistance to oppression. He also instituted the five K's, observed by male Sikhs to the present day: (1) *kesh*, long hair; (2) *kangh*, a comb; (3) *kach*, short pants (for quick movement); (4) *kara*, a steel bracelet; and (5) *kirpan*, a knife.

Guru Gobind Singh declared that upon his death the line of individual gurus would end and the authority of the guru would rest solely in the scripture—the Adi Granth (called the *Guru Granth Sahib*)—and in the Khalsa, the fellowship of pure followers. Guru Gobind Singh died on October 7, 1708.

Further reading: Surinder Singh Johar, *Guru Gobind Singh* (New Delhi: Enkay, 1987).

Singh, Jaimal See [RADHASOAMI MOVEMENT](#); [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#)

Singh, Kirpal Maharaj (1894–1974) *teacher of Sant Mat and Radhasoami*

Kirpal Maharaj Singh was a dynamic and influential reformer and international champion of inter-faith cooperation. He helped disseminate the Sant Mat teachings in India and around the world.

Kirpal Singh was born on February 6, 1894, in Sayyad Kasran in the Rawalpindi District of the Punjab in what is now Pakistan. He was educated at the Edwards Church Mission High School in Peshawar. In January 1912 he signed up for government service in the Military Accounts Department, an occupation that he pursued until retirement in 1947 as deputy assistant controller of military accounts. Throughout his early life he studied the basic scriptures of the Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians and began to believe that various religious philosophies communicate the same basic truth, which is the need for each person to attain both self-knowledge and God-knowledge.

In 1917 he first had contact with his teacher, Baba Sawan Singh of the Beas lineage of RADHASOAMI teachers. He was later married and became the father of two sons. In February 1924 he was formally initiated by Baba Sawan Singh and given the name *Naam*, “the word.” It is said that his teacher Sawan Singh passed all his spiritual knowledge onto his disciple through one look in the eyes. In 1935 he began writing and composing his text, *Gurmat Sidhant*. On April 2, 1948, after the death of his teacher, he began his ministry in the Radhasoami lineage. At the end of that year he started his mission and began giving regular initiations.

In June of 1951 he founded the Sawan Ashram in Shakti Nagar, Delhi. Four years later he went on his first world tour. In 1956 in Delhi, he gave the inaugural address to the Ninth General Session of UNESCO. In 1957 he became the founding president of the World Fellowship of Religions; he later presided over four World Religious Conferences over a period of 14 years. In 1962 he was the first non-Christian to be honored with the

Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta. His interfaith efforts reached a climax when he convened the first World Conference on Unity of Man in Delhi in February 1974, which inspired the Unity of Man movement.

His extensive knowledge of major religious faiths along with his dedication to teaching led to Kirpal Singh's wide acceptance in the West. He popularized Sant Mat teachings in India and the West and became one of the most well known teachers of Radhasoami. He died on August 21, 1974.

See also [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#).

Further reading: David Christopher Lane, *The Radhasoami Tradition: A Critical History of the Guru Successorship* (New York: Garland, 1992); Bhadra Sena, ed., *Ocean of Grace Divine* (Bowling Green, Va.: Sawan Kirpal, 1976); Kirpal Singh, *The Crown of Life* (Delhi: Ruhani Satsang, 1967); ———, *Surat Shabd Yoga: The Yoga of the Celestial Sound* (Berkeley: Images Press, 1975).

Singh, Sawan See [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#).

Singh, Shiv Dayal See [RADHASOAMI MOVEMENT](#); [SANT MAT MOVEMENT](#).

Sita

In the [RAMAYANA](#) Sita is the wife of [RAMA](#). *Sita* means “furrow,” and it is said that she was not born to her father Janaka, but was ploughed up by him during a sacrificial rite to gain progeny. Sita was won by Rama in a contest by bending [SHIVA](#)'s bow.

Sita is considered the model for wifely fidelity and purity in India (though modern Indian women have begun to rebel against this model). In the epic, she was kidnapped by the demon king Ravana and taken to Lanka. Because of a curse he was unable to violate her, and she refused his advances. Her husband fought successfully for

her freedom. However, he doubted that she had remained faithful and cruelly rejected her, saying he had only fought against Ravana to clear his name.

To clear her name, Sita underwent a “trial by fire” (*agnipravesha*), which she survived unscathed. Several vernacular versions of the [Ramayana](#) indicate that the real Sita never actually went into the fire, sending a substitute instead; in fact, in these versions she was not even really kidnapped, but had only been in hiding. These versions seem to show a later discomfort with the original [SANSKRIT](#) story.

After her trial by fire, Sita was then accepted by Rama, until people once more began to challenge her faithfulness and Rama asked Lakshmana to take her away to the forest, in exile once more. He did not know that she was pregnant with his two sons, Kusha and Lava. She gave birth to her sons in the [ASHRAM](#) of the very [VALMIKI](#) who is cited as the author of the epic.

On one occasion Rama initiated a [HORSE SACRIFICE](#); in that ritual, a horse is allowed to roam at will for a year, followed by the king's soldiers. Whatever land the horse covers becomes part of the ruler's kingdom. Kusha and Lava as it happens captured the king's horse and defeated the king's army when it arrived, thus defeating, in an act of poetic justice, their father. When Rama heard from [VALMIKI](#) that these were his own sons he asked that they be taken to court, where they sang the [Ramayana](#) story. He then called for Sita to return and declared her innocence in open court. Sita, however, refused to return and asked Mother Earth, from which she had been born, to take her back, whereupon she disappeared.

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1991); Paula Richman, ed., *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Skanda See [KARTTIKEYA](#).

smṛiti

Smṛiti (from *smri*, to remember) is a term in the Hindu tradition used to refer to revered textual sources that were composed by humans, as opposed to those that are eternal and appeared through revelation (*shruti*).

These texts were composed by men but usually memorized rather than committed to writing. They were considered authoritative, but less so than the *shruti*, or “heard,” texts such as the *VEDAS*, which had been received by *RISHIS* (seers) during divine trances.

Because of the diverse nature of Hindu tradition there have been disagreements between sects as to what texts can be considered *smṛiti*. Some hold, for instance, that the *BHAGAVAD GITA* is *shruti*, divinely received, whereas others hold that it is *smṛiti*.

Further reading: A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1997); Ram Kishore Gupta, *Political Thought in the Smṛiti Literature* (Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 1968); Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); L. Sternback, *Hindu Legends of Justice: Pancatantra and Smṛiti* (Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2002).

Society of Abidance in Truth

The Society of Abidance in Truth (SAT) was formed in 1974 by devotees of *RAMANA* Maharshi (1879–1950). The purpose of the nonprofit society is to disseminate the teachings of *ADVAITA* (non-dual) *VEDANTA*. SAT follows two ancient traditions with roots in India and China. These

include the wisdom originally found in the *VEDAS* and codified in the 19th century as the *SANATANA DHARMA*, and Ch’an (Zen) Buddhism, as developed during China’s T’ang dynasty. Following the knowledge imparted by *Ramana Maharshi*, the society emphasizes self-inquiry and self-knowledge to further the realization that no difference exists between one’s nature and the absolute. The teachings proclaim that the true identity of self resides in God. The society does not observe any religious ritual, formal meditative technique, or code of conduct. Rather, SAT relies on developing skills of self-observation so that one can experience the unity of self and the highest divinity. SAT holds that in awakening to true formless nature one will find peace, happiness, and freedom.

Nome and Russell Smith, who have backgrounds in *advaita* Vedanta and Zen Buddhism, respectively, offer spiritual leadership, weekly teaching sessions, and *satsangs* (meetings) in Santa Cruz, California. SAT publishes translations of ancient *SANSKRIT* texts and books relating to *Ramana Maharshi*’s life. Membership is primarily concentrated in Santa Cruz, but devotees are present throughout the world. SAT welcomes the general public to participate in its events.

Further reading: *The Journey Home* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Avadhut, 1986); *Ramana Maharshi, Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Boston: Arkana, 1975); ———, *The Spiritual Teaching of Ramana Maharshi* (Berkeley: Shambala, 1972); ———, *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Madras: Affiliated East-West Press, 1990).

Soma

Soma was a divine, intoxicating drink favored by *INDRA*, king of the gods, according to the *Vedas*. It was made from a celestial plant taken to Earth by an eagle and was said to confer immortality on gods and humans. *BRAHMIN* priests in Vedic times oversaw its preparation, offered it to the gods,

and drank it themselves at their rituals. The drink was used in such quantities that the YAJUR VEDA includes a chant to alleviate the effects of excessive Soma drinking.

Soma was most used by the priests of the SAMA VEDA. A majority of hymns in the Sama Veda itself praise the Soma, personified as a god. In fact, Soma is said to have inspired the composition of Vedic hymns. The drink is said to be sweet and milky. Various attempts have been made to identify the Soma plant. Today it is the name of a vine that does not appear to have intoxicating properties.

The Vedic god Soma acts as the husband of the dawns, supports the Earth and sky, and makes the Sun light up. In late Vedic times Soma was connected to the Moon. In modern Hindu mythology Soma is the Moon god and the lord of all plants. Scholars identify the beverage Soma with the Haoma, which was also offered to the gods in the Avesta, the scripture of the ancient Persians.

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Sri See [LAKSHMI](#).

Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Mandal (est. 1980) The Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Mandal is an offshoot of the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON), popularly known in North America as the Hare Krishna movement. The Mandal was founded in 1980 by Bhakti Rakasa Sridhara Deva Goswami (1895–1988) to

carry on the teachings of his god-brother Swami A. C. Prabhupada BHAKTIVEDANTA (1896–1977), founder of ISKCON.

Before he died Prabhupada is said to have told his disciples that if dissention occurred in the movement, it should be resolved by Sridhara; they were “god-brothers,” as both received their initiation from Bhaktisiddhanta Sarawati Takir in the GAUDIYA MATH in India. This group had been the central Krishna Consciousness organization in Bengal.

Prabhupada’s death was in fact followed by intense infighting and theological unrest. Disputes were frequent and solutions hard to obtain. When some members of the upper ranks turned to Sridhara, as they had been advised to do, the eventual solution was the founding of a new order. The Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Mandal was formed as the branch that would serve the mission in the United States while remaining affiliated with the Gaudiya Math.

Since its founding the mandal has flourished and has engaged in an expansive publishing program. Guardian of Devotion Press has published a variety of Sridhara’s literature in the field of religion and spirituality. There are affiliated centers in Mexico, Brazil, England, Venezuela, South Africa, Italy, the Netherlands, Australia, Austria, and Hungary.

Further reading: Sridhara Deva Goswami (Bhakti Rakasa), *Bhakti Parparana Jivanmarta: Lifenechar of the Surrendered Souls: Nabadwip Dham* (West Bengal: Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math, 1988); ———, *The Search for Sri Krsna, Reality the Beautiful* (San Jose, Calif.: Guardian of Devotion Press, 1983).

Sri Krishna Chaitanya See [CHAITANYA](#).

Sri Lalita See [SRI VIDYA](#).

Sri Lanka See [RAMAYANA](#).

Sri Ram Chandra Mission (est. 1945)

Sri Ram Chandra Mission in India was founded by His Holiness Sri Maharaj RAM CHANDRAJI of Shahjahanpur, in 1945. He was popularly known as “Babuji.” The mission was in memory, honor, and testimony to his teacher, Samarth Guru Mahatma Sri Ram Chandriji Maharaj of Fatehgar, Uttar Pradesh, who is devotedly referred to as “Lalaji.” Today, the work is being carried forward by Sri PARTHASARATHI RAJAGOPALACHARI (b. 1927).

The mission’s objectives are to educate and teach the masses in the art and science of YOGA, tailored for the modern world, and to encourage feelings of unconditional love to everyone inclusive of all castes, creeds, and colors. In addition, the mission seeks to establish research centers whose focus is the study of YOGA, helping those who wish to carry forth the mission.

Practice and life in the mission include rising before dawn for daily PUJA (worship to divinity through offerings such as incense or rice) or spiritual MANTRAS (chants). The honor code of devotees includes being truthful and harmless to others and being free from resentful motives. Typically, members assume a peaceful lifestyle that gives harmony and serenity to their surroundings. The disciples try to live a plain and simple lifestyle devoted to spirituality. The mission has several hundred centers around the world. The president of each center is responsible for the transmission of divine wisdom. More than 1,000 people have been trained to assist these presidents with the authenticity of the *raja* path or the royal road to divine wisdom.

The international headquarters of the mission is in Madras (Chennai), India, and the United States headquarters is in Molena, Georgia. *Sahaj Sandesh* is a service that periodically broadcasts news via e-mail about SRCM activities worldwide.

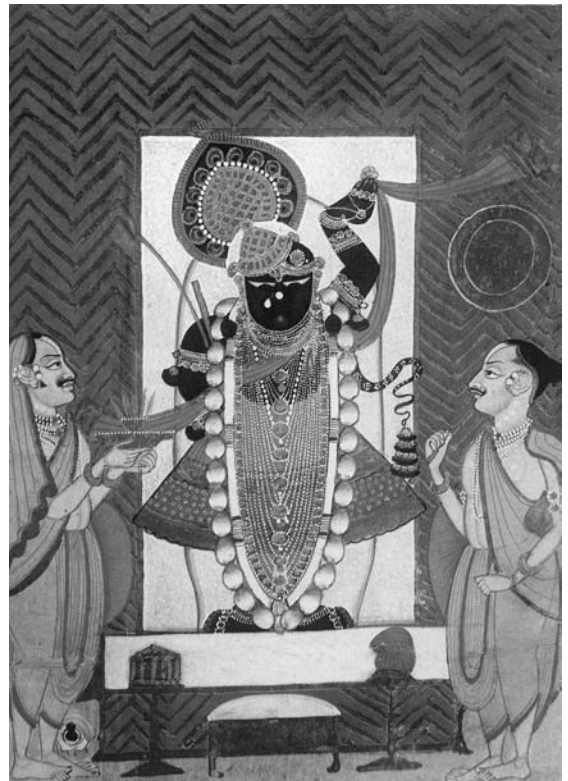
Further reading: Ram Chandra Maharaj, Shri, *Heart to Heart*, vol. 3 (Shahjahanpur: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1993); ———, *Letters of the Master*. Vols. 1 and

2 (Shahjahanpur: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1992); ———, *Letters of the Master*, vol. 3 (Shahjahanpur: Shri Ram Chandra Mission, 1996).

Sri Rama Foundation (est. 1971) See [NARI DASS, BABA](#).

Sri Sri Nathji

Sri Sri Nathji (the Lord of Sri) is a form of KRISHNA worshipped at NATHDWARA near Udaipur in Rajasthan. Nathdwara is one of the main shrines of the cult of the Hindu saint VALLABHA. The image has different forms, one of which shows Sri Sri Nathji



Sri Sri Nathji, a special icon of Lord Krishna revered by the Vallabha sect of Krishna devotees (*calendar print*)

lifting up the Govardhana mountain, which is part of the Krishna mythology.

The image here is treated as Krishna himself and the worship follows a cycle of the events of Krishna's life. The image was taken from Mathura in 1669 to preserve it from destruction by the iconoclastic Muslim Mughal king Aurangzeb.

Further reading: Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdvara* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1987); Anne-Marie Gaston, *Krishna's Musicians: Musicians and Music Making in the Temples of Nathdvara, Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997).

Sri Vidya

Sri Vidya is an all-India cult of the worship of the GODDESS Sri Lalita or Tripurasundari. It initiates in the right-handed tantric tradition (see [TANTRISM](#)), which emphasizes Sri Lalita as the Great GODDESS. Iconographically, she is seen as a beautiful 16-year old with a parrot on her shoulder; however, this is just her gross form. Her subtle form is the Sri YANTRA or Sri CHAKRA, which is a geometric design around a basic point, showing four entranceways at its outer portion that are representative of temple entranceways.

The highest form of Sri Lalita is the 16-syllable MANTRA that is chanted in worship of her. As is the tantric norm, she is the mantra and one who chants the mantra *becomes* the goddess. She in effect enters that person and becomes that person. The Sri Vidya PUJA (worship and offering) is done at homes and not publicly. The devotee first burns his or her self up symbolically, readying for the transformation into the goddess. "One must become the Goddess to worship the Goddess" is the operative phrase. Doing ritual worship to the diagram of the Sri Yantra, one places mantras on one's body to transform it into the body of the goddess. The reverse is done when the puja is coming to a close. At the end of the ritual proper the 1,000 names of goddess Sri Lalita are usually chanted.

South India has a particularly strong cult of Sri Lalita, where the initiates tend to be BRAHMINS. Thus, though there are tantric aspects to this ritual, there is no consumption of forbidden things such as beef or alcohol, as in the left-handed rites. Substitutes are used to make the rites palatable to Brahmin practitioners. The philosophical system involved is a tantric ADVAITA non-dual system, understanding that the manifest world is real and an aspect of the supreme Goddess.

Further reading: Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); ———, *The Secret of the Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Sri Yantra See [YANTRA](#), [SRI](#).

states of consciousness

There are four states of consciousness outlined in the MANDUKYA UPANISHAD, one of the classical Vedic UPANISHADS often cited in VEDANTA and other Indian traditions. The four states are *jag-arita* (*jagrat*), the waking state; *svapna*, the dreaming state; *sushupti*, the deep sleep state; and *turiya*, the transcendent state beyond conventional consciousness, in which one realizes the BRAHMAN or ultimate reality. Some early Upanishads conflate the last two states.

Further reading: Swami Krishnananda, *The Mandukya Upanishad: An Exposition* (Shivanandanagar: Divine Life Society, 1977); Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *Self-Knowledge (Atmabodha): An English Translation of Sankaracharya's Atmabodha* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1946); S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanisads* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1992).

Sthanakavasi

The Sthanakavasis are a minority sect within the Jain community founded by a Jain layperson from



Sthanakavasi, a Jain monk with mouth covering to practice *ahimsa*, in Gujarat (Constance A. Jones)

Gujarat, Lonka Shaha, who in 1451 C.E. decided to form a new community based on a return to traditional values. He is said to have gained access to the basic texts of the Shvetambaras, which traditionally only the monks could read. In reading the texts he was stunned at the laxity shown by the monks of his day. He was convinced that the rituals performed by monks in the Jain temples had nothing to do with the Jain ideals; he felt that even the act of digging in the ground to establish temples and images involved such injury to Earth beings that it was in and of itself a violation of the Jain sacred principle of *ahimsa* or noninjury.

Shaha started a movement assisted by influential Jains to reexamine Jain life in view of the scriptures.

His community, which still exists today, adopted the practice of meeting only in halls (*sthanaka*) and not in temples, hence the name *Sthanakavasi* (inhabiters of halls). Lonka Shaha's fanatical opposition to the worship of icons may have been influenced by the iconoclastic Islam of his era. As a distinguishing feature, Stanakavasi monks wear a mouth covering to prevent injury to invisible beings that might be breathed in and killed.

Further reading: John E. Cort, *Jains in the World: Religious Values and Ideology in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992); A. K. Roy, *History of the Jainas* (Colombia, Mo.: South Asia Books, 1984).

stotra

Stotras (from *stu*, to praise) are shorter or longer chants in praise of various divinities, gurus, and personages. They have been a timeless feature in all native Indian traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, JAINISM, and SIKHISM. There are *stotras* of 1,000 verses, such as *Vishnu Sahasranama* (in praise of Vishnu) and *Lalita Sahasranama* (in praise of Sri Lalita), that consist of 1,000 verses; many others consist of 108 verses, but verses of almost any length can be found.

From very early times Hindus believed that chanting *stotras* could induce the gods to grant benefits in this world and, if done with sufficient devotion and frequency, lead to liberation from birth and death. By contrast, in JAINISM and early Buddhism *stotras* could not gain benefit from spiritual teachers such as MAHAVIRA or BUDDHA, because such yogis (unlike gods) did not confer grace; *stotras* were merely capable of calming the mind.

Further reading: Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*. Vol. 2, Fascicle 1, *History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977); Nancy Ann Nayar, *Poetry as Theology: The Srivaisnava Stotra in the Age of Ramanuja* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992); Nancy Ann Nayar, trans., *Praise-Poems to Visnu and Sri:*

The Stotras of Ramanuja's Immediate Disciples (Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1994).

Subramaniya See [KARTTIKEYA](#).

Subramuniyaswami, Satguru (1927–2001)
American founder of the Saiva Siddhanta Church

The American-born Satguru Subramuniyaswami was an important teacher in the Saiva SIDDHANTA tradition. Through his organizational work, fund-raising, and many books he helped spread Hindu teaching in America and around the world.

Born in Oakland, California, on January 5, 1927, and orphaned in 1938 at age 11, Robert Hansen spent his childhood and youth in the San Francisco Bay area and was, before he renounced the world, a lead dancer in the San Francisco Ballet Company. He was raised by a family friend who, as a student of Indian art, dance, and culture, had lived as a guest of the maharaja of Mysore, India. As a child, he wore Indian clothing and learned to appreciate many elements of Indian culture. As a teenager, he was exposed to Swami VIVEKANANDA'S writings and the lectures of other SWAMIS. He relates that he studied MEDITATION and classical YOGA disciplines with several teachers.

At age 21 Hansen traveled to India and Sri Lanka, searching for a spiritual teacher. In Sri Lanka he studied with Shaivite elders and pundits (see [SHAIVISM](#)), one of whom, a member of the Chettiar caste, adopted him into his extended family and introduced him to temple worship. He meditated in the jungle caves at Jalani and attained SELF-REALIZATION by experiencing the absolute reality of SHIVA, which transcended all time, space, and form. This experience of Self-Realization became the cornerstone of his mystical teachings. Also in Sri Lanka, he met his GURU, Jnanaguru Yoganathan, also known as Shiva Yogaswami (1872–1964) who initiated him into the Shaivite tradition of *siddha* yoga and named him Subramuniya. Yogaswami was a direct descendent of the original gurus of

this Sri Lankan lineage known as the Nandinatha Sampradaya, a tradition that has its roots in the 2,200-year-old sacred text Tirumantiram, by the saint TIRUMULAR. He followed his initiation with years of spiritual practice (SADHANA) and began to be referred to as *Satguru*, or “one who has attained God-realization and assumes responsibility for the spiritual life of his disciples.” Upon the passing in 1964 of Shiva Yogaswami, Subramuniya (or *Gurudeva*, as he was affectionately known) became the spiritual successor of the lineage.

In 1950, he returned to the United States and continued his spiritual path, developing various psychic powers, including clairvoyance and clair-audience. In 1957, at age 30, he began his public ministry by founding the Subramuniya Yoga Order and the Christian Yoga Church, both in San Francisco, California. During the 1960s, the latter was disbanded; in 1970 the Subramuniya Yoga Order moved to Hawaii, where it was renamed the Wailua University of the Contemplative Arts. In 1973, the organization became the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order, and later the Saiva Siddhanta Church. Subramuniya called the Church the “first Hindu church, organized according to the American church system.” In an attempt to sustain Shaivite orthodoxy, the church recognizes the celibate monk as the ideal spiritual practitioner and requires at least 12 years of adherence for a man to become a *SANNYASI*. Women may follow the celibate life of the *BRAHMACHARINI*, but they are not, strictly speaking, monastics in this church.

In addition to the church, Gurudeva created the Himalayan Academy, an educational publication house, and Hindu Heritage Endowment, a public service trust begun in 1995 to establish and maintain permanent sources of income for Hindu institutions worldwide. These organizations serve the growing Hindu DIASPORA. Local missions are on five continents. Subramuniya was instrumental in founding and building 37 Hindu temples around the world, including his own Iraitvan Sivalingam temple on the island of Kauai, the first all-granite Agamic (built to Shaivite canon-

cal specifications) temple ever built in the Western world. He founded Kauai's Hindu Monastery, known officially as Kauai Aadheenam, the first orthodox Shaivite monastery in the West.

Throughout his years of teaching, Subramuniyaswami traveled widely and met leaders of many faiths and heads of state. He participated in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993. In 1995, he named three of his longtime initiated swamis as his consecutive successors, beginning with the present *satguru*, Bodhinatha Veylanswami.

Subramuniya wrote over 30 books explaining Hindu philosophy to adherents and others. His



Satguru Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), founder of Saiva Siddhanta Church and Hinduism Today (*Siva Siddhanta Church, Kapaa, Kauai, Hawaii*)

lessons on Shaivism are designed to preserve the teachings among youth, and his illustrated Master Course trilogy—three inspired 1,000-page texts—summarize the religion, culture, and metaphysics of Hinduism.

The academy's quarterly magazine, *Hinduism Today*, originally begun as a newsletter in 1979, seeks to promote Hindu solidarity in the face of global pluralism and educate Hindus around the world about their heritage. It covers the practices and beliefs of all lineages and traditions within the Hindu fold, and addresses the issues of the day in light of orthodox Hindu teaching. The Web site Hindu Resources Online, a public service inspired by the message of Subramuniyaswami, is another vehicle for dissemination of Shaivite teachings.

According to the teachings of Subramuniyaswami, Shaivism is ageless, the *SANATANA DHARMA* or eternal faith. An enduring spirituality innate in every man and woman, it is the source of all religions on Earth.

Subramuniya died on November 12, 2001, at age 74.

Further reading: Sivaya Subramuniya, *Dancing with Siva*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Himalayan Academy, 1993); ———, *Hindu Catechism* (San Francisco: Himalayan Academy, 1987); ———, *Merging with Siva: Hinduism's Contemporary Metaphysics* (Kapaa, Hawaii: Himalayan Academy, 1999); ———, *Raja Yoga* (San Francisco: Himalayan Academy, 1973).

Sufism Reoriented See [DUCE, IVY O.](#)

Sugriva See [RAMAYANA.](#)

Sukul, Deva Ram (fl. 1920s–1940s) *teacher of raja yoga in the United States*

Deva Ram Sukul, founder of the Yoga Institute of America, was one of a handful of independent Hindu teachers active in the United States during

the years when the Asian Exclusion Act was in effect (1924–65).

Little is known of Deva Ram Sukul's early years, the work of his institute, or even his death. He emerges out of obscurity only as the author of a few books (*Yoga and Self-Culture* and *Yoga Navajivan*) and as a teacher of the American actress Mae West.

As director of the Yoga Institute, Sukul had become an acquaintance of the lawyer James A. Timony. At one point in the late 1920s, West became ill in reaction to the stress of several lawsuits against her. Timony introduced her to Sukul, who was able to heal her at their first meeting. Sukul subsequently joined her entourage and traveled with her through the next decade. West would later credit him with assisting her in developing a philosophy of life, although she was also interested in astrology and spiritualism.

In later years, Sukul lectured on raja yoga and taught the GAYATRI MANTRA. He also knew the pioneer San Francisco HATHA YOGA teacher Walt Baptiste (1917–2001) and he taught raja yoga in Baptiste's center in the 1940s.

Further reading: Deva Ram Sukul, *India and Tibet: Pilgrimage Lessons* (New York: Yoga Institute of America, 1941); ———, *Yoga and Self-Culture: Higher Laws of Spiritual Dynamics Including Outline of Philosophy of the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and the Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy* (New York: Yoga Institute of America, 1947); ———, *Yoga Navajivan (Path to New Life and Divine Realization): Introduction to Raja Yoga System of Self-Culture as Taught by Deva Ram Sukul* (New York: Yoga Institute of America, 1947); Jill Watts, *Mae West: An Icon in Black and White* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mae West, *Mae West on Sex, Health and ESP* (London: W. H. Allen, 1975).

Sundarar (c. end of seventh and beginning of eighth centuries C.E.) *Tamil Shaivite poet-saint*
Sundarar (also known as Nambi Arur and Suntharamurti) is among the trio of the most prom-

inent Tamil Shaivite saints (NAYANMARS) whose hymns appear in the central liturgical and literary text of the Tamil Shaivites, the TEVARAM.

Sundarar, “the Handsome One,” was born a Shaivite BRAHMIN in Tirunavalur. SHIVA claimed Sundarar as his devotee, it is said, on Sundarar's wedding day, before his marriage could be completed. However, Sundarar later married a temple dancer, Paravai, whom he often mentions in his hymns, and a non-BRAHMIN, upper-caste woman, Cankili.

Sundarar lived in the Shaivite city of Tiruvarur, although as the other saints of the Tevaram did, he often traveled to other shrines to sing his devotion of Shiva. He also sang the praises of kings and local chieftains who were his benefactors. Sundarar, they say, went to heaven on a white elephant (perhaps the white elephant of Indra), accompanied by a Chera king. Sundarar is depicted in iconography with his two wives. His courtly life contrasted with the more austere life of his contemporaries APPAR and SAMBANTHAR, the others of the sacred trio of saints in Tamil Shaivism.

Further reading: Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); M. A. Dorai Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tevaram, with Special Reference to Nampi Arurar (Sundarar)* (Madras: University of Madras, 1990).

Sun Temple See KONARAK.

Sunyata (Alfred Julius Emanuel Sorensen)
(1890–1984) *Danish-born sadhu and teacher*

The youngest of three children on a small farm in northern Denmark, Emmanuel (indwelling God, the name he favored for himself) Sorensen worked during his childhood on his family's farm and attended school only to the eighth grade.

When he was 14, the family farm was sold and he entered four years of apprenticeship in horticulture. He had jobs in France and Italy and settled in England in 1911 and took up gardening on large estates. At one of those estates he met Rabindranath TAGORE, who was impressed with the quality of Emmanuel's silence. Tagore invited the young Dane to visit Shanti Niketan, Tagore's school in India, to "teach silence."

Sorensen arrived in India in 1930 at the age of 40 and began to teach. Immediately he was given the titles of *BABA*, *saint*, and *GURU*, but his gift to the people he met was not captured by these titles. In the four decades he spent in India, he traveled widely and offered his gift of "being" to those who went to him. In 1936 he met RAMANA MAHARSHI (1879–1950) at Arunachala and noted Ramana's quality of self-radiance, which nourished all around him. Ramana later called Sorensen a "rare-born mystic." On his third visit, Sorensen received a telepathic message from Ramana, "We are always aware SUNYATA." Sorensen wrote that he experienced the words as a "recognition, initiation, MANTRA, and name." Sorensen thereafter referred to himself and his hut as *sunyata* (a Buddhist term for void or emptiness). He acquired Indian citizenship in 1953.

Sunyata first lived in Haridvar, on a small island in the GANGES River, but eventually built himself a stone hut in the foothills of the HIMALAYAS near Almora. He accepted a small sum from the Birla Foundation in New Delhi, whose purpose is to assist saints and SADHUS (spiritual aspirants). He knew many teachers and saints of his day, including Lama Anagarika Govinda, Walter Evans-Wentz, Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI, Jawaharlal Nehru, Yashoda Ma, KRISHNA PREM, SRI ANIRVAN, J. KRISHNAMURTI, ANANDAMAYI MA, and NEEM KAROLI BABA. He remained uninterested in power, fame, or money, preferring nature, his own company, and silence. He did not heal, was not psychic, and did not perform miracles. He simply reminded all he met of the identity of each person



Sunyata (1890–1984), Danish sadhu and teacher
(Courtesy Sunyata Society)

and the divine in the words *Tat tvam asi*—thou are That.

Sunyata's dog Sri Wuji (Chinese for "a full emptiness") was his constant companion. The saint Anandamayi Ma accepted the dog along with Sunyata into her ashram with the words "Wuji is not a dog."

In 1973, a group of Americans from the Alan Watts Society invited Sunyata to California. At age 84, he arrived in California, where he gave *DARSHAN* (blessings) at Esalen and Palm Springs. In 1978 he moved to California permanently at age 88 and spent the last six years of his life there. At age 93, in 1984, he was struck by a car in Fairfax, California, and died soon afterward on August

13, 1984. The Sunyata Society of San Anselmo, California, publishes articles and books about his life and teaching.

Further reading: Betty Camhi and Elliott Isenberg, eds., *Sunyata: The Life and Sayings of a Rare-Born Mystic* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 1990); Sunyata Society, eds., *Sri Wuji*, vols. 1 and 2 (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1990).

Surdas (Late 15th to late 16th century) *Hindi poet-saint*

Surdas was a poetic of mythic status in North India born in a village called Sihi, which was probably near BRINDAVAN, judging from the Braj dialect of his poems. Most of the biographical details of Surdas's life are in question.

Surdas is credited with writing *Sursagar* (The Ocean of Sur), a song of about 5,000 verses. As with many poet-saints in India, most of his poetry was written to be sung at public events; it is likely that these "songs" changed for each performance. His extant work is probably the careful textual recording of students and admirers. As is also the case in Indian tradition, his work may well include compositions of genius written by other authors that seemed worthy of inclusion among his. In the end this lack of clear biographical detail matters little in the perspective of the brilliant work represented under the name of Sur.

All the stories of his life agree that Surdas was blind, but there they part company. One story puts him at the court of the great Muslim king Akbar. In the other he was a follower of VALLABHA, the great devotee of KRISHNA, of Brindavan. It is said that Vallabha encouraged Sur to write about the child Krishna's divine play.

Sur's poetry is one of pure devotion. Millions of people in North India know his songs. His poetry is used for the temple liturgy of the Vallabhites. Classical vocalists always include his works in their repertoire, as do village singers. Many others read, recite, or sing his verses.

Further reading: Kenneth E. Bryant, *Poems to the Child-God: Structures and Strategies in the Poetry of Surdas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Usha Nilsson, trans. and ed., *Surdas: Poems* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982).

Surya

Surya is the most common of the names for the Sun in the VEDAS, which all seem to refer to different aspects of this divine body. (SAVITRI is the next most frequent Vedic Sun name.) The Sun is seen as crossing the sky each day on a chariot pulled by horses. In the Vedas Surya is sometimes said to be the son of ADITI and sometimes that of Dyaus (the heavens). Sometimes he is said to be the son or the husband of USHAS, the dawn. In the era of the PURANAS, Surya is seen as the son of Aditi and the sage Kashyapa. The Sun (under the name Savitri) is the object of worship each morning by twice-born (confirmed), upper-caste Hindu males who chant the GAYATRI MANTRA.

Further reading: Shakti M. Gupta, *Surya, the Sun God* (Bombay: Somaiya, 1977); Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990); P. Pandit, *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda* (Pondicherry: Dipti, 1970); W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

sushumna See KUNDALINI.

sushupti See STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

sutra

A sutra (line, thread, or string) is a text (on any subject) composed of short, aphoristic verses, usually only of a few words. Most often the sutra form was used to facilitate easy memorization, as

knowledge in India was most frequently communicated from memory. Because of the extreme conciseness of the lines of text, most verses are not comprehensible without reference to some sort of commentary. Buddhist and Jain traditions (see [JAINISM](#)) also frequently used this method in their texts (e.g., Acharanga Sutra of the Jains). Among the many such texts are the Dharma Sutra, YOGA SUTRA, and Vedanta Sutra.

Further reading: M. Winternitz, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, 3 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963).

suttee See [SATI](#).

svadhishthana chakra

The *svadhishthana* CHAKRA is the second chakra (energy center) in KUNDALINI YOGA systems. It is situated on the spine in the genital region. It governs sexuality, excitement, and more refined physical sensation. It is associated with the element water. Its deity is VISHNU. Its SHAKTI is Rakini. All chakras are considered lotuses; *svadhishthana* has six red petals.

Further reading: Harish Johari, *Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 2000).

svapna See [STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS](#).

swami

A swami (one who has his own) is anyone who has proprietary rights, an owner, a lord, or a master. By extension, a person who is master of himself or herself, who has developed perfect yogic self-control, is a spiritual swami. Any religious or spiritual being of the highest order is called a swami. The word is usually added to proper names, for example, Swami MUKTANANDA or Swami SACCIDANANDA.

Further reading: Pagal Baba, *Temple of the Phallic Kin: The Mind of India, Yogis, Swamis, and Avatars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973); Swami Agehananda Bharat, *The Ochre Robe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970); Marvin H. Harper, *Gurus, Swamis and Avatars: Spiritual Masters and Their American Disciples* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972).

Swami Kavalayananda Yoga Foundation (est. 1972)

The Swami Kavalayananda Foundation (SKY) of Philadelphia is devoted to the study and practice of HATHA YOGA. It was founded in 1972 as a nonreligious organization by Dr. Vijayendra Pratap, who received a Ph.D. in applied psychology from Bombay University. Dr. Pratap studied YOGA as a student of Swami Kavalayananda (1883–1966), who founded the noted yoga center Kaivalyadhama in Bombay, where Pratap was assistant director before moving to America.

The SKY Foundation holds HATHA YOGA classes, from basic to the most advanced levels; trains teachers; and focuses on teachings from the ASHTANGA YOGA system of PATANJALI. One of the significant objectives of the foundation is to investigate the ancient as well as the more recent developments of yoga as they interface with contemporary times. Dr. Pratap's foundation has sponsored academic conferences to review what is known about science and yoga. At this point, he and his supporters consider the foundation an academic and research organization seeking ways that science and yogic practice can work together for the good of all humanity. The headquarters are in Philadelphia over the Garland of Letters bookstore, which is sponsored by the foundation.

Further reading: Vijayendra Pratap, *Beginning Yoga* (Rutland, Vt.: Chares E. Tuttle, 1997).

Swaminarayan movement

The Swaminarayan movement is a major worldwide Hindu movement. It is the contemporary

expression of a religious revival started by Sri Sahajanand Swami (1781–1830), a monk generally known to his followers as Lord Swaminarayan.

Sahajanand was born at Chhapaiya, near AYODHYA in northern India. A precocious child, he showed an early inclination to the religious life. Upon his parents' deaths, when he was 11 years old, he adopted the life of a renunciant and pursued his spiritual quest. His seven-year PILGRIMAGE around India ended at Gujarat, where he spent a year with Muktanand Swami, who confirmed that Sahajanand was an incarnation of KRISHNA.

Eventually Sahajanand assumed leadership of the devotees of Muktanand Swami.

Sahajanand began to reform the movement by recruiting a group of young *SANNYASIS* (renunciants) who were dedicated to his vision of uplifting humankind and involved themselves in various social service activities. He imposed five rules on the *sannyasis*: they were to avoid greed, worldly desires, attachments, and ego and live a life of celibacy. He also started holding large ceremonies called Vishnu Yajna with the goal of abolishing the popular sacrifice of animals. His actions attracted a large following throughout Gujarat. The non-*sannyasi* (householder) members were asked to avoid alcohol and intoxicating drugs, meat, food from improper sources, stealing, and debauchery.

Sahajanand authored the *Shikshapatri*, a work summarizing a code of conduct for his followers. As the movement expanded, followers began to affirm that Sahajanand was the incarnation of Lord Purushottama Narayana (i.e., Krishna).

Swaminarayan promoted a form of BHAKTI YOGA, the devotional path to God. He and the movement he founded believe God to be a person and focus their primary attention on Vishnu/Krishna. Nevertheless, they fall within the larger scope of traditional Hinduism by affirming a philosophy of unity in diversity and acknowledging the common history and language of Hinduism.

Swaminarayan has been followed as head of the movement by a succession of leaders: Gunatitanand Swami (1785–1867), Bhagatji Maharaj (1829–97), Shastriji Maharaj (1865–1951), Yogiji Maharaj (1892–1971), and Pramukh Maharaj (b. 1921). In 1907 Shastriji Maharaj founded the Bochsanwasi Shri Akshar Purusottam Sanstha, which gave the movement its present corporate structure. He also exported the movement outside India, to East Africa. Later, in the 20th century, Pramukh Swami Maharaj carried the movement to the West, establishing the first center in England and subsequently overseeing the vast international



Swaminarayan (1781–1830), monk and founder of Swaminarayan movement, pointing to Lord Vishnu (Courtesy Swaminarayan Headquarters, Bombay [Mumbai])

spread of the movement through the post–World War II Indian DIASPORA.

At the beginning of the 1970s, Yogiji Maharaj sent four monks to America in response to a request from some immigrants from Gujarat. In 1972 the group who assembled in response to their visit established a center and purchased a temple on Long Island, New York. Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1974 made the first of what were to be many journeys to the United States. He installed a group of deities for the community and has held similar ceremonies across North America in subsequent visits.

Today, international headquarters for the movement is in Ahmedabad, India. The group supports several institutions of higher learning such as the Pramuch Swami Medical College, the School of Architecture at S. P. University, and the Pramukh Swami Science College, all in Gujarat.

Internationally the movement has a following in Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Australia, Belgium, Germany, England, Canada, the United States, Singapore, and Thailand. Worldwide there are more than 3,000 centers.

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SYDA Foundation See [CHIDVILASANANDA, SWAMI](#).

T



Tagore, Rabindranath (1861–1941) *poet and writer*

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the great literary figures of the world and a fighter for social reform, was the first modern Indian writer to win a reputation around the world. He was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in literature.

Tagore was born May 7, 1861, in the Jorasanko District in Calcutta (Kolkata) in the state of Bengal, to the celebrated Hindu reformer Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. His father's father had been a prominent, highly educated businessman and a supporter of the BRAHMO SAMAJ, the Hindu reform sect founded by RAMMOHUN ROY. His father had maintained this affiliation.

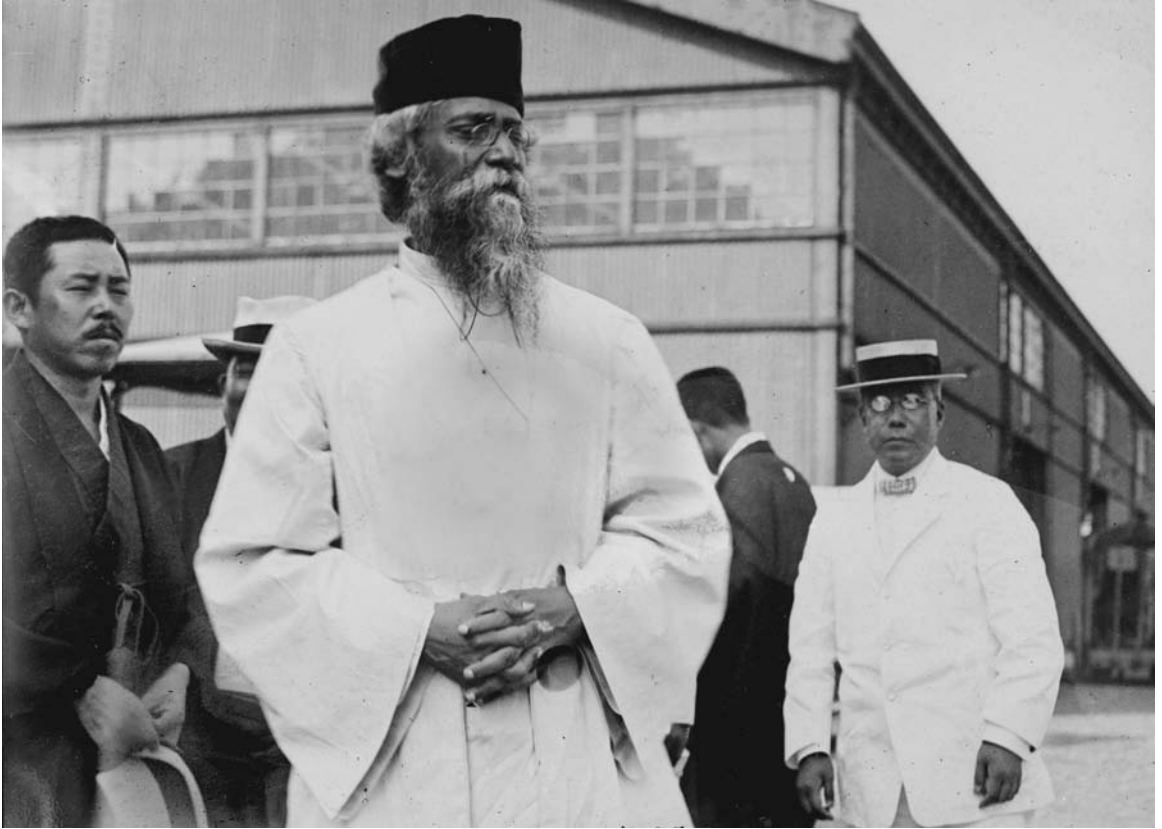
Rabindranath was the youngest of 14 children, all of whom were well educated, including the girls, in keeping with the newly emerging Bengali progressive tradition. Most of the children were educated in both Bengali and English and used their knowledge to publish magazines, write plays, and sponsor the arts; young Rabindranath had rich surroundings to allow his talent to grow.

In 1878, at the age of 17, Rabindranath went to England for a year to study in an elite public school in Brighton, and then at University College, London. He did not, however, complete his

degree. In 1883, he married Mrinalini Devi, and the couple had two sons and three daughters. By this time he had begun to develop a literary reputation based on several Bengali works, including a long poem in the Maithili regional linguistic style originated by Vidyapati, the authorship of which he initially attempted to hide, and the poetry anthology, *Sandhya Sangit* (Twilight song), which he wrote in 1882. This work includes the famous poem *Nirjharer Svapnabhanga* (*The Cry of the Waterfall*).

In 1890, Tagore began to manage the family estates at Shelaidaha, a riverine region in what is now Bangladesh. There he lived modestly on a houseboat on a tributary of the Padma River. Works of poetry from this period include *Sonar Tari* (1894), *Chitra* (1896), and *Katha O Kahini* (1900). He also began to be known for his essays, plays, and short stories, often set in the local village and river life.

In 1901, Tagore moved to Shantiniketan, in west Bengal, where he started a pioneering educational experiment championing the outdoor classroom run in the ancient Indian way with one teacher and a very few students. Today this school is run by the government of India under the name Vishva Bharati. There he wrote *Naivedya* (1901)



Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Bengali poet, educator, and Nobel Prize laureate (Courtesy Library of Congress)

and other works. Here, his wife died young and he lost a son and a daughter. His profound grief affected the tone of his work.

Tagore had developed a large following among Bengali readers; some English translations of his work had been made, but they were not of high quality. At the urging of some of his English admirers he started translating some of his own poems in free verse. In 1912, he went to England to read some of these. It was his fortune to be heard at these readings by the celebrated Irish poet William Butler Yeats. The English version of *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*) (1915) was later published by the India Society with an admiring preface by Yeats.

In November 1913 Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, based on the attention that this translation had drawn.

His literary fame established at the age of 60, Tagore began to paint and exhibit his paintings in India and Europe. He painted in a wistful modernist style that was as impressive as his literary work. Deeply beloved in his home of Bengal, Tagore is the only person in the world to have composed two national anthems, India's and Bangladesh's. His love for his country, India, was well known and he joined others of his generation in doing what he could to contribute to the great struggle for independence. He carried on a cor-

respondence, too, with Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI and they were mutual admirers.

As a result of his refined aesthetic sensibilities, his love of nature, and his extensive travels in Europe, America, the Middle East, and the Far East, Tagore developed a philosophy of universal brotherhood and cultural exchange. Above all he believed in the immanence of the divinity and the reflection of that divinity in human beings. As a result he is known and read as a philosopher as well as a literary figure. Perhaps because of his openness of spirit, Tagore's literature and philosophy have found an audience in realms far away from the quiet beauty of the Bengal of his time of which he so passionately wrote.

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Taittiriya Upanishad

The Taittiriya Upanishad is an UPANISHAD of the Black YAJUR VEDA. It is considered one of the oldest Upanishads. It consists of three sections.

The first section is devoted to teaching; it outlines elements of the sacred study of the VEDAS.

The second section is named for its description of the ANANDA (infinite bliss) of the BRAHMAN (ultimate reality). While in passing, defining the terms *self* and *ultimate reality*, it introduces the five SHEATHS that make up a human being. These are the sheath of food, the sheath of breath, the sheath of mind, the sheath of understanding, and the sheath of bliss.

In the final section, named after the teacher Bhrigu, these five levels of being are fully described: the sheath of food describes the external body and the sheath of bliss lies in the core of the heart, as the ultimate Self or *brahman*. The Upanishad concludes with a memorable chant, the vision of the sage who realizes *brahman*: “I am food; I am food; I am food. I am the food-eater; I am the food-eater; I am the food-eater. . . . Earlier than the gods; at the navel of immortality . . . [I see] the golden light!” The food is the manifest universe. The food-eater is the transcendent reality. The sage understands that in SELF-REALIZATION he encompasses all the manifest and unmanifest world.

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tamas See GUNAS.

tanmatra

The *tanmatras* (subtle elements) are categories in the SAMKHYA and YOGA list of 24 categories; they mediate between the five ELEMENTS (*panchabhuta*) and the five powers of knowing. The subtle elements are sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. Among the elements sound is connected to ether

(*akasha*), contact is connected to air (*vayu*), form is connected to fire (*tejas* or *agni*), taste is connected to water (*ap* or *jalam*) and smell is connected to earth (*prithivi*).

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tantra See TANTRISM.

tantric See TANTRISM.

tantric ritual sex See TANTRISM.

tantrism

Tantrism is a philosophical and religious stream that can be found in Buddhism, JAINISM, and Hinduism.

Tantrism derives from the term *tantra*, which in certain usages defines systems and texts that contrast themselves with the Vaidika or VEDIC tradition. While elements common to the tantric traditions can easily be enumerated and analyzed, the boundary between a system that is tantric and one that is not is not so easily defined.

Philosophically, most Hindu tantric systems focus on “desire” as a path of liberation. This involves a sophisticated reversal process that transforms what is commonly understood in Hinduism as a barrier to liberation, that is, desire, into an instrument for liberation. This method can be applied to numerous aspects of normative life and tradition that are purposely inverted or ignored in order to harness the “lower” aspects of existence and make them servants of liberation.

For instance, a tantric devotee might ritually eat beef, forbidden in normative Hinduism, in order to facilitate realization.

To be sure, many “tantric” elements infuse ordinary ritualistic, temple-oriented Hinduism. But the key to identifying tantrism are the distinctive rituals and practices that form a complex, usually taught to small groups of adepts by a special GURU. These rituals and practices are almost always practiced in secret, away from mainstream society. Thus tantrism as a fuller, secret complex contains an element, more or less obvious, that runs counter to the overt “sanctioned” philosophical streams.

Hindu tantrism seeks both supernatural powers (most often considered a distraction from the goal of liberation) *and* liberation, worldly enjoyment *and* release from the bonds of birth and rebirth. It does this by embracing what is usually eschewed. It takes the world, which is seen to be nothing but a barrier to liberation, as divine and by fully realizing its divinity learns to be its master, living in it in the full presence of the divine.

For the purposes of transformation, the transcendent is often seen as a passive masculine reality, and the feminine is seen as the same transcendent power in action. Using the polarity of masculine and feminine tantrics seek to realize both poles, finally embracing a totality that fuses, so to speak, that which is beyond with that which is here, or, more accurately, realizes that the two are already fused.

Once one understands the unity of the manifest and unmanifest, one also understands that the human is the microcosm of the macrocosm; the human is the universal. The tantric sexual ritual, *maithuna*, is based on these understandings. Sexual intercourse ritually replicates the truth of existence, that the masculine is the transcendent divinity and the feminine the immanent divinity, with two human bodies. But this ritual need not be practiced directly; many forms of tantrism practice *maithuna* metaphorically or simply understand it at a philosophical level.

Hindu tantrism can be understood as a marriage of practices and beliefs from the pre-ARYAN Goddess-oriented cults with the larger and more philosophically encompassing Aryan Vedic (but more directly UPANISHADIC) traditions. Tantrism as a distinct tradition has its beginnings with the settlement of the Aryans in fringe areas of India (e.g., Kashmir, Bengal, Tamil Nadu). As the two cultural complexes began to merge in the centuries before and after the start of the Common Era (with the Aryan Vedic always retaining its cultural supremacy), the forms of tantric practice began to become formalized.

Because of their derivation tantric practices are neither purely Vedic nor purely indigenous, but a fusion of the two. It is well known, for instance, that some contemporary non-Hindu tribal people of India still practice sexual rituals and even orgies in fields to promote agricultural (and human) fertility. This is a very ancient ritual, found all over the world in conjunction with early agriculture. It is based on the understanding that the female is the Earth and the male is the sky (and its rain). The two join in sexual embrace to create the fundamentals of life. The use of sexual ritual in tantrism most surely derives from this precise process, but it is philosophically aggrandized or at least explicitly philosophized (as it may not have been before), as the union of God and Goddess.

Likewise it is well known that many subgroups in India, both Hindu castes and non-Hindu tribal people, worship the Goddess with alcohol, which is a most despised substance in Brahminical Hinduism. Vedic tradition does record the usage of very small quantities of alcohol in certain obscure rituals, but the drink is in general condemned. It is obvious again that the use of alcohol in certain tantric rituals, in which it is in fact ritually given to the female (the Goddess or SHAKTI) before sexual intercourse, is a remnant of the pre-Aryan traditions.

The ritual egalitarianism of tantrism, which does not observe caste divisions in ritual, also

is probably a substratum tribal value taken up into the main complex, as mainstream Hinduism itself is highly oriented toward social stratification. Because the combination of pre-Aryan and Vedic needed philosophical interpretation, certain tantric practices such as the eating of beef can be derived only through philosophical reversal. Non-Hindu tribal people are not beef eaters, but they do eat and ritually use buffalo meat. Beef, of course, became the most forbidden substance for all Hindus. Therefore, the ritual eating of beef in tantric ritual is neither Aryan nor non-Aryan, but a philosophically constructed practice.

Perhaps ironically, tantrism as a system only became consolidated after BRAHMIN practitioners had written numerous texts in SANSKRIT to give it a certain orthodox sanction. Because Hinduism itself is a mixture of the same elements as tantrism, even some of its normative aspects can be said to have tantric roots.

Vedic tradition was not associated with place, probably because of the pastoral nature of society in the era of the Vedas. It was also quite clearly aniconic—not using visible, external forms of the divinities. Temple Hinduism, however, is place-based and uses ICONS. It is quite likely that the notions of a specific place that divinities inhabit is a non-Aryan notion. It is undoubtedly the case also that stone or wood images or symbols of divinities are also non-Aryan. It is thus no coincidence that the ritual texts that lay out the principles for temple design, the AGAMAS, are tantric in character and form part of the large tantric tradition.

The three most important tantric sects are the Vaishnavite tantrics, who have VISHNU as transcendent divinity; the Shaivite tantrics, who have Shiva as transcendent divinity; and the SHAKTA tantrics, who have the Goddess as the transcendent divinity. The last two are often difficult to distinguish as they use similar terminology and frameworks. The Ganapatyas (worshippers of GANESHA) constitute another, small tantric sect. Historically, there was a group of tantrics called

Sauras or Sun (SURYA) worshippers, but these do not appear to have an active sectarian presence in India.

There are numerous textual classifications and subclassifications of tantric groups and practice, but these seem to be more descriptive than practical. Any regional differences that once existed have by now disappeared.

The most important tantric system may be that of Kasmiri Shaivism, which has received the most study and has reached the West through teachers such as Swami MUKTANANDA. Generally, there is a tremendous amount of intentional obscurity and abstruseness in tantric texts to protect them from noninitiates. The Kashmiri Shaivite tradition, however, led by exemplars such as ABHINAVAGUPTA, seemed to make an effort to create philosophical systems that could vie with more orthodox or normative systems in the philosophical arena. Therefore, the Kashmiri Shaivite systems seem to be more clear and open than many others.

A second important subsystem is the SRI VIDYA Goddess-oriented tradition. This is, in fact, a modified and highly Brahminized tradition whose textual history has begun to attract significant scholarship.

Mention must also be made of SAIVA SIDDHANTA, a South Indian and Sri Lankan tantric system. Here, there is a significant body of literature not only in Sanskrit but also in Tamil. In fact, some of the texts originated around 600 C.E.

The various systems, while they share a common sexual paradigm to portray the relationship between the manifest and unmanifest worlds, are not philosophically uniform. Kashmiri Shaivism, for instance, is completely non-dual (*ADVAITA*), or monistic, whereas Shaivite Siddhanta is purely dualistic; one can realize oneself as a “small Shiva,” but Paramashiva, or transcendent Shiva, is beyond the reach of the soul in transformational terms. That is, the highest Shiva is eternally distinct from the souls. The system of Bengali Vaishnavite Sahajiya, alternatively, retains the

Vaishnavite “quasi-non-dualistic” aspect, representing a third philosophical stream.

Tantric systems are divided into two tendencies that are referred to as left-handed and right-handed. The left-handed is most probably the original practice. It can be shockingly antinomian or antisocial. The AGHORIS are an example of this. These wanderers eat excrement and in other ways try to outrage people in public arenas in order to use the “reversed” energy to gain supernatural powers.

The extreme left-handed practices dating from very early in the history of tantrism have made the word *tantric* as despised in India as in the normative West. Formalized left-handed practice uses the *PANCHA MAKARA*, or five forbidden substances: meat, wine, sexual intercourse, parched grain, and fish. These are combined in a ritual context.

Right-handed practice could be considered a Brahminization of the left-handed stream. There, accepted entities or practices are substituted for the “forbidden” ones to align the practice more closely with social norms. This substitution might be a mental visualization of the practice rather than the practice itself; physical substitution, for instance, eating a particular vegetable instead of beef; or complete avoidance of any of the elements in favor of a purely philosophical approach.

Some important notions used in Hindu tantric practice include *SADHANA*, or adept practice; *DIKSHA*, the necessary initiation (distinct from the Vedic initiation); *MANTRA*, a distinctive usage of mantra practice; *YANTRA*, abstract designs used for ritual worship and *MEDITATION*; and *MUDRAS*, special hand gestures used in conjunction with meditation and ritual. *KUNDALINI* yoga is by definition a tantric practice and is a central part of many tantric systems. *SHAKTIPAT* (Shakti initiation) is also a practice done by some tantric gurus, who can transform an adept, or initiate him or her, by merely a touch that transfers the guru’s Shakti, or grace, to the adept. Most tantric

sects also develop a range of divinities or special powers that are worshipped only in the context of their particular cult.

There is some evidence of tantrism in Jain tradition, mostly limited to the use of tantric style mantras and certain hints of tantric sexuality. No full tantric practice is known to have emerged in JAINISM. This was primarily due to the severity of Jain asceticism, and the nature of reality according to Jainism, which left no room for pursuit of enlightenment through desire.

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tapas (tapasya)

Tapas (heat) or *tapasya* is a concept of great importance in Hindu practices of austerity. The word refers to the sacred heat that is generated by bodily mortifications and ascetic denial. *Tapas* confers wondrous powers and abilities upon the YOGI and makes it easier for the adept to break the bonds of attachment to worldly life.

In a very literal example of *tapas*, ancient orthodox yogis used to sit surrounded by five fires under the noonday Sun in order to absorb the heat and gain spiritual power. Other ascetics doing *tapasya* would endure lengthy fasts or extreme bodily mortifications. There is some indication that the notion of *tapasya* developed within the Brahminical tradition as a result of association with the fires of the Vedic sacrifice.

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tat tvam asi See [VEDANTA](#).

Tattvartha Sutra (c. 200 C.E.)

The Tattvartha Sutra was composed by the great Jain Acarya (Saint) Umasvami (or Umasvati). It is the first text of JAINISM written in SANSKRIT (the earlier ones, which are no longer extant, were written in Prakrit, the vernacular tongue that developed from Sanskrit). The Tattvartha Sutra is the first extant text of the Jains, and it systematizes the canonical teachings into an integrated philosophical school. It is written in the concise aphoristic style typical of Indian texts designated as SUTRAS.

The Tattvartha Sutra plays a similar authoritative role in Jain tradition as the VEDANTA SUTRA of BADARAYANA or the YOGA SUTRA of PATANJALI in

orthodox Hindu culture. In approximately 350 short verses, Umasvami surveys basic Jain doctrine. He discusses salvation; states of the soul; the human, celestial, and infernal realms; insentient reality; the nature of KARMA, karmic bondage, and the acquisition and removal of karma. The *Tattvartha Sutra* is the only Jain text that is accepted by both of the two main sects, the SHVETAMBARA and the DIGAMBARA.

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Tegh Bahadur See [SIKHISM](#).

tejas (Agni) See [ELEMENTS, FIVE](#).

temple

The temple is the center of Hindu worship. It can vary in size from a small shrine with a simple thatched roof to vast complexes of stone and masonry.

During most times of the year the temple is devoted to individual or family worship or to greeting of the divinity. Since many houses in India have their own shrines set up for worship, the temple is reserved for special worship or for requests to the divinity, often by people who have made PILGRIMAGES. At festival times temples are given over to group worship, as devotees sing BHAJANS or KIRTANS, or to various rituals that commemorate special events in the life of the divinity, for example, the marriage of MINAKSHI at the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai.

The early worship of the VEDAS took the form of a ceremony around a fire or fires, without any permanent structures or icons. Location was

unimportant. As Hinduism developed, it borrowed from other modes of worship, and both location and iconography became central features. Often geography determined temple location: high places that jut out from the countryside would usually have at least small temples at their summits, as would river junctions. In addition, places traditionally associated with events in the lives of a deity would often be marked with temples. The temple at RAMESHVARAM, for example, marks the place where RAMA had his monkey armies build a bridge to cross over and fight the demon king Ravana, according to the RAMAYANA.

Today, ICON worship is central to Indian temple worship. The stone itself is not worshipped. The icon is merely the place the divinity inhabits. A complex ritual must first be performed to install the divinity in the image. Thereafter, the image is treated as the divinity itself would be: it is bathed, dressed, sung to, fed, and feted each day. For SHVAIVITES, most often the icon is the SHIVA LINGAM,



A typical Hindu temple tower. Shown here is the Krishna temple in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

(Constance A. Jones)

the erect phallus symbol of Shiva surrounded by the round *YONI* representing the goddess's sexual organ. For Vaishnavites the icon is a full representation of *VISHNU* in one of his forms; for *SHAKTAS* it is an image of the great *GODDESS*.

Often the inner sanctum of the temple, its most holy spot, holds a small, typically modest icon. The more elaborate statues and images are usually located in the larger temple precincts. Large temples often boast a huge array of images of gods and goddesses, usually depicting a particular event in their story. One might see, for instance, *NARASIMHA*, the man-lion *AVATAR* of Vishnu, ripping apart his demon foe *HIRANYAKASHIPU*, or see Shiva in his pose as the divine dancer, *NATARAJA*.

PUJA, the regular worship service including offerings and rites, is usually performed before the central icon at fixed times during the day. For a donation, devotees can dedicate certain features of a regular *puja*, such as the recitation of a particular *MANTRA*. They may also pay for *pujas* to be conducted by *BRAHMIN* priests at other times, simple or elaborate at their discretion, in support of certain prayers or pleas to the divinity. A woman might want to have a son, a man might want to gain success in business, or a student might seek success in exams. All worldly and salvational requests are taken to the divinity of the temple; popular temples are thronged with people year round.

The *puja* consists, at the minimum, of fruit, water, and flower offerings to the divinity, accompanied by the appropriate mantras. No *puja* is done without the *ARATI*, or waving of a lighted lamp before the divinity. At the end of the ritual people may step forward and waft the smoke from the lamp over their head or face to receive the blessing of the divinity. In certain temples one may receive a little of the food that had been offered to the divinity, called *PRASADA*, which will confer blessing when eaten.

Most temples in India, including all of the well-known temples, allow only Brahmins to perform the rituals. There are smaller and larger

shrines all over the country, however, who have non-Brahmin and even *SHUDRA* (low-caste) priests. These are usually temples serving a smaller local community. By law, any member of any caste may enter any temple in India. Nevertheless, in practice Dalits (*UNTOUCHABLES*) are often barred. Certain temples admit only Hindus; Muslims and Christians will be excluded if they are identified. A famous case of temple exclusion took place when Indira Gandhi, prime minister of India, visited the *JAGANNATH* temple at Puri. She was excluded because she was married to a non-Hindu.

Many great Hindu temples deserve mention: the *VISHVANATHA* TEMPLE to Shiva in the holy city *BENARES* (Varanasi); the famous *KALI* temple at Kali Ghat in Calcutta (Kolkata); the *JAGANNATH* TEMPLE to *KRISHNA* in Puri; the temple for the goddess *Kamakshi* at *KANCHIPURAM*; the *BRIHADISHVARA* temple to Shiva in Tanjore; the *MEENAKSHI* TEMPLE to the goddess *Minakshi* and the *Shrirangam* temple to *VISHNU*, both in Tamil Nadu.

Most Jains also worship at temples. These can be quite elaborate, as at *MT. ABU*, or smaller buildings. The *puja* is similar to the Hindu *puja* in these Jain contexts, but since the *TIRTHANKARAS*, the exalted personages who are worshipped, are not gods, but human beings, there is no *PRASADA* or "blessed food" given, and technically no blessing can be given by the image or personage. Instead, worship is aimed largely at instilling values that will lead devotees toward the yogic perfection of the *Tirthankara* being worshipped.

Sikhs have only the Golden Temple at *AMRITSAR*, where the holy book of the Sikhs, *Granth Sahib*, is enshrined. Sikhs also have *gurudwaras*, or "entranceways to the guru," all over the world. These meeting places welcome anyone, but there is no iconic worship or *puja* there.

Recently many Hindu temples, Jain temples, and Sikh *gurudwaras* have been established in the West. They often have unusual features, as at the *Shiva-Vishnu* Temple in Livermore, California, where both Shiva and Vishnu are worshipped side by side. The Western temples are usually built in

very traditional fashion, under the guidance of Brahmins and temple experts and artisans from India. However, each has its own unique style.

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Temple of Cosmic Religion

In 1966, while attending the KUMBHA MELA, a much-celebrated festival of ritual bathing at the confluence of the YAMUNA and GANGES rivers in ALLAHABAD, Lord Panduranga Vittala, an incarnation of KRISHNA, approached Satguru Sant KESHAVADAS (1934–97), an independent teacher of various paths of Indian philosophy, and told him, “Go to the West: spread the cosmic religion.” Later, after returning home to Delhi, Keshavadas experienced a vision in which he understood the spiritual reason for such a journey. The key VEDANTA principle that there is only one truth, he realized, should be used to include, not exclude, others. Religion could be a force to gather together the sacred bonds that unite humanity.

The next year, 1967, Keshavadas toured Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. In 1968 he founded a small center in Washington, D.C., that would become the American headquarters of the Dasashram International Center, as it was known in India. In the mid-1970s he relocated the center to Southfield, Michigan, near Detroit, and changed its name to the Temple of Cosmic Religion.

Keshavadas had a primary goal of introducing the wisdom of Hinduism to the West. He wanted to usher in a cosmic religion founded on the principles that truth is one and that all paths lead to God. Keshavadas taught YOGA and MEDITATION as a way to know God and encouraged his followers to dance, sing, and chant. Central to Keshavadas’s beliefs are the precepts of KARMA and REINCARNATION.

The world headquarters of the Temple of Cosmic Religion is now located in Bangalore, India; there are five other centers in India. The U.S. headquarters is currently in Oakland, California. Since the death of Keshavadas in 1997, the temple has been led by his widow, Guru Mata Keshavadas. The temple also has centers in Trinidad and England.

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Temple of Kriya Yoga

The Temple of Kriya Yoga was established on the North Side in Chicago in the 1960s by the American Goswami Kriyananda (b. 1930), who had been teaching yoga since the 1940s. The headquarters of the temple is still located in Chicago. Goswami was born Melvin Higgins; he is not to be confused with his compatriot Swami KRIYANANDA of the ANANDA MOVEMENT.

Kriyananda studied YOGA and was initiated by his first GURU, Sri Shelliji, a disciple of Paramahansa YOGANANDA, founder of the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP. Kriyananda, an excellent astrologer, also opened the College of Occult Sciences, which offered many courses in esoteric traditions.

During the 1970s Kriyananda established a retreat in South Haven, Michigan, and in 1977 founded the Kriyananda Healing Center as a

holistic health facility. The center teaches nontraditional methods of healing, including biofeedback, MEDITATION, yoga, fasting, nutrition, and massage.

Kriyananda instructs students in Yogananda's KRIYA YOGA path of supreme bliss (*samadhi*); he teaches the oneness of God and a non-dual VEDANTIC cosmology. He has written several books about *kriya yoga*, astrology, and meditation.

The temple publishes a periodical, *The Flame of Kriya*, and maintains a Web site.

Further reading: Goswami Kriyananda, *The Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God* (Chicago: Temple of Kriya Yoga, n.d.); ———, *Pathway to God-Consciousness* (Chicago: Temple of Kriya Yoga, 1970); ———, *Yoga, Text for Teachers and Advanced Students* (Chicago: Temple of Kriya Yoga, 1976).

Tevaram

The Tevaram is the collected hymns of the three most prominent NAYANMARS or Tamil SHAIVITE saints, APPAR, Jnanasambanthar (also known as SAMBANTHAR or Tirujnanasambanthar), and SUNDARAR (Suntharamurti), whose lives spanned the sixth through eighth centuries C.E. These hymns, in the Tamil language, are considered by Tamil Shaivites to be equal in sanctity to the SANSKRIT VEDAS as scripture and MANTRA; in a sense, the Tevaram is a Veda. The text is memorized and sung by a hereditary community called Otuvars during daily temple rituals and ceremonies.

The hymns of the Tevaram celebrate SHIVA with passionate devotion, dwelling on the many tales of Shiva; his wives, SATI and PARVATI; and his two sons, GANESHA and KARTTIKEYA. They lovingly describe the deity's physical attributes and recount his visitations to famous devotees at the sites of many important Shaivite shrines in Tamil Nadu.

Further reading: Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton, N.J.:

Princeton University Press, 1989); R. Vijayalakshmy, *An Introduction to Religion and Philosophy—Tevaram and Tivviyappirapantam* (Chennai: International Institute of Tamil Studies, 2001); Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

Thailand

Contemporary Thailand is a predominantly Theravada Buddhist country, where Hinduism, animism, Islam, and Christianity are also practiced. The Hindu minority constitutes only about 1 percent of the population. Nevertheless, the historic influence of Hinduism is still apparent. The king of Thailand is always referred to as RAMA, the name of the title character of the Ramakien (the local version of the SANSKRIT RAMAYANA), and he is considered an AVATAR of VISHNU. Though the Thai monarchies date to the formation of the kingdom of Sukothai, the first king to take the title of Rama was Phraphutthayotfa Chulalok, who was named Rama I during the 18th century. The most famous Thai king was Rama V, also known as King Chulalongkorn, who defended Thailand's independence from European colonizers and introduced democracy. The West knows of him primarily as the child prince of King Mongkut (Rama IV) in the book *Anna and the King of Siam*. The current king, Adulyadej the Great, who rose to power in 1946, is called Rama IX.

The Ramakien is a central part of Thai culture. The epic is illustrated in the artwork of many temples and is often performed in dance and puppet plays. The best known image is a massive fresco painted on the wall of the Royal Temple (Temple of the Jade Buddha). Other Hindu imagery, such as YAKSHAS, who act as guardians of the doors, can be found within many Buddhist temples.

Monuments to the Hindu gods SHIVA and Vishnu are found in Thai Buddhist temples. The Royal Temple has a small group of BRAHMINS to conduct royal rituals, as Buddhist monks cannot preside over these rites. Thai Buddhism shares

many beliefs with its parent religion Hinduism, most particularly the belief in liberation from the cycle of births, the cosmology of Hinduism, and the four major eras or *YUGAS*. Many of the laity fuse Hindu belief and ritual with Buddhist religion. Several Hindu temples exist in Thailand and most of the major deities are recognized. There are even temples and *PUJAS* (worship services) dedicated to the creator god *BRAHMA* alone, a rarity in India itself.

Further reading: Eliezer B. Ayal, ed., *The Study of Thailand: Analysis of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science* (Athens: Ohio Center for International Studies, South East Asia Program, 1978); John M. Cadet, *The Ramakien: The Thai Epic: Illustrated with the Bas-Reliefs of Wat Phra Jetubon* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971); Georges Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Edited by Walter F. Vella translated by Susan Brown Cowing (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968); Rajiv Malik, "Thailand Hinduism," *Hinduism Today* (July–August–September 2003); Stanley J. O'Conner, *Hindu Gods of Peninsular Siam* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1972).

Theosophical Society (est. 1875)

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in New York City by Helena Petrovna *BLAVATSKY*, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Q. Judge. The founders sought to promote the study of insights from various world religions, investigate spiritualist and other occult phenomena, and foster the brotherhood of all humankind. Olcott became the first president (1875–1907), although the writings and teachings of Blavatsky became synonymous with the teachings of the society. The society accepted her self-description as a disciple of highly evolved beings, *mahatmas*, who had instructed her in the ancient wisdom, the secret doctrine, the wisdom religion, or Theosophy. She claimed to have contacted an occult brotherhood of these *mahatmas* in her travels in the Far East,

particularly in Tibet. Their perennial philosophy became the basis of her writings.

Although Theosophy has no official dogma, it sees itself as a body of truths that are the basis of all valid religions. It is not a religion per se, but rather a restatement of the essence of religion itself. The three stated objectives of the society are (1) to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color; (2) to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science; and (3) to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in humans.

To Theosophists, the universe is a manifestation of one eternal, infinite reality, the divine, which underlies and pervades everything. Each person is a spark of the divine, a microcosm of the macrocosm, born in order to evolve from latent divinity to perfection. Through many incarnations, a soul entity or monad of the divine becomes perfect enough to be free from the cycle of birth and death.

Blavatsky expounded a cosmological scheme and description of the human body and soul, involving levels and hierarchies that express relationships among humanity, the angelic realms, and ultimately, the divine. Theosophical ideas are largely drawn from the cosmological and psychological teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism and are portrayed in an amalgam of Hindu and Buddhist terminology.

In 1879 Blavatsky and Olcott settled in India; in 1882 they established Theosophical Society headquarters at Adyar, near Madras (Chennai). In 1895, Judge, who headed the American section, severed its relations with the British and Indian branches. In 1896 Judge died and was succeeded by Katherine A. *TINGLEY*, who moved the American section's headquarters to Point Loma (San Diego), California. Further schisms of the Theosophical Society in America produced the Temple of the People (from the Syracuse, New York, branch) and the Theosophical Society of New York.

After Blavatsky's death in 1891, the Theosophical movement experienced a decade of internal dissent. Annie BESANT, an Englishwoman who joined the society after reading Blavatsky's work, succeeded her as head of the Esoteric Section, a small group who experimented with occult principles. When Olcott died in 1907 Besant became the new president of the society.

The first decades of the movement saw widespread interest in Theosophical principles in America, Europe, and India. The synthesis of East and West, religion and science, and esoteric and exoteric understanding made Theosophy compelling to cosmopolitan, liberal people, regardless of nationality, who had been disappointed by the dogmatism of both religion and science and sought to unite the diverse peoples of the world in a peaceful brotherhood.

Around the turn of the 20th century the movement had begun to decline, but under Besant's leadership many lodges in Europe, America, and India revived. In the Netherlands in 1926 Besant announced to the world gathering of Theosophists that the world teacher whom the society had anticipated since Blavatsky's time had been located. This teacher was the young Jiddu KRISHNAMURTI.

The occult formulations and esoteric teachings of the society have influenced many Western teachers and movements that do not use the name *Theosophy*, including Alice BAILEY and the Lucis Trust; Guy Ballard and the "I AM movement"; Elizabeth Clare Prophet and the Church Universal and Triumphant; and Rudolph Steiner and Anthroposophy. Theosophical publishing houses are responsible for making available to the general public many texts and writings of Hinduism.

Today the Theosophical movement includes the Judge-Tingley-dePurucker branch called the Theosophical Society, headquartered in Altadena, California. This organization sponsors the Theosophical Press, which publishes the periodical *Sunrise* and operates a large library. The Theosophical

Society in America, part of the larger International Theosophical Society in India, is headquartered in Wheaton, Illinois. This organization sponsors the Theosophical Publishing House and Quest Books, publishes the *American Theosophist* and *Discovery*, and operates the Olcott Library at Wheaton. *The Theosophist*, founded in 1979, is still published at Adyar, India.

The United Lodge of Theosophy, founded in 1909 by Robert Crosbie, former member of the Point Loma community, is headquartered in Los Angeles and sponsors Theosophy Company, its publishing house. This organization publishes *Theosophy*, a monthly periodical. All of the Theosophical organizations cited here maintain Web sites.

Although current membership statistics are not available, adherents to the formal structure of Theosophy are becoming fewer. Yet its historic role in introducing Eastern thought and philosophy to the West remains secure.

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Therapanthi

The Therapanthis are a schismatic movement within the the STHANAKAVASI sect of Jains (see [JAINISM](#)). It emerged from the attempt by the 18th-century monk Bhikanji to deal with the perennial conflict faced by Jain monks: to eschew all worldliness or to work actively for the welfare and salvation of all beings.

Bhikanji's solution, radical for Jains, was that renunciation was more important than saving of an animal's life. He argued that if one were, for instance, to save the life of a dog, one would then be responsible for the violent KARMA of that animal in the rest of its life. Other Jains, shocked at this conclusion because of its apparent rejection of the Jain notion of AHIMSA or noninjury, predicted that Bhikanji would never have even 12 disciplines. Therefore, when the sect did in fact take hold, it became known as the Therapantha (the way of the 13).

Further reading: V. G. Nair, *Jainism and Therapanthism* (Bangalore: Adinatha Jaina Shvetambara Temple, 1970); Muni Nathmal, *Acarya Bhiksu: The Man and His Philosophy* (Churu: Adarsa Sahitya Sangha, 1968).

Thind, Bhagat Singh (1892–1967) *teacher of Sant Mat in the United States*

Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian-American disciple of the reformist SANT MAT movement, became the subject of a court case in the 1920s that had far-reaching consequences for the American Indian community.

Thind, born in AMRITSAR, Punjab, and initiated by Sant Mat Satguru Sawan Singh (1858–1948), migrated to the UNITED STATES in 1913. He attended the University of California and earned his living, as did many Punjabis, working in the lumber mills in Oregon. During World War I he served in the U.S. Army. In 1920 he applied for and was granted citizenship.

Thind's move to become a naturalized citizen occurred in the wake of the passage of the Asian Exclusion Act of 1917, which included provisions that blocked further immigration from India. India's inclusion in the definition of "Asians" to be excluded had in part been prompted by the so-called "Hindoo riots" that occurred in Washington, Oregon, and northern California protesting the many jobs that were given to Punjabi men in the lumbering industry.

After the final approval of Thind's citizenship, a naturalization examiner challenged the court's decision. That challenge initiated a three-year court process that rested on a provision of an earlier 1790 law, which had opened citizenship to any "free white person" not otherwise encumbered. Thind argued that he was a "Caucasian" and hence a "white person." The case went to the United States Supreme Court, which in 1923, in an opinion written by Justice George Sutherland, ruled that not all Caucasians were white in the common understanding of that term and revoked Thind's citizenship. That ruling also led to the withdrawal of a number of other previous grants of citizenship to Indian Americans. The ruling in the Thind case stood as federal policy until changes were enacted in immigration law in 1965.

In the meantime, Thind remained in the United States and maintained his vocation as a Sant Mat teacher, though generally describing himself as a Sikh (see SIKHISM). He lectured widely across the United States, primarily to non-Indian audiences, and authored a number of books and booklets. He educated himself on American religion and argued for his faith, comparing it to transcendentalism and Christianity. In his mature years, cut off from the Sant Mat community, he developed his own unique, eclectic spiritual system.

He later married a French American, Vivian Davies, who worked for many years to introduce Indian culture into the United States. They had one son, David, who keeps his father's writings in print.

Further reading: David Christopher Lane, *The Radhasoami Tradition: A Critical History of Guru Successorship* (New York and London: Garland, 1992); Bhagat Singh Thind, *The Bible of Humanity for Supreme Wisdom* (New York: Author, n.d.); ———, *Divine Wisdom*, 2 vols. (New York: Author, n.d.); ———, *Radiant Road to Reality* (New York: Author, 1939); "United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind, Decided February 19, 1923," *Supreme Court Reporter* 43, no. 10 (April 1, 1923).

time in Hindu tradition

Time in Hinduism is a cyclical concept. The universe arises and disappears in an infinite series of cycles.

In this time scheme, every “Great Age” (MAHA-YUGA) encompasses four successive Ages (YUGAS), beginning with an Age of Truth (KRITA, or Satya, YUGA) and progressively declining until an Age of Corruption (Kali Yuga, which has no relation to the goddess Kali, spelled differently in SANSKRIT). A long series of such oscillating Great Ages eventually plays out, until the universe dissolves and remains absent for a time equal to its previous presence. Then, it once again emerges into a new round of Great Ages. The Jain tradition shares this notion of cycles, defined somewhat differently. Buddhism has its own version of endless time, stretching in both directions, past and future.

Different traditions or *puranas* describe the story of time in varying ways. In one version, after the long night of BRAHMA, equal to 4,320,000,000 years, when the universe is in dissolution, the Supreme Being, VISHNU, stimulates the ever-present nature, or PRAKRITI (who exists in potential form while the universe is gone), to reemerge as the universe. The universe then begins a new Krita, or Satya, Yuga, now seen as a Golden Age, followed by a Treta (Silver) Age, a Dvapara (Bronze) Age, and finally a Kali (Iron) Age, the final Age of Corruption. We are currently in one such final age. Each Mahayuga, or Great Age, equals 12,000 god-years, each of which lasts 360 human years, for a total of 4,320,000,000 human years.

The Yugas decrease in duration: a Satya Yuga is 1,728,000 years, Treta is 1,296,000 years, Dvapara is 864,000 years, and Kali is 432,000 years. During this decline human stature, longevity, and morality also progressively decline.

One thousand Mahayugas, or cycles of four Yugas, make up a *kalpa* (eon), a day in the life of Lord BRAHMA, 4,320,000,000 years. Each *kalpa* is followed by a time of calamity and disaster, on the Earth and in all the worlds. All beings perish. Fire overtakes all of the worlds, followed by a massive

flood. Finally all the elements return to the seed of primordial nature, or *prakriti*, and time itself ends, only to reemerge when the cosmic night has ended.

Within these cycles is another classification of time called the *MANVANTARA*, each of which is ruled by a MANU, or “first man,” the progenitor of the human race in that period. Because the universe dissolves and reappears again and again, there are an infinite number of such figures. Each *kalpa* sees 14 Manus reign in succession. This means that a *manvantara* takes up approximately 71 Yugas. One *manvantara* thus lasts 367,020,000 years. Each *manvantara* has seven *RISHIS* (VEDIC seers), certain deities, an INDRA, and a Manu. The Manu of our era is known as Vaivasvata. He is the seventh Manu of our *kalpa*, or eon.

We are currently in the Kali Yuga, but there is no agreement among the sources as to precisely where we are in this 432,000-year cycle and when this age will end.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); F. B. J. Kuiper, “Cosmogony and Conception: A Query,” *History of Religions* 10 (1970): 91–138; W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa, 1973).

Tingley, Katherine (Augusta Westcott) (1847–1929) *American Theosophical leader*

Katherine Augusta Westcott served as the head of the American Theosophical Society after it broke with Annie Wood BESANT (1847–1933).

Westcott was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Privately educated, she became interested in social work and founded the Society of Mercy, a relief organization on New York City’s impoverished East Side.

Through her social work, she met William Q. Judge (1851–96), cofounder of the Theosophical Society. In 1891, another cofounder, Helena

Petrovna BLAVATSKY (1831–91) died. Previously, she and the third co-founder, Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), had moved to India, where each had absorbed elements of the Indian spiritual environment. Through the early 1890s, Judge challenged the role of Besant, a relatively new member of the society who emerged as head of its important Esoteric Section, in which Blavatsky had taught psychic development and occult practices.

Judge's challenge of Besant led the majority of the American section to break with the international society. Before he died in 1896 Judge designated Tingley, whom he had seen as a capable and dedicated leader, as his successor. Tingley stepped into her role immediately and traveled the globe on a World Crusade for Theosophy. When she returned to America, she set up headquarters at Point Loma at San Diego, California, where she founded the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity.

Tingley led the Theosophical Society in an interesting direction, mixing esoteric teachings with an experiment in communal living at Point Loma and developing a variety of outward-directed programs in the community. Among the more interesting programs was a relief work effort in Cuba that included taking a group of Cuban children to Point Loma.

Theosophy is basically a Western esoteric teaching, but it resonated with Hinduism at a variety of points. Most notably, it shared an understanding of the individual as essentially a substantial soul that reincarnated in different bodies through time. The youth division of the school at Point Loma was designated the Raja Yoga College, a designation Tingley took from the SANSKRIT sense of "royal union." She saw true education to consist in the harmonious development and balancing of all human faculties. As taught at the school, raja yoga was a system for developing psychic, intellectual, and spiritual powers and a union with one's higher self (the inner divine source of all).

The Tingley-led Theosophical Society opposed the emphasis placed on the role of Jiddu KRISHNAMURTI (1895–1986). Besant's designation of Krishnamurti as the vehicle of the World Savior in the 1920s attracted many new supporters to the international Theosophical Society, though most left when in 1929 Krishnamurti rejected his connection with Theosophy. Tingley's organization was crippled by Tingley's death in July 1929 in an automobile accident in Germany, and by the collapse of the stock market in October that year that plunged the world into an economic depression.

Tingley led every activity at Point Loma, and during her life the society flourished, though her inability to delegate authority and her neglect of the organization's other centers became evident after her death. The society remained vital through the 1930s but lost the land at Point Loma during World War II. In the later half of the 20th century, the International Theosophical Society recovered the support of the majority of American Theosophists.

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Tirthankara

The Tirthankaras (ford crossers), those who have crossed the ocean of birth and rebirth and have been released from the bonds of KARMA, are the central objects of devotion for Jains (see JAINISM). A Tirthankara is a karmically select being, not a god, but a perfected YOGI who has reached enlightenment. At rare intervals, such people appear in

this world to teach and promulgate the tradition of the Jains. Technically, no one can become completely released from karma until death; Jains use the term Tirthankara in anticipation of the liberation from karma that these venerated beings have earned.

In each “half-era,” 24 Tirthankaras manifest. Such events have transpired for an infinite number of eons and will do so in the future; thus, there have been an infinite number of Tirthankaras, in theory. Besides, Jain cosmology posits numerous other realms beyond our Earth where other Tirthankaras manifest, so it is understood that though we have no living Tirthankara here on Earth, there is always one alive somewhere in the universe.

In Jain temples the Tirthankara is often the central icon in the shrine, usually depicted at his or her moment of enlightenment and first teaching, surrounded above and around by all the gods, humans, and animals present to hear the teaching. The 24 Tirthankaras of the current half of a cosmic cycle: RISHABHA, Ajita, Sambhava, Abhinandana, Sumati, Padmaprabha, Suparshva, Chandraprabha, Suvidhi/Puspadanta, Shitala, Sreyamsa, Vasupujya, Vimala, Ananta, Dharma, Shanti, Kunthu, Ara, Malli, Munisuvrata, Nami, Nemi, PARSHVANATH/MAHAVIRA.

DIGAMBARA and SHVETAMBARA Jains agree on this list; however, the Shvetambara believe that Malli was a woman, while the Digambaras do not accept that women can achieve enlightenment or release from karma in a female birth. Most often the names of the Tirthankaras are followed by the term *Natha*, or “Lord,” for example, Parshvanath. The final Tirthankara of our half of a cosmic cycle, MAHAVIRA, however, is generally not addressed this way. In iconography, the first Tirthankara and the last three are by far the most commonly seen.

Further reading: Jyotindra Jain and Eberhard Fischer, *Jaina Iconography*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); P. S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979); T. G. Kalghatgi, *Tirthankara Parsva-*

natha: A Study (Mysore: Dept. of Jainology and Prakrits, University of Mysore, 1977).

Tirumular (c. sixth century) *Tamil Shaivite saint*
Tirumular has a unique position in the Tamil literature. He is one of the 63 orthodox Shaivite (see [SHAIVISM](#)) saints of the Tamil pantheon, while also considered the first of the mysterious Sittars (*SIDDHAS* in Sanskrit), the antinomian, antiorthodox YOGIS of that tradition. Tirumular is so called because he entered his *mula* (body) by the grace of Tiru (the sacred one), the designation of SHIVA’S bull NANDI. He says in one of his verses, “God created me, so that I might recreate Him in Tamil.” Tirumular is known for his sixth-century poem Tirumanthiram, which forms the 10th book of the Tamil Shaivite canon, the TIRUMURAI.

Further reading: B. Natarajan, trans., *Tirumantiram, a Tamil Scriptural Classic by Tirumular* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994); Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975).

Tirumurai

The Tirumurai is the Tamil Shaivite (see [SHAIVISM](#)) canon. This set of sacred texts, written in Tamil, holds a place in that tradition at least equal to the SANSKRIT texts about SHIVA. It is a collection of devotional hymns and stories of holy men and women, written over the course of 600 years by the 63 Tamil Shaivite poet-saints.

The entire 12-volume canon was assembled between 1080 and 1100 by Nambi Antar Nambi. Nambi began with the seven-volume TEVARAM, his collection of hymns by the three great saints SAMBANTHAR, APPAR, and SUNDARAR. Nambi then added MANIKKAVACAKAR’S poems, the Tirukkovaiyar and TIRUVACAKAM, as the eighth book, and collected 28 hymns by nine other saints into the ninth book. He made the Tirumanthiram of TIRUMULAR the 10th book. The 11th book has two parts; the first contains 40 hymns by 12 other poets, and

the second contains his own contribution, the Tirutontar Tiruvantathi. This work recounts the lives and achievements of the 63 saints, offers the story of his own life and work, and records some of his own hymns. Finally, Nambi made SEKKILAR'S PERIYA PURANAM, a larger summary of the lives and works of the Shaivite saints, the 12th book.

Thus, the Tirumurai is a vast heterogeneous collection. It spans the centuries from the first Shaivite saint, the woman Karakkal Ammaiyar (c. 500 C.E.), to Sekkilar in the 12th century. For a fuller list of the Shaivite saints see [NAYANMARS](#).

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Tirupati

Tirupati (also known as Tirumala) is a site in southern Andhra Pradesh where a TEMPLE to VISHNU in the form of Venkateshvara stands on top of a sacred hill. It is one of the major PILGRIMAGE sites in India and may be India's richest temple. People go to see Venkateshvara for practical ends, with wishes for children, wealth, or success in education. It is very common for people to have their head shaved in the town of Tirupati, to fulfill a vow to the deity, who has been humbly beseeched.

As many as 30,000 pilgrims a day walk the long narrow winding roads to the top of Tirumala hill to the modest-sized temple there. There are rest houses along the walking route. A bus ride to the summit takes approximately one hour from the bottom. The summit is a dramatic 2,100 feet over the city of Tirupati. As are most Vaishnavite temples Tirupati is known for its delicious PRASADA, or "grace food," which is given to all who visit the Lord. The food is symbolically offered to God and divinely eaten by him before it is given

to the worshippers to take home. The temple is known both for allowing non-Hindus into its inner sanctum and for keeping the eyes of the image covered—its look is considered too potent for people to bear.

The temple is located amid the famous seven hills of the Sheshacalam mountain range, said to represent the seven hoods of the divine serpent ADISHESHA, the couch for the recumbent VISHNU as they float on the MILK OCEAN between eras. The oldest part of the temple dates to the ninth or 10th century. There is a credible tradition that the temple was originally a MURUGAN or SHIVA temple that was converted to Vishnu by the famous Vaishnava Acharya RAMANUJA in the 12th century. The temple was enlarged considerably under the VIJAYANAGARA kings, who took Venkateshvara as the patron deity of the royal family.

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Tiruvacakam

The Tiruvacakam is the celebrated collection of hymns by the Tamil Shaivite poet-saint MANIKAVAKAKAR. Together with the shorter poem Tirukovaiyar, it forms the eighth book of the Tamil Shaivite canon TIRUMURAI. Tiruvacakam contains 51 hymns comprising a total of 3,414 lines. The hymns range in length from eight to 400 lines and show a significant variety of metrical forms, with 14 subvarieties of meter. The hymns are usually rhythmically recited or sung rather than read.

The work includes some unusual themes. Some have a woman in the role of devotee to the Lord, singing songs appropriate for playing games or doing village chores. One interesting poem is meant to be sung to awaken the divinity in the temple in the morning (a common part of Indian

temple ritual). Because of its sacredness, Tiruvacagam has no traditional commentaries attached to it.

Manikkavacakar's most important theme is the shadow of KARMA, which hovers over all as a specter. The poet calls to God to remove the bonds of karma and free him. He also speaks of impurity that takes him on the long road; when impurity has been removed, he becomes a slave to Lord SHIVA. (For both Shaivites and Vaishnavites, the truest devotee is often called a "slave to the feet" of the divinity.) Most importantly he asks for Shiva's grace to escape the hold of the senses, which lead one to impurity and destruction. Manikkavacakar is not, in the end, antisensual, but is wary, as many renunciants are, of the pull of the unrestrained senses.

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Transcendental Meditation

Transcendental Meditation (T.M.) is a meditation practice taught first in the 1940s by Maharishi MAHESH YOGI, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati (1869–1953), affectionately known as Guru Dev.

Maharishi has refused to discuss his early life and little has been discovered. It is known that he was born Mahesh Prasad Varma and that he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Allahabad University. Beginning in the 1940s, he spent 13 years in silent retreat with Guru Dev. After the death of Guru Dev in 1958, Maharishi started teaching publicly and began to gather disciples. He taught what he had learned from Guru Dev and added some of his own ideas to strengthen the work. His movement began to attract global

attention when celebrities such as Mia Farrow, Jane Fonda, and the Beatles became involved.

In T.M., each student is given a private, individual MANTRA or sound for silent repetition. The overall strategy of Maharishi is revealed in his book *The Science of Being and Art of Living*, in which he spells out the groundwork for creating worlds of unmanifest being, with the goal of realizing God.

The theoretical base on which T.M. operates is termed the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI); practitioners maintain that their objective is scientific and not religious; the basic technique for SELF-REALIZATION is derived from VEDIC science and technology. T.M. claims that its effectiveness has been scientifically proved in therapeutic settings involving criminals, drug abusers, and alcoholics.

The technique is described as a simple mental exercise that initiates deep relaxation and rest. It is generally practiced for 15 to 20 minutes in both the morning and evening. Although the technique was inspired by Vedic practices, instructors in T.M. and the Maharishi do not consider the practice to be specifically Hindu, as it does not require either belief in or devotion to a deity. The benefits of this practice (lowering of blood pressure, decreased effects of stress, and rehabilitation from dysfunctional habits) are said to have been verified by more than 500 scientific studies conducted at 214 independent universities and research institutes in over 27 countries. The research has been published in scientific journals in India, Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Transcendental Meditation has received acclaim for improving physiological functioning, developing mental potential, improving concentration, improving health, preventing disease, and bringing about positive effects on social behavior.

In 1977, T.M. announced its SIDDHA program to help initiates achieve paranormal abilities, including levitation of the body. A former teacher of the Siddha program eventually sued the council, claiming that these manifestations of unusual

phenomena could not be achieved. He won a judgment of \$138,000.

T.M. was largely introduced to the West through two organizations, the Spiritual Regeneration Movement and the Student International Meditation Society. In 1971, Maharishi purchased the defunct Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa, and turned it into Maharishi International University, which in 1974 was renamed the Maharishi University of Management [of the Universe]). The school awards bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in consciousness-based education. Currently, almost 800 students are enrolled in programs structured one course at a time in small classes over a period of four weeks. Degrees are granted in science, the humanities, and Vedic science.

In 1972, Maharishi revealed a World Plan to guide the nations of the world in using the insights derived from the practice of T.M. and the Science of Creative Intelligence. The World Plan includes a wide spectrum of activities for cultural renewal, health, freedom from war, and personal development. Over the last generation, a number of different organizations have been formed to implement the plan's ambitious goals.

According to the World Plan Council, T.M. is not a new religious group, but some observers disagree. In the United States controversy arose as T.M. teachers were receiving government funds to teach T.M. in places such as the public schools and the armed forces. In 1978, a federal district court in Newark, New Jersey, ruled that T.M. was indeed a religious practice and could not receive public funds; nor could government agencies promote its teachings and practice. After this ruling, the sharp upward trajectory of growth for the movement fell sharply, though it remains a substantial movement worldwide.

The New Jersey ruling pointed to the use of MANTRAS as a form of japa yoga; to T.M. initiations, which include traditional religious acts (most of which were never explained to Westerners); and to the acceptance of the movement in India as a form of SHAIVITE Hinduism.

Millions of people have taken T.M. courses. There are currently more than 7,000 authorized teachers working at 400 teaching centers. As the movement has grown, it has become to a large extent decentralized. In the United States, a Vedic City is being planned on land adjacent to the Maharishi University of Management. The many T.M.-related bodies are described in Web sites sponsored by the global movement.

During the 1980s the council introduced a line of AYURVEDIC medical products and opened a center adjacent to the university to promote them. The writer and physician Deepak Chopra emerged as a leading exponent of Maharishi's Ayurvedic (see AYURVEDA) program but has in recent years distanced himself from the organization.

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transmigration See REINCARNATION.

Treta Yuga

All of the Yugas, or Ages in the Indian tradition, refer to throws in an ancient dice game. Treta Yuga is named after the 3, the second best throw. It always follows the KRITA, or SATYA, YUGA (the

Golden Age of Truth). It is 1,296,000 years in duration. The Sun God is its presiding divinity. Where in Krita Yuga pleasure was spontaneous, this ends in Treta Yuga. Where there were no permanent homes in the Krita Yuga, in the Treta Yuga trees become the homes for people. A beautiful honey (not made by bees) could be found in holes in the trees and was all the food people needed. People were all happy, well fed, and healthy.

However, passion and greed began to increase in this age. People remained truthful, but they focused on worldly success. As people cycled between greed and virtue, the trees would disappear and reappear. In their absence, people suffered from cold and heat and had to build shelters.

Toward the end of the Yuga, people grew more angry and more greedy, and men tried to possess each other's wives and wealth. In response, Lord BRAHMA emitted the warrior class, the KSHATRIYAS, to set limits in the world. Equality vanished as classes were formed.

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trimurti

Trimurti (*tri*, three; *murti*, forms) is a common term in Hindu texts, referring to the triad of divinities BRAHMA, VISHNU, and SHIVA. Brahma is the creator god, Vishnu is seen as the sustainer of the world, and Shiva is seen as its destroyer. In theistic Hinduism these three are often seen as aspects of one divinity, either Shiva or Vishnu.

Shiva and Vishnu are the two divinities around which the two great Hindu sects, SHAIVISM and VAISHNAVISM, constellate. Brahma is not a sectarian divinity, and there are only two temples dedicated solely to Brahma in all of India. Though it resembles the trinitarian conceptions of Christianity,



Image of the Hindu trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, Elephanta Caves, Bombay (Mumbai) (*Constance A. Jones*)

the *trimurti* is a much looser concept and was not emphasized theologically or theorized upon in any way as the Trinity was in Christianity.

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Trinidad

Hinduism first arrived on the Caribbean island of Trinidad on May 30, 1845, with a group of 197

indentured workers, who had endured a month-long voyage from Calcutta (Kolkata) aboard the *Fatal Kazack*. Trinidad had become a British colony in 1802, after a takeover from Spain. After Britain abolished slavery in 1833, African slaves left the sugar and cocoa plantations to pursue employment as free workers in urban areas. To fill the labor shortage on plantations, British officials developed a scheme to introduce indentured servants from India. Between 1845 and 1917 approximately 140,000 such workers arrived in Trinidad. Most were from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Calcutta in northern India; others were from Madras (Chennai) in the south. About 60 percent of them were males. The majority left their homes in India to escape decades of famine, while others sought to escape increased British repression in India after the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, the first of several revolutionary outbreaks of Indian nationalism.

Indentured servants were originally contracted to work five years, yet the majority remained in Trinidad and formed permanent settlements. They were enticed by the offer of free land and did not want to return to India, where conditions had not yet improved. Settlers soon converted the landscape, renaming streets and villages with familiar references to their Indian home.

Colonial officials initially sought Indian workers from the lower castes, claiming that BRAHMINS had “soft hands” for the hard work of the cane fields. British policy soon explicitly denied passage to the well educated in an effort to prevent Brahmins from stirring resistance among lower-caste workers. Nevertheless, approximately 10 percent of workers entering Trinidad were Brahmins, who secured passage by concealing their caste status and changing their name. Many arrived in response to the urgent plea for spiritual guidance. As more Hindus settled permanently on the island, Brahmins were able to practice their religious duties more openly. By 1870, public Hindu rituals were common in villages that had large populations of Indians.

Hindus in Trinidad followed the diverse forms of traditional worship and rituals common in their homeland. Over time, exposure to multicultural experiences and pressure by Brahmin leaders to make Hinduism a respected religion on the island combined to transform Hindu practices and make them distinct from Indian Hinduism. In the early 20th century the Brahmin caste consolidated and standardized doctrines and ritual practices in an official, organized orthodoxy now defined by the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha, the largest Hindu organization in Trinidad. This central organization prescribes congregationally centered practices, BHAKTI rituals (devotions), and the study of scriptures. The specification of a Hindu orthodoxy has placed Hinduism on a par with other religions, compatible with Christianity and Islam.

Changes in Hindu observance include the elimination of caste. Nevertheless, the Brahmin priest is recognized for ritual purposes. Brahmins were once considered to have lost their caste status once they traveled across the ocean, but the general population of Hindus today receive Brahmins with reverence as unique practitioners of essential and inherent duties. Today, many Brahmins in Trinidad are not full-time *pandits* (teachers) or priests but rather rely upon secular jobs for their income.

Hinduism has also made its impact on the larger culture of Trinidad. The popular Hindu festival DIVALI has become recognized as a national holiday in Trinidad with the growing influence of Hindu representation in government. Divali, also known as the festival of lights, is a much anticipated week-long event that honors LAKSHMI, the goddess of light, wealth, and prosperity. It is celebrated in the same way as Hindu communities observe Divali internationally: families and communities join together, homes are decorated with traditional clay lamps, and festive meals and sweets are prepared for the celebration. The climax of the holiday occurs with the lighting of the lamps, which are arranged in homes, on

porches, along streets, and throughout villages. The thousands of lamps are lit to dispel darkness and ignorance.

In the 1920s, buildings known as *koutias* became a regular feature in the country's landscape. The structure, found throughout the Bhojpur region in India, traditionally served to house the temple caretaker. In Trinidad, *koutias* became additions to traditional temple structures and served as congregational halls. Many *koutias* were built in communities where there were no traditional temples, in order to attract visits from SWAMIS. The congregational halls became converted into central places of worship and began housing numerous Hindu deities. By the 1950s, the *koutia* temple became a unique feature of Trinidad's Hinduism. The structure of the *koutia* includes a long rectangular body with a flat or low-angled roof. When attached to a traditional temple it appears with a decorative dome at its front entrance. The temple typically holds up to 100 worshippers, who use the structure for congregational rituals, seminar talks with visiting swamis, and general worship services.

At present, approximately 300,000 Hindus reside in Trinidad and Tobago. They make up about 23 percent of the country's population and represent the second largest religion in the country after Christianity. Hinduism continues to thrive. Despite the incursion of secular influences, many young people remain interested in their faith and continue to support the preservation of Hindu traditions.

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Tukaram (1608–1649) Maharashtran poet-saint

Tukaram was a Maharashtran poet-saint, who sang Marathi songs in praise of Vithoba or Vitthala, a local incarnation of KRISHNA.

He appears to have been low-caste in birth, probably SHUDRA. As with many of the poet-saints little is known of him for certain, and most of that is taken from autobiographical snippets found in his verses. The primary hagiographies, the *Bhaktivilamrita* and the *Bhaktavijaya*, were both written by one Mahipati. They contain many miraculous events and much information that is probably not factual.

Poet-saints sometimes find the corpus of their works expand over the years as others mimic their style and wish to have verses of their own composition appear under the respected name of a saint. This phenomenon is evident in the case of Tukaram. Thus, there is no possibility of issuing a critical edition of Tukaram's words, though many editions and sets of verses have been attributed to him.

The hagiographical biography is as follows: Tukaram is born as an AVATAR of the Mahatrastran saint-poet Namdev at the behest of VISHNU himself, after his parents, Vaishnavite Bolhoba and Kanakai, sincerely entreat God for a saintly son. When Tukaram reaches manhood, his father gives him responsibility in his business. Because his first wife is feeble, Tukaram's father arranges a second for him. Tukaram proves inept at business, as he has otherworldly concerns; when he does have a successful venture he gives away all his profits to a needy BRAHMIN.

Tukaram falls into severe poverty and his elder wife starves to death. Then his eldest son dies. At this, Tukaram renounces the world and retires to a mountain to worship Vithoba. There Vithoba reveals himself to him. Tukaram's second wife continues to serve him as her husband but complains bitterly of his otherworldly nature.

Tukaram is known for his kindness and caring for all. He feeds the hungry by miracles, he aids a lame woman, he repairs a temple. Gradually, he

attracts disciples and gains fame in his worship of Vithoba at Pandharpur. The famous Maratha king Shivaji visits Tukaram, who tells him to return to kingship and not renounce the world. Tukaram performs many miracles, including turning iron into gold. After many visitations, God himself escorts the glorious Tukaram to heaven.

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tulsi (tulasi)

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) is a species of plant resembling European basil that is sacred to the Vaishnavites (worshippers of VISHNU) and is cultivated by them for use in PUJAS (worship services) and offerings. It is often put on a four-sided pedestal placed in a special location in one’s house or near a place of worship. It is sometimes seen to be the wife of Vishnu, LAKSHMI herself.

One popular legend explains its origin: once Lakshmi and SARASVATI quarreled and cursed each other. Sarasvati’s curse turned Lakshmi into a tulsi plant and forced her to live on Earth forever. Vishnu, however, intervened and modified the curse, saying that Lakshmi would remain on Earth as tulsi until the river Gandaki flowed from her body.

In another story tulsi is understood to be the plant incarnation of Vrindadevi, the primary and archetypal “forest goddess.” She beautifies the flora and fauna of the ultimate spiritual forest, Vrindavana (BRINDAVAN). She appears in this world

so that her leaves may be used in the worship of KRISHNA.

Tulsi is offered daily in Vaishnavite *pujas*, whether in the temple or at home. When an orthodox Vaishnavite BRAHMIN male dies, a tulsi plant is worshipped and a bit of root is placed in his mouth and leaves are placed on his face and eyes; he is sprinkled with a tulsi sprig that has been dipped in water. This ritual is said to guarantee heaven. Some say that even looking at this sacred plant confers release from sins.

Any illness or pollution from contact with polluting people or substances is said to be removed by worship of the plant. Tending the tulsi plant is said to assure liberation from birth and rebirth. Sprigs of tulsi are offered to Vishnu especially in the month of Karttika (October–November). Tulsi dipped in saffron will please Vishnu. A twig of tulsi given to someone can lift his or her troubles and anxieties.

Tulsi leaves are aromatic, and the plant is thought to help with coughs; it is taken as a folk medicine. Orthodox Vaishnavite Brahmins take it after meals to help digestion. It is also taken before and after rituals.

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Tulsidas (1532–1623) greatest Hindi poet

It can be said without reservation that Tulsidas is the greatest poet to write in the Hindi language. Tulsidas was a BRAHMIN by birth and was believed to be a reincarnation of the author of the SANSKRIT RAMAYANA, VALMIKI.

Tulsidas was born in the village of Rajpur in Uttar Pradesh in 1532 C.E. He died in 1623 C.E. at the age of 91 at Asighat in BENARES (Varanasi). His father’s name was Atmaram Shukla Dube and his mother’s was Hushi. Tulsidas’s birth name was Tul-

siram. The story of Tulsidas's life is not historically verifiable and many details clearly are intended to enhance the understanding that he was a saint. For example, he did not cry at birth and was born with 32 teeth. His early life was fraught with sorrow because his parents died when he was still young. Some say that his foster parents also passed away when he was young. We know he was married to a woman named Buddhimati or Ratnavali. It is said he had a son named Tarak.

Tulsidas was inordinately fond of his wife. One day she went to her father's house without telling her husband. When Tulsidas found out, he could not stay away from her and went to sleep with her in her father's house. Buddhimati, trying to resist his advances in embarrassment, said that if Tulsidas had half the love for Lord RAMA that he had for her lowly body, he would most certainly reach liberation from birth and rebirth. Shamed by this, Tulsidas resolved to leave the householder life and become an ascetic.

He spent the next 14 years visiting the various PILGRIMAGE sites of North India. Living in the wilderness, Tulsidas would spill the excess water after his ablutions on the root of a particular tree. This pleased the being within the tree, who offered Tulsidas a boon. Tulsidas asked for a direct vision of Lord Rama. The being told Tulsidas to go to a particular temple where HANUMAN, the monkey god, visited regularly in the form of a leper. He was told to approach Hanuman for his request. This he did, and he received DARSHAN of Lord Rama.

Tulsidas wrote 12 books, but, by far, the most important is the Ramcharitmanas (*The Holy Lake of the Acts of Ram*), a Ramayana written in old Hindi (*Avadhi*) couplets. The book was written under the direction of Hanuman himself. It is read all over North India, and particularly during the time of the Ramlila. It is sung aloud in large groups for devotional purposes. Vinaya Patrika is another excellent book said to be written by Tulsidas, who also authored Gitavali (1571), Kavitavali (1612), and Barvairamayana (1612)

Several stories demonstrate Tulsidas's special spiritual status. Once some thieves went to his ASHRAM to steal. They were frightened off by a dark-complexioned guard holding a bow and arrow in his hand. The next morning they asked Tulsidas about this unusual-looking guard. Tulsidas realized that it had been Lord Rama and was overcome with devotion. In thanks, he gave away all his wealth to the needy.

In another story it is said that Tulsidas, while visiting BENARES, was greeted by a murderer, asking alms in the name of Lord Rama. Tulsidas invited him to his house and gave him PRASADA, sacred food, from the worship of Rama. The BRAHMINs were angered; they thought it improper to give a criminal such a blessing and to sit and eat with him. The Brahmins challenged Tulsidas; they said they could approve giving alms to a murderer only if the temple icon of NANDI, Shiva's bull mount, would accept food from the hand of this murderer. Tulsidas took them up on this challenge, and the temple Nandi did indeed eat from the murderers hands.

In another tale saint Tulsidas restores a poor woman's husband to life. Finally, Tulsidas is said to have been jailed by the Mughal emperor; when he was freed by a band of monkeys, friends of Hanuman, the emperor himself, though a Muslim, recognized Tulsidas as a saint.

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Turiya See STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

Turiyasangitananda, Swami (Alice Coltrane) (1937–) *jazz pianist and spiritual teacher*

Swami Turiyasangitananda combined her spiritual learning and musical talent to create a unique teaching in the YOGA tradition.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 27, 1937, Alice MacLeod was a rare female jazz instrumentalist, playing piano, organ, and harp. She married the famous jazz musician John Coltrane in 1965. In 1968 she received a spiritual awakening and received initiation into SANNYAS (renunciation). She traveled to India with Swami SATCHIDANANDA, founder of the INTEGRAL YOGA INTERNATIONAL and studied his teachings. She began publishing books and recording devotional music, reflecting her spiritual life. In 1975 she was given the name Swami Turiyasangitananda and began to establish a small following in the United States. In 1983 she established the Vedantic Center on 48 acres of land in the Santa Monica Mountains near Agoura, California, and built an ASHRAM to serve its growing membership. The ashram was renamed Sai Anantam Ashram in Chumash Pradesh in 1994.

Sai Anantam incorporates both the teachings of Swami Satchidananda and Western spirituality. Music and singing have a central role at the ashram. Devotional compositions influenced by Turiyasangitananda's musical talents mix traditional BHAJANS with modern Western features. Studies at the center include readings from the VEDAS and the Hindu scriptures as well as Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist texts.

Sai Anantam is open to seekers of all faiths. Turiyasangitananda emphasizes basic Vedic principles including the advancement of human life, self-purification, selfless service, and unity with God. The center has primarily African American members. Approximately 30 residents live at Sai Anantam and others from the surrounding community attend regular worship services. Activities at the ashram include Sunday school for children, weekly worship, chanting of services, and prayer.

The ashram has a bookstore and a vegetarian restaurant. Radio and television programs are also produced by the center. Avatar Book Institute of Agoura Hills distributes Turiyasangitananda's writings and recordings.

Further reading: Alice Coltrane-Turiyasangitananda, *Endless Wisdom* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Avatar Book Institute, 1981); ———, *Monument Eternal* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Vedantic Book Press, 1977).

Twitchell, Paul See [ECKANKAR](#).

Tyberg, Judith M. (1902–1980) *Theosophist and U.S. Sri Aurobindo disciple*

Judith Tyberg was a convert to Hinduism who worked to introduce the faith to the West.

Judith was born on May 17, 1902, in California. Her parents were both Danish Theosophists; her mother reportedly chanted a Vedic hymn to the entering soul throughout her pregnancy carrying Judith. Her parents sent her to the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY'S Point Loma Raja Yoga School and the Theosophical University. She earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in Religion and Philosophy with a concentration in Oriental thought and SANSKRIT studies. While working on her degrees, she began to teach at the Raja Yoga School. In 1932 she became its assistant principal, a position she left to become the dean of studies at the Theosophical University in 1935.

As a scholar, she began to work on the SANSKRIT terms that had been introduced into Theosophical teachings. Her first book, *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom-Religion*, appeared in 1940.

In 1947, Tyberg moved to India to pursue further studies at Benares Hindu University and to follow a spiritual quest that was leading her from Theosophy to Hinduism. Soon after her arrival, she was introduced to the writings of SRI AUROBINDO. Impressed, she traveled to Pondicherry and met the MOTHER, who related to Judith that both she and

Aurobindo had awaited her arrival. At the touch of the Mother's hand, Judith felt electric forces go through her being. Judith asked the Mother for a spiritual name and was given a piece of paper on which, in Aurobindo's handwriting, was written Jyotipriya (lover of light). While she would encounter a number of prominent Indian teachers over the next years, including ANANDAMAYI MA, Swami SHIVANANDA of RISHIKESH, Sri KRISHNA PREM, and RAMANA MAHARSHI, she had found her gurus in Aurobindo and the Mother.

Jyotipriya returned to the United States in 1950 and opened the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles in 1953, the first Aurobindo center in America. Eminent teachers from India, including Swami RAMDAS, Mother KRISHNABAI, Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Puri, Dilip Roy, Indra DEVI, Swami MUKTANANDA, Swami SATCHIDANANDA, and

Swami VISHNUDEVANANDA, visited and lectured there. Besides offering regular meetings to share Aurobindo's teaching, the center became a welcoming place for Indian teachers to meet Westerners and to offer initial presentations of their ideas and practices.

She continued to work in Los Angeles until her death on October 3, 1980. The East-West Cultural Center evolved into the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles and continues to the present.

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U



udgatri See [VEDAS](#).

Uma See [PARVATI](#).

Umaswami (Umasvati) See [TATTVARTHA SUTRA](#).

United Kingdom

The National Census of April 2001 reported 559,000 Hindus living in Britain, approximately 1 percent of the population, making Hinduism Britain's third largest religion. In 1977, 70 percent of Hindu residents were Gujarati, 15 percent Punjabi, and others originating from other Indian locations, such as Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, as well as Sri Lanka.

The presence of Hinduism in Britain goes back at least to the early 19th century, when Rammohun ROY (1772–1833), founder of the BRAHMO SAMAJ, visited England toward the end of his life and died in Bristol in 1833. In 1870, Keshab Chunder SEN, another representative of the Brahmo Samaj, visited London and initiated the transmission of Hindu thought and practice to the West. Only

later, in 1911, was a branch of this Hindu reformist organization established in London.

The substantial presence of Hindu communities in Britain can be traced to the late 1950s and 1960s, often the result of enforced alienation, rather than employment. Hindus now have a noticeable presence in numerous major British cities. At the early stages of settlement, Hindu communities rented premises for *PUJA* (worship services). A decade later, during the late 1960s and 1970s unused churches and some private houses were converted into Hindu *TEMPLES*, and a few temples were built dating from the 1990s. There are some 150 *mandirs* (temples) in Britain: the earliest is the Sri Geeta Bhawan in Birmingham (1967), and the largest is the Sri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, completed in 1995.

Hinduism's main traditions are reflected in Britain's religious landscape: Vaishnavite, Shaivite, and SHAKTA, as well as some presence of the NATH tradition. Within the Vaishnavite tradition, the SWAMINARAYAN sect enjoys some prominence. Although followers speak a variety of languages, the use of SANSKRIT in worship is prevalent. All major Hindu festivals are celebrated.

Hinduism has inevitably undergone adaptation in the DIASPORA. The most notable changes

have occurred in worship, as increasing emphasis is placed on congregational activity, scheduled to accommodate Western working hours. Rites of passage have undergone some change. Initially temples were not registered for the solemnization of marriage, thus necessitating a civil ceremony as well as a religious one. Hindu temples, however, are now formally recognized as places of worship, although the ceremony must incorporate elements necessitated by British law. FUNERAL rites have undergone some modification, to make them more compatible with crematorium arrangements. The CASTE system continues to prevail and remains relevant to POLLUTION, marriage, and eating prescriptions.

A number of umbrella organizations have been formed to champion the interests of British Hindus. These include the National Hindu Students Forum UK (founded 1993), the Hindu Council of the UK (founded 1994), and the National Council for Hindu Temples. The last of these was set up in the late 1980s, mainly by the INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS (ISKCON), to enlist the support of the wider Hindu community for ISKCON's activities.

Few indigenous Britons have converted to Hinduism in its traditional forms. However, a number of Hindu-related movements have emerged within the country and have proved attractive to Westerners. One early example was the RAMAKRISHNA



Swaminarayan Temple, completed 1995, in suburban London, England (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

VEDANTA CENTRE, founded by Swami Ghanananda in 1948. The MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI lectured on TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION in London in 1960. In 1969 the Beatles hosted Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta PRABHUPADA in London, and in 1973 George Harrison purchased Bhaktivedanta Manor for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).

Other more recent Hindu groups include ANANDA MARGA YOGA SOCIETY (founded by P. R. Sarkar), BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION (founded by Dada Leharaj), Prem RAWAT's movement (previously known as the Divine Light Mission and now called Elan Vital), Sahaja Yoga (led by Sri Mataji), the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP (brought by YOGANANDA), Siddha Yoga Dham (founded by MUKTANANDA), and Sri CHINMOY centers. SATYA SAI BABA's movement remains controversial; SHIRDI SAI BABA (1838–1918), his allegedly previous incarnation, is followed in his own right by some of Britain's Asian community, who regard Satya Sai Baba as an imposter.

Western interest in Hindu spirituality has given rise to a number of Western GURUS who teach in the Indian tradition. The best known are Baba RAM DASS (born Richard Alpert, 1931), Avatar ADI DA SAMRAJ (born Franklin Jones, 1939), and Andrew COHEN (b. 1955).

See also UNITED STATES.

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United States

The dissemination of Hindu thought and practice in the United States began before any Hindu teacher



Hindu temple in Malibu, California, a popular site for American Hindus (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

entered America. Ironically, the assimilation of immigrants from India has not been a primary vehicle for the introduction or popularization of Hindu teachings. The development of appreciation for Hindu traditions followed a standard American pattern—dependence on European scholarship and interpretation in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and independent experimentation and selectivity in the 20th and 21st. During the 17th century, colonists and missionaries set up relationships with India that led to translation into English of some Hindu sacred texts. The BHAGAVAD GITA, translated in 1785, became important to Emerson, Thoreau, and other leaders of the transcendentalist movement early in the 19th century.

Before the transcendentalists, Americans showed little understanding of or sympathy for India and Hinduism. Cotton Mather, spokesman for militant Christianity, maintained a keen interest in the East, but only as a field in which Christian missionaries might preach, teach, and convert the “heathen.” In 1721, Mather’s *India Christiana* outlined the methods he felt were best suited to drawing Hindus into the flock of Christ.

Later in the 18th century, tangible evidence of contact with India reached American eyes. In 1784, the ship *United States* sailed to Pondicherry and returned to stock Boston, Salem, and

Providence with cloth, teas, spices, and crafts. By 1799, William Bentley, minister of the Second Congregational Church of Salem, Massachusetts, set up the East India Marine Society and became the first notable collector in America of Oriental art and artifacts.

The first attempts to understand Hinduism and the East were those of American thinkers who were inheritors of the spirit of the Enlightenment, a time in which redefinition of religion was central. In Europe, Voltaire hailed Confucius as one of history’s great men, and English deists found Oriental religions of equal merit with Christianity.



Old Vedanta temple in San Francisco, California, dedicated in 1905 (Constance A. Jones)

Attuned to this new thought, Benjamin Franklin maintained a friendship with Sir William Jones, the English Orientalist, who introduced the study of SANSKRIT to Western scholars. In the 1780s, while occupying a judgeship in Bengal, Sir William established the Asiatic Society and translated the *Laws of Manu* and Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*.

Joseph Priestley, scientist, scholar, and founder of English Unitarianism, traveled to America in 1794 and spent the last decade of his life there. His works of philosophy, science, and theology reveal a new understanding and respect for the Hindus, a people of "superior wisdom and civilization." Praising the culture, control, and traditions of the Hindus, Priestley stopped short of extolling their religion, which he dismissed as "absurd notions" and "complicated polytheism." As a reader of the translations of Sir William Jones, Priestley looked back toward European thinking and scholarship. As a resident in America, he exerted direct influence on John Adams, who heard the elderly Priestley lecture in Philadelphia in 1796. Adams, in turn, referred Thomas Jefferson to Priestley's writings.

At the turn of the century, Hannah Adams's *A View of Religion* (1801) encouraged greater acceptance of non-Christian faiths. In her study, Adams devotes considerable attention to Hinduism, describing the voluntary suffering to which the Indian submits in order to fulfill religious obligations and labeling Indian religion "the most tolerant of all." The open-mindedness of *A View of Religion* reflects a new liberality willing to dispute the supremacy of Christianity and to make religious questions and religious toleration a standard, at least among the informed.

Spreading this new liberality of interpretation was Unitarianism, with its emphasis on tolerance and the centrality of monotheism. In India, Hindus were responding to the impact of Christianity. Among the reformist movements in India was the BRAHMO SAMAJ, a movement based upon the assumed monotheism of the UPANISHADS and the abandonment of all image worship. The founder,

Hindu Rammohun ROY, found spiritual affinity with Unitarianism and sought to apply Unitarian standards to Hinduism and to focus the attention of Unitarians on India. By 1820, Roy had published several Hindu texts in English and had developed his ideas on Hindu reform in articles and speeches, which were featured prominently in Unitarian periodicals published in the United States. Roy's writings and talks explaining Asia and Hinduism were the first expressions by a Hindu in Unitarian terms to which Americans had access. In the 1850s the Unitarian Charles Dall and the Brahma Samaj's Keshub Chunder SEN developed a friendship that initiated a relationship between the two organizations that is still bearing fruit.

Later in the 19th century, leaders of the transcendentalist movement read newly translated Hindu scriptures and incorporated their ideas in an American philosophy. Emerson stressed eclectic theology; Thoreau, the immersion in nature; and Bronson Alcott, an interest in universal scriptures. Influenced by Emerson, Walt Whitman wrote poetry that expressed a remarkable similarity to Asian thought. In his writing he admits he had read "the ancient Hindoo poems," and he mentions BRAHMA and Hinduism in his "Song of Myself." While these figures created an intellectual climate receptive to the ideas of Hinduism, transcendentalism did not attempt to represent all of Hindu teachings, but rather selected elements consistent with their worldview.

Another American group, the Free Religious Association, made up largely of Quakers, Unitarians, and transcendentalists, turned to world religions to support their rejection of a faith based solely on the Bible. Their publications and meetings featured the works of the Oriental scholar Max Muller and championed the idea of a world Bible. Through this organization, active from 1865 through the late 1880s, the American consciousness was exposed to comparisons and contrasts of Christianity and Hinduism. In its 17 years of publication, *The Index*, journal of the Free Religious

Association, issued more than 500 separate works explaining and describing the East.

Beginning in 1875, the THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY took to the United States an appreciation of Hinduism and Buddhism, interpreted through the lenses of its Western leaders, HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY, Charles Leadbeater, and ANNIE WOOD BESANT, who traveled to India and took home firsthand impressions. Theosophists directly proclaimed an adherence to Asian thought but included elements of occultism and psychism as well. As a result of this synthesis, the contribution of Theosophy to the developing American consciousness was an amalgam of Hinduism, Buddhism, spiritualism, and rationalism. Helena Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* claimed direct revelation from Eastern adepts, called *Mahatmas*, and celebrated the traditional Hindu concepts of REINCARNATION and KARMA. In spite of its original association with spiritualism, Theosophy exerted a major influence in both India and the United States. By 1884, in addition to its success in the United States, over 100 branches of Theosophy flourished in India. Continuing until the present, various Theosophical publishing houses have been important disseminators in the United States of Hindu texts, commentaries, and histories. Much of what Americans grasp of Hinduism has been a result of the popularity of Theosophical publications.

Uniquely American religions, including New Thought and Christian Science, took up Hindu concepts. The New Thought churches, which include Religious Science, Divine Science, Unity School of Christianity, Mind Cure, and Applied Metaphysics, concentrated on VEDANTA philosophy and the concepts of REINCARNATION and KARMA. Indebted to the research of the Theosophists, exponents of New Thought gained for Hinduism a new kind of acceptance, however narrow, in the United States. No longer were the doctrines of the East damned as pagan nonsense; they were now incorporated into American religion. Christian Science, with its radical monism, its doctrine of eternal mind, its disavowal of the ultimate reality

of the world, and its unorthodox interpretation of Christ, demonstrated a mixture of Eastern and Western views of reality. The sources of the Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy's ideas remain in debate, but the result is clear: the incorporation in an organized American church of at least some of the ideas and values of Hinduism.

While religious movements and philosophical schools offered their interpretations of Hinduism, scholars were examining the East from their own perspective. The American Oriental Society, founded in 1842, provided a forum for scholarly exchange. It established a library and published the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, which ran bibliographic essays reporting on Vedic research occurring in Germany, translations of religious texts that exposed ideas formerly unavailable to American readers, and essays on the philosophy of Hindu scriptures and on the various schools of Hinduism. These scholarly efforts lifted cultural, religious, and linguistic barriers. Leaders in the society were Edward Salisbury; William Dwight Whitney, who became America's greatest Oriental scholar; and Charles Rockwell Lanman, who, among other contributions, edited the *Harvard Oriental Series*.

Attempts to understand and explain surfaced in the general press as well. Although popular magazines did not carry reliable information about Asia, serious reviews served to foster escape from American isolation by looking analytically at Hindu ideas and scholarship. The *North American Review*, as did the *Edinburgh Review*, touched on many aspects of Indian culture and the Hindu religion. Book publishing reflected the new interest in the East. The popularity of Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* (1879) and his free translation of the Bhagavad Gita (1885) drew the author to the United States for a lecture tour.

In 1883, the first Hindu GURU visited America. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, a representative of the BRAHMO SAMAJ, delivered his first American address at the home of Ralph Waldo Emerson's widow in Concord, Massachusetts. He returned

in 1893 to attend, along with many representatives of the religions of Asia, the WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS in Chicago. The congress was the first international gathering of representatives of the major Eastern and Western faiths. Speakers gave formal recognition to non-Christian faiths and made clear that Western thought had always drawn heavily on the East, and that Hinduism was a source of tolerance, introspection, self-discipline, and the opportunity for a full religious life, not mere idol worshipping or polytheism. This 17-day conference, which drew crowds far larger than any forecast, permitted non-Christians to speak about their own faiths and created an appreciation of the offerings of Eastern traditions. The experience affirmed that an interest in comparative religions was not simply the province of a few specialized or elite groups.

Swami VIVEKANANDA, another representative of Hinduism and a young disciple of the late Sri RAMAKRISHNA, was one of the parliament's most impressive speakers. He was hailed by the American press as the most persuasive speaker of the parliament. In several eloquent presentations, Vivekananda rejected formalism and delivered a universal gospel of unity in diversity by quoting from the sacred books of India. He chose to cite, "Whoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him," and "All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me." He spoke of the gods of all faiths, not only the God of a respective religion (Rolland, 1931).

His popularity established, Vivekananda followed the parliament session with a two-year tour of the United States. In 1895, he founded the first Hindu organization in the United States, the VEDANTA SOCIETY, and, upon his return to India, he organized the scattered disciplines of Sri Ramakrishna into the RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION. Two disciples, Swami ABHEDANANDA and Swami Turiyananda, traveled from Calcutta (Kolkata) to head the Vedanta centers in New York and San Francisco, respectively.

Establishment of the Vedanta centers coincided with the first small wave of immigrants from India to America, in the 1890s—a phenomenon that evoked riots and vitriolic reaction against a "Hindu invasion." But reason also existed and prompted a growing interest in Hinduism among non-Indians, the establishment of various societies, and the arrival of Indian teachers, partly to serve the immigrants. Among them, in 1902, was a young monk, Swami RAMA TIRTHA, who lectured for two years throughout the United States on the reasonableness of Hinduism—and the evils of the Indian CASTE system. In 1904, a Bengali Vaishnavite, Baba Premanand BHARATI, began a five-year tour, during which he formed the Krishna Samaj; in 1909, Swami PARAMANANDA, another member of the Ramakrishna Math in India, arrived, eventually to form another group of Vedantins.

From the time of the parliament onward, the United States saw the establishment of Hindu organizations and an expanding interest in the teachings of the religion. In large cities such as New York and Chicago, the press chronicled the exploits of visiting teachers from India. Emulating these emissaries, some Americans adopted the role of Hindu teacher and helped disseminate Hindu ideas through publications and formation of groups. In 1903, William Walker Atkinson, a New Thought teacher, assumed the title Yogi RAMACHARAKA and published widely on various YOGAS and Hindu philosophy. His many books remain in print a century later. Around 1909, PIERRE ARNOLD BERNARD, calling himself "Oom the Omnipotent," founded the Tantrick Order of America and demonstrated flamboyant stagecraft while dressed in Eastern garb. In spite of the demise of his movement after a few decades, his nephew, Theos Bernard (1908–47), wrote several texts on YOGA that remain reliable resources.

After two decades of growing interest in Hinduism from 1895 to 1915, the growth of Hindu groups waned during and after World War I. A string of American occultists created in the public mind the image of SWAMIS as fortune tellers and

charlatans. After Sara Bull left the greater part of her half-million-dollar estate to the Vedanta Society, her daughter called for testimony of family servants, who reported frequent visits of swamis, a MEDITATION room, and séances. On the basis of their testimony, the court overturned Bull's will and awarded the money to her daughter. A series of articles in the press spewed forth, complaining that Americans, particularly women, were duped by Indian "holy men" and were forsaking the true Christian faith. A recurring theme was that Hinduism appealed to bored older women who had sizable fortunes to bequeath to their teachers. In 1914, Elizabeth Reed's *Hinduism in Europe and America* attacked alleged exploiters of naïve Westerners and blamed the tenets of Hinduism for their crimes.

Anti-Asian sentiment had direct political effect as well. Following immigration exclusion acts in 1882 and 1914 directed primarily against Chinese and Japanese immigrants, the Asian Exclusion Act of 1917 specifically denied immigration to Asians from India. By denying entry into the United States from most Asian countries, including India, the act effectively cut off immigration for several generations and halted what would have been, most probably, a significant growth of Hinduism. Several years later, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that Indians were not eligible for citizenship and that the citizenship granted to previous Indian immigrants would be revoked. By 1921, a quota system allowed immigration from countries in proportion to each nationality's percentage in the United States. The quota for India was approximately 100 annually. This federal act of exclusion significantly curtailed the growth of Hindu movements. Of the organizations formed before 1917, only the Vedanta Society remained.

In 1927, Katherine Mayo's best-selling *MOTHER INDIA* damned all things Indian and heaped opprobrium on the worship of KALI. Mayo characterized Indians as inert, helpless, and weak: in all, slaves to superstition and oppressors of women and minorities. Perhaps no other writing damaged

Indo-American understanding so severely and so prejudiced an entire generation of Americans. From the early 1920s until 1960, anti-Indian feeling was strong, although Hinduism itself was not perceived as a political threat. This period includes two world wars, American isolationism after World War I, intense hatred of things Eastern because of Pearl Harbor, and the Korean conflict. That attacks on India and Indian traditions occurred is hardly surprising. What may be surprising are the viability and growth of interest in Hinduism throughout this period.

The Hindu community grew very slowly after the passage of the exclusion act. Teachers who immigrated prior to the exclusion act continued to lead and write. A Bengali playwright, Besudeb Bhattacharya, took the name Pundit Acharya and founded the Temple of Yoga, the Yoga Research Institute, and Prana Press in New York. Paramahansa YOGANANDA, charismatic teacher and author of the still-popular *Autobiography of a Yogi*, arrived in the United States in 1920 and organized the Yogoda-Satsang in 1926. Now known as SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP, Yogananda's organization has been extremely influential in disseminating Hindu thought through home correspondence courses and initiation into KRIYA YOGA disciplines.

Other teachers from India created organizations, taught Hindu ideas and practices, and fostered interfaith cooperation, including A. K. Mozumdar (The Messianic World Message), Swami Omkar (Shanti Ashrama), Sri DEVA RAM SUKUL (Dharma Mandal), Kedarnath Das Gupta (Fellowship of Faiths), Sant Ram Mandal (Universal Brotherhood Temple and School of Eastern Philosophy), Rishi Krishnananda (Para-Vidya Center), and Swami A. P. Mukerji (Transcendent Science Society).

Theosophy continued to contribute to the dissemination of Hindu ideas through its growing number of lodges and its reliable editions of Hindu and Buddhist texts. Theosophy also gained increasing popularity through its promotion of Jiddu KRISHNAMURTI as the vehicle for the coming world teacher, prophesied by spiritual adepts in

the East. Krishnamurti, a poor BRAHMIN boy from South India, had been selected by the Theosophists to be groomed for acceptance of a higher consciousness that the world would need in the current era. He lectured throughout the 1920s as the anointed messiah but became disillusioned with the Theosophical enterprise and, in 1929, renounced the organization founded in his name. Upon leaving the Theosophical fold, he began his own career as an independent teacher, founding educational institutions in England, the United States, and India and lecturing until his death in 1986. Although Krishnamurti rejected any claim to represent Hinduism (or any organized religion), he nevertheless taught a form of self-analysis and self-observation that was congruent with Hindu and Buddhist disciplines. And, in his later years, after having shunned the study of sacred texts throughout his life, he became enamored of the VEDAS and the UPANISHADS. Americans who became familiar with Krishnamurti's teaching were drawn closer to Hindu thought and practice, although they did not identify themselves as "Hindu."

Later, in 1951, a Bengali philosopher, Haridas CHAUDHURI, founded the Cultural Integration Fellowship in San Francisco, which represented the first American influence of the famous philosopher and mystic Sri AUROBINDO. Chaudhuri was a charismatic proponent of Aurobindo's approach to integralism in philosophy and yoga, adding his own insights to his teacher's message through collaboration with other scholars of the East. In the 1960s Chaudhuri founded the California Institute of Asian Studies, an educational organization that exists today under the name California Institute of Integral Studies.

In the fall of 1965, the Asian Exclusion Act was repealed and immigration quotas for Asia became comparable to the quotas for Europe. The number of Indian immigrants rose dramatically. Between 1871 and 1965, only 16,013 Indians had been admitted to the United States. Between 1965 and 1975, over 96,000 were admitted, and the 1980 Census reported 387,223 Indians in the

United States (Melton, 1985). By 1965, most large American cities had at least one Hindu center where lectures could be heard, texts purchased or read, and courses taught in Hindu philosophy. Although relatively small, these groups were significant in their stability and in their attempts to make Hindu literature available. Popular figures such as Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) made traditional Hindu concepts, such as reincarnation and karma, almost standard fare for spiritual seekers not bound to traditional denominations. But popularization has been accompanied by charges of violence, fraud, drug misuse, and emotional abuse leveled against some Indian and American promoters and leaders of Hindu and related New Age groups. Hinduism, in its various guises in the United States, has provided inspiration to spiritual seekers, an entry into countercultural pursuits, and groups who have experienced backlash from conservative quarters.

Most immigrants from India have not been teachers of Hinduism, but rather Hindu lay people seeking traditional venues and methods of practicing their religion. Unable to fund conventional structures, such as temples and shrines appropriate to their respective sects, they have joined other Hindus to create temples that serve several modes of Hindu worship—SHAIVITE, Vaishnavite, and SHAKTA—within one structure. Groups of Hindus have cooperated to recruit traditionally trained priests to the United States to preside over ritual activities at these temples.

Since the 1960s, elements of Hinduism have entered popular culture as components of various forms of spirituality, health practices, cosmetics, bumper stickers, and medical and psychological therapies. Somewhat independent of its source in Hinduism is the popular practice of HATHA YOGA, almost pervasive throughout the country in a variety of forms. Romain Rolland, French student of Vedanta, spoke in 1931 of the "strange moral and religious mentality of the modern United States" that was both cause and effect of the appropriation of Hindu thought in the 19th

century. Simultaneous with stringent efforts to preserve traditional Hindu teachings intact and in toto is the more dominant American practice of eclecticism, which combines elements of any (or all) religions into idiosyncratic fusions designed to serve the individual.

See also [DIASPORA](#); [UNITED KINGDOM](#).

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untouchability

The concept of untouchability has long played a role in the Hindu CASTE system of socioeconomic organization. Members of certain low-status castes were considered polluting and not allowed to touch any person of the upper castes, particularly BRAHMINS and members of the warrior and merchant castes. This practice was exaggerated even further in parts of South India, where certain people were considered unseeable and had to stay out of sight of the upper castes.

The history of untouchability no doubt tracks the rise of ARYAN cultural domination of India. There is evidence to suggest that certain tribal groups and peoples last integrated into the Aryan fold became classified as “out-castes” or the “fifth caste” (where the Aryans had a fourfold class system from great antiquity). The custom is supported by a very complex social conception of “POLLUTION” related to occupation. Purity is seen to reside in certain types of activity such as teaching and recitation of the VEDAS, and in habits such as VEGETARIANISM, while such essential social tasks as sweeping, the collecting of refuse, the removal of carrion animals, and the production of leather are considered severely polluting.

Caste, more properly *jati*, or birth, is in fact directly related in most cases to occupation, so untouchability is generally conferred by birth. (However, certain polluting situations within the family context, such as having someone recently die in the household, make any person, whatever the caste, polluting or “untouchable” for a limited time.)

It should be noted that almost all of the major freedom fighters in India who sought indepen-

dence from Britain denounced the notion of caste and called for the abolition of untouchability. MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI was most notable in this regard. He coined the term *harijan* (those born of God) to relieve the stigma from untouchables. The constitution of India was written by an untouchable (who also became a Buddhist), Dr. Babasaheb R. Ambedkar (1891–1956). In the setting up of India’s central and state governments, untouchables were given designated quotas of positions, including parliamentary seats, to guarantee their advancement.

Today, India’s untouchables have taken an increasingly militant political stance. They prefer to call themselves Dalit (the oppressed). Many of them have converted to Buddhism, following Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion in late life. Buddhism was always opposed to caste notions and preached spiritual equality.

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upanayana See SACRED THREAD.

Upanishads

There are thousands of texts referred to in Indian tradition as Upanishads. They all take this name to gain the authority of the original Upanishads, about 14 in number, which are considered part of the BRAHMANA or commentaries that are associated with the four VEDAS. (Each of the four is divided into a MANTRA portion, which consists of

the chants themselves, and a BRAHMANA, or commentary. Both portions are considered *SHRUTI*, or revelation.)

Within the Brahmana portion of the Vedas are two classes of passages that later took the names ARANYAKA and Upanishad. The Aranyaka portions often closely resemble the Brahmana but often contain esoteric interpretations of the Vedic rituals. The further sections, sometimes within these Aranyaka sections, were termed Upanishads. While included in the Vedic literature, the Upanishads were composed somewhat later, roughly in the seventh to third centuries B.C.E., although they exist in the same ancient literary SANSKRIT.

Upanishad in its literal definition means “to sit down near.” They represented secret teachings reserved for those who sat near their GURU in the forest. They contain a wide range of material. Some of it is indistinguishable from the rest of the Brahmana or Aranyaka, but other sections discuss the creation and nature of the universe. Most often, the discussions concern the *BRAHMAN*, or ultimate reality; the *ATMAN*, the ultimate self or soul; or their relationships with the individual self or soul.

In many places these Upanishads make clear that the individual self, seen from the highest consciousness, is nothing but the ultimate reality in all its glory. The exact relationship between the ultimate reality and the souls became the subject of centuries of discussion and mystic insights into the nature of things. The most commonly listed Upanishads are ISHA, KENA, KATHA, Prashna, Mundaka, MANDUKYA, TAITTARIYA, AITAREYA, CHANDOGYA, BRIHADARANYAKA, Pingala, and Jabala.

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Urvashi and Pururavas See [APSARAS](#).

Ushas

Ushas is the Vedic goddess of the dawn. The night goddess, Ratri, is often called her sister. Some of the most beautiful hymns of the *VEDAS* are addressed to Ushas. Sometimes she is seen as the mother of the Sun god and sometimes his wife. She travels in a shining chariot drawn by red horses or cows.

She is seen as very beautiful, dressed in ornaments and fine raiments. She gives life and health to all beings. She is called the “life of all life” and the “breath of all breaths.” She is a great power who revivifies Earth each day and makes all life that we know possible.

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V



Vach (Vak)

Vach or Vak is Hindu goddess of speech, and the most prominent and important goddess in the VEDAS. In later times she becomes identified with SARASVATI, the goddess of learning, and loses her separate character, except in linguistic philosophy.

In Vedic tradition the words of SANSKRIT have a divine character. Words are not arbitrary or mere names, but are the essential truth of the object they represent. The sounds of the word *tree*, for instance, form the essence of a tree. All of reality can be seen as mere congealed speech.

Vedantic theory sees four levels of speech: (1) the transcendent level, where speech is the divine silence out of which emerges the manifest universe; (2) speech as it becomes incipient thought looking toward manifestation; (3) speech expressed as thought, but before external expression; and (4) speech as uttered words.

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vaikuntha See [HEAVEN](#).

vairagya

Vairagya, freedom from any attachment, or renunciation, has been a central theme in Hinduism throughout the centuries. It was understood that attachment to worldly desires and ends can result only in continued rebirth, a continued circuit on the wheel of SAMSARA or worldly life.

The period from the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C.E., when JAINISM and Buddhism first emerged along with the UPANISHAD era within the VEDIC tradition, saw a great expansion in mendicancy and ascetic orders and a flowering of traditions of renunciation. The Vedas themselves, in their ancient MANTRA sections, upheld a very different, world-affirming point of view.

Ever since in India, it has been those who left the ordinary world behind and abandoned worldly concerns who have been credited with the greatest spiritual accomplishments. *Vairagya* in one form can mean simple avoidance of worldly externals, but in its most difficult form it might mean bodily mortification. In either case it is a central feature of Hindu religious life.

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Vaisheshika See [NYAYA-VAISHESHIKA](#).

Vaishnavism

Vaishnavism is the name for the group of traditions that adhere to the worship of VISHNU. An adherent of Vaishnavism is a Vaishnavite, “One who belongs to Vishnu.”

Vishnu can be worshipped alone as Mahavishnu or “Supreme Vishnu,” but Vaishnavites more commonly worship one of the two most prominent AVATARS or manifestations of the godhead, RAMA or KRISHNA, along with their respective consorts, SITA or RADHA. To be sure, every Vaishnavite reveres all 10 of Vishnu’s avatars.

As all Hindu traditions do, Vaishnavism traces itself back to the VEDAS and honors them as the ultimate authority. Vishnu, “The All-Pervading,” is only a minor divinity in the Vedas, but the roots of a devotional cult that can be called Vaishnavite had been established by the later Vedic period in the sixth or fifth century B.C.E. The MAHABHARATA and RAMAYANA epics are both primarily Vaishnavite documents, highlighting the stories of Krishna and Rama, respectively.

The BHAGAVAD GITA within the Mahabharata is a sophisticated philosophical text that outlines the Vaishnavite path of devotion in the context of Vedic and UPANISHADIC visions of the divinity. The later temple-oriented Vaishnavism is based largely on the ancient PANCHARATRA tradition.

The followers of Vaishnavism are many fewer than those of Shaivism, numbering perhaps 200 million. If there is a distinctive character to Vaishnavism, aside from its doctrine of the avatar, it is in its commitment to the life of a householder. There are far fewer renunciants in the Vaishnavite

sect than among the Shaivites. (Vishnu, after all, is the “preserver” of the world, whereas Shiva himself is a naked renunciant who is the world destroyer.)

Six sects of the Vaishnavites are prominent: the Shrivaishnavas founded in SHRIRANGAM in Tamil Nadu, best known for their great 12th-century teacher RAMANUJA; the Gaudiya Vaishnavites of Bengal, founded by the great 15th-century devotional mystic CHAITANYA; the Vallabhas or Rudrasampradaya founded at BRINDAVAN in the north by the great teacher VALLABHA around the 15th century; the MADHYA sect founded in the state of Karnataka at Udipi in the 13th century; the NIMBARKA, or Nimbarki sect, based in Govardhana and founded by the 15th-century Vedantin philosopher Nimbarka; and the Sri sect founded by Ramananda, who was strongly influenced by the Ramanuja lineage, at AYODHYA.

Textually, Vaishnavites revere, in addition to the Vedas and Upanishads, the epics, the BHAGAVAD GITA, the Vishnu Purana, the BHAGAVATA PURANA, and the hymns of the ALVARS or other poet-saints of Vaishnavism. They focus, as does Shaivism, on temple worship, with, of course, their own distinctive ritual elements. PRASADA in the form of “blessed food” is typically distributed at Vaishnavite temples and shrines and festivals after being offered to the divinity. This giving of blessed food is less common in Shaivite contexts.

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Vaishnavite (Vaishnava) See [VAISHNAVISM](#).

Vaishya

Vaishya is the term used in the ancient fourfold class (*VARNA*) system of India for the common people, including merchants and agriculturists. The earlier VEDIC term was *Vish*, from which the term *Vaishya* derived. They were “twice-born” as were the KSHATRIYAS (warriors) and BRAHMINS (priests), being invested with the sacred thread at eight to 12 years of age to symbolize a new birth into society. They were allowed to learn the VEDAS, though they probably studied them much less than the upper two classes. Vaishya merchants were known for their early support of JAINISM and Buddhism (c. 800 to 500 B.C.E.).

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Vallabha (1473–1531) Vedanta philosopher

Vallabha was one of the great exponents of devotional VEDANTA. He was born in 1473 to a Telegu BRAHMIN, Lakshmana Bhatta, and his wife, Yellamma Garu, a member of an influential South Indian family. Her father had been a priest at the VIJAYANAGARA court.

Vallabha’s father is said to have fled BENARES (Varanasi) while his wife was pregnant with Vallabha, because of a rumored Muslim invasion. While he hid in the forest near modern Raipur in Chattisgarh state, Vallabha emerged from his mother stillborn—but miraculously came to life. When the Muslim invasion did not take place, Vallabha’s father returned.

As were many of the Vedantic *ACHARYAS*, or scholar-teachers, Vallabha was a precocious child

who learned all the VEDAS and all the philosophical systems in four years of study. After his father died when he was just 11, Vallabha spent the next 20 years wandering India’s sacred sites, remaining unmarried. At a mere 12 years old, he is said to have entered into a debate at the Vijayanagara court. He emerged victorious against the views of SHANKARA’S Vedanta (absolute non-dualist) on the one hand and the views of MADHVA’S supporters (dualist) on the other.

Vallabha stayed at the Vijayanagara court for some three years, learning the BHAGAVATA PURANA and becoming familiar with the Madhva tradition (which he did not accept). By now he had followers of his own, as his debating victory had greatly enhanced his status.

At the age of 15 he set out on a long pilgrimage to a great many of India’s sacred sites. One story relates that at Kaundiya Ashrama (see [ASHRAM](#)), Vallabha had a vision of the *rishi* (seer) Kaundinya, who preached to him the path of devotion, or BHAKTI; even the Vedas and the gods do not know VISHNU, Kaundinya said; only the one who concentrates his consciousness upon Vishnu and serves him every moment can merit that knowledge.

It is said that Vallabha spent time at the important centers of RAMANUJA’S followers and Madhva’s followers, learning all the nuances of the different philosophies. Heading north, Vallabha arrived in BRINDAVAN, the center of KRISHNA worship in India. Here he made Krishna his Lord and received the vision to establish a new sect, the Pushti Marga.

The last leg of this long pilgrimage took him to the HIMALAYAS. After returning to stay with his mother for one year, he headed to Maharashtra and Pandaripura, where he encountered the special form of Krishna, Vitthala. Here he received the divine command to marry, as he had up till now been a celibate, though not a *SANNYASI* (renunciant). When he arrived in Benares in about 1500, he encountered a man who offered him his daughter in marriage.

Vallabha's marriage produced two sons, one of whom was central in building his sect. While in the town of Gokula, near Mathura, Vallabha took the vow to establish his new sect. This new tradition was all his own, as he had never accepted anyone as his GURU. The initiatory MANTRA of his sect was *Sri Krishna Sharanam Mama*, "Shri Krishna is my refuge."

An auspicious miracle soon occurred near Gokula. An image of Krishna in his pose lifting the mountain Govardhana appeared out of a cave. It was said that Krishna would only accept food from the hand of Vallabha. On this spot Vallabha built a small temple, later supplanted by a large complex. The temple's image later had to be moved to Udaipur in Rajasthan, because of the Muslim invaders. There it is known as SRI SRI NATHJI.

Vallabha now embarked on a journey around the country that might be described as evangelical. He would debate the proponents of other systems, sharpen his own principles, and gain followers. His message resonated particularly in the area of Gujarat, thanks to the support of a famous devotional singer there.

There are many stories of Vallabha's meeting with his contemporary SRI CHAITANYA. Both made the BHAGAVATA PURANA the primary authority and both took Krishna as the fullest expression of divinity on Earth. The contrast was between Vallabha the intellectual, who prescribed worship of the child Krishna or the cowherd Krishna, and Chaitanya the ecstatic mystic, who preached "Love Devotion" based on the relationship between Krishna and his lover RADHA.

In all Vallabha wrote 17 books in SANSKRIT and five in medieval Hindi (Braj). All but one of his Sanskrit "books" were actually brief manuscripts. His longest book was in Sanskrit, *Essays on the Light of Knowledge*, a full exposition of his theology. Others of his books in Sanskrit are Vyasa Sutra Bhashya, Jaimini Sutra Bhasya, Bhagavata Tika Subodhini, Pushti Pravala Maryada, and Sidhanta Rahasya.

In the last year of his life Vallabha took vows of renunciation from the world. He wandered as a mendicant for only one year. The story has it that he plunged into the GANGES at HANUMAN Ghat in Benares and disappeared in 1531.

The philosophical system of Sri Vallabhacharya (to call him by his honorific) was technically called Shuddhadvaita (pure non-dualism). He did not believe that the world was illusory—all the universe was Krishna alone. The worldly, then, is a lower aspect of the divine, but still an expression of the being of the divinity. In Vallabha's system Krishna, as BRAHMAN, or the ultimate reality, was called *Purushottama*, the highest personage.

In practical terms, the Vedanta of Vallabhacharya was similar to that of both RAMANUJA and NIMBARKA. God is permanently transcendent; souls can reach union with God but remain distinct even in liberation.

Distinctive in Vallabha's system is the notion of inherent distinctions among souls. There are privileged souls who are destined for union with the divine, and other souls who are destined for eternal reincarnation without attainment of liberation (this Vallabha has in common with Madhva).

His Pushti Marga, or path of grace, is unique. *Pushti* literally means "nourishment," and later in the sect's history, this word began to be taken more literally, and the eating of vast amounts of PRASADA or sacred food became a sign of the sect. However, Vallabha seemed to intend "spiritual nourishment" or "grace." This effectively means that human efforts to reach the divine are secondary; primary are the will and grace of the divine.

Thus, in terms of the YOGAS of the BHAGAVAD GITA, the yoga of action (KARMA YOGA), the yoga of knowledge (JNANA YOGA), and even meditative yoga (raja yoga) are of almost no importance to Vallabha. Devotional yoga (BHAKTI YOGA) alone is enjoined to gain the grace (PUSHTI) of the divine.

This devotion is best developed through total service to the divinity and his servants.

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Valmiki *author of the Ramayana*

Valmiki is the mythological author of India's great epic the RAMAYANA. His authorship, however, consisted simply in putting into a lasting composition a story that was related to him by the ancient RISHI (seer) NARADA.

Valmiki is said once to have seen a hunter shoot a male bird as it was making love to its mate. The female bird, seeing her mate bleeding and in distress, cried out piteously. In grief and sorrow, Valmiki uttered a poetic verse of two lines that upon reflection made a special meter. Because he received the line in sorrow (*shoka*), Valmiki termed the meter *shloka*. It is in this meter, suitable to be accompanied by the Indian lute (*vina*), that most of the Ramayana was composed.

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Vamana Avatar

There are many versions of the stories about VISHNU'S Vamana AVATAR (incarnation), as there are about his other manifestations.

In the best-known Vamana story, the avatar appeared in order to fight the *asura* (demon or antiod) Bali, who had succeeded by his religious austerities in gaining supreme power over the three worlds. Because of his own powers he was depriving the gods of the offerings that ordinarily went to them. They went to Vishnu to ask for assistance. He took on the form of a dwarf (*vamana* means "dwarf" in SANSKRIT) and approached the arrogant demon, BALI. The foolish demon king offered the dwarf the boon of having whatever territory he could cover in three paces. Thereupon the dwarf, who was Vishnu himself, took one step to possess the Earth, another to possess the sky, and another to possess heaven itself. (In some versions Vamana takes two paces to step over the whole universe and the last step onto Bali's head.) Thus did Vamana return the worlds to the gods.

Further reading: Nanditha Krishna, *The Book of Vishnu* (New Delhi: Viking, 2001); A. K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Pandrimalai Swamigal, *The Ten Incarnations: Dasvatara* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982).

vanaprastha

In the orthodox Brahminical stages of life for men, *vanaprastha*, going into the forest, is the third stage or ASHRAMA. After he has completed his studentship and fulfilled his duty in life (when he has seen his children's children), the man enters the forest with or without his wife to devote himself to celibacy, austerity, study of the VEDAS, Vedic sacrifices, and spiritual discipline. This stage is

also called the stage of *SADHU*. The man must wear animal skins, bark, or rags; leave his hair and nails uncut; and eat pure food. He may beg food, if necessary. The final stage is *SANNYASI* or mendicancy, when he emerges from the forest to wander alone, seeking alms. The *vanaprastha* and the *sannyasi* stage were clearly the most ideal course of conduct and were probably never followed completely by all *BRAHMINS* or other upper-CASTE men, for whom they were primarily intended.

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varada mudra

The *varada* (giving boons) *mudra* (see [MUDRAS](#)) is an important iconic gesture, with the fingers pointing downward and the palm facing straight outward from the body. The open palm indicates that the divinity or personage will bestow blessings upon the person who looks upon him or her with respect or devotion. Many iconic divinities, particularly those who have more than two hands, give this gesture with a left hand. This ancient *mudra* is found in the iconography of the Buddhists, Jains (see [JAINISM](#)), and Hindus. The *BUDDHAS* and the Jain *TIRTHANKARAS* are frequently seen using this hand gesture. This, as may any other *mudra*, may be used in any Indian dance when divinities are represented.

Further reading: Eva Rudy Jansen, *The Hindu Book of Imagery: The Gods and Their Symbols* (Havelte, Holland: Binkey Kok, 1995); Margaret Stutley, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

Varaha Avatar

At the commencement of a new eon, when the Earth is covered by water in every direction, Vishnu takes the form of a huge boar (*varaha*).

The boar dives down to the bottom of the ocean and takes the Earth to the surface again so that life can reemerge.

Further reading: Nanditha Krishna, *The Book of Vishnu* (New Delhi: Viking, 2001); A. K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Pandrimalai Swamigal, *The Ten Incarnations: Dasavatara* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982).

Varanasi See [BENARES](#).

varna

Varna (color) is the Vedic word for social class, in the class scheme found in Rig Veda X. 90. There the divine being is said to have offered himself in sacrifice to create reality. It is said that his mouth became the *BRAHMIN*, or priestly class; his arms became the *Rajanya* (*KSHATRIYA*), or warrior class; his thighs became the *Vish* (*VAISHYA*), or merchants, farmers; and his feet became the *SHUDRAS*, or the servant class.

The “mouth” of society is symbolically important in India because of the power of divine speech through the *SANSKRIT* language. The arms are obviously symbolic of the strong arms of the warrior. The thighs symbolize the ability to procreate and create prosperity for society. Feet have long been associated with impurity in Indian tradition, but it is a fact that no body can move without its feet.

There has been some debate about whether the use of the word *color* to denote class reflects an ancient racist system. At the present day Brahmins in any part of India tend to have slightly lighter skin than other classes, while the poorest elements of society often have much darker skin. When colors are traditionally assigned to the classes, white is for the Brahmin, red for the warrior, yellow for the merchants and farmers, and black for the servants.

This verse of the Vedas, which may in fact have been simply an ideal scheme for an inte-

grated society, which could not function without any of its constituents, became the religious justification for the later concept of caste. *Caste* itself is a Portuguese word adopted into English; the more proper word for this type of social class is *jati*, or “birth.” Nothing in this Vedic verse implies that *varna* is fixed at birth or that people can never alter their *varna*. It is well known, for instance, that the *RISHI* (seer) Vishvamitra, though born a warrior, became a Brahmin.

Further reading: Bharat Jhunjhunwala, *Varna Vyavastha: Governance through Caste System* (Jaipur: Rawat, 1999); Laurie L. Patton, ed., *Authority, Anxiety and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Brian K. Smith, *The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Varuna

Varuna is a sky god of the VEDAS who has many, sometimes contradictory traits. He is the Indian counterpart of the Greek Ouranos. Varuna is paired with several deities in rituals and hymns, most commonly with MITRA. By himself, Varuna is seen as a guardian over the cosmic order. He is called the sovereign ruler of the universe, but this is said of other Vedic gods. Later he becomes the Indian god of the ocean.

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Vasanta Panchami

Vasanta Panchami festival, literally “The ‘Fifth Day of the Moon’ in the Springtime,” is celebrated

on the fifth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Magha (January–February), the beginning of spring in India. It is dedicated to the worship of SARASVATI, the goddess of learning and fine arts. The worship is performed to a fashioned clay image, which is then put into a body of water such as a river or a tank. This festival is particularly popular in Bengal.

Some call this festival Sri Panchami and equate Sarasvati (who is usually the wife of Brahma) with LAKSHMI or Sri, the wife of VISHNU. Part of the day’s observance is a preparation for the HOLI festival, which falls 40 days later. The devotee places a flammable image of the demoness Holika (after whom Holi is supposedly named) on a log, with an inflammable image of PRAHLADA (the great devotee of VISHNU) on her lap. During the 40 days people throw twigs and other flammable objects on the log, which is set on fire before the Holi festival commences.

Further reading: Swami Harshananda, *Hindu Festivals and Sacred Days* (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 1994); H. V. Shekar, *Festivals of India: Significance of the Celebrations* (Louisville, Ky.: Insight Books, 2000).

Vasudeva

In Hindu mythology Vasudeva is the father of KRISHNA. He was particularly popular in the Jain tradition (see JAINISM), whose PURANAS abound with stories about his life. Krishna himself is known by the epithet *Vasudeva* (with a long *a* as the second letter, indicating that he is the son of Vasudeva).

Vasudeva was the chief minister of the evil king Kamsa of Mathura. Kamsa had learned that Vasudeva’s wife, DEVAKI, was destined to bear a son who would eventually kill him. He kept the couple under constant guard and had their first six children killed. The seventh child, BALARAMA, was miraculously transferred to the womb of Vasudeva’s other wife, Rohini. When the eighth child, KRISHNA, was born, a profound slumber fell

upon the guards, and Vasudeva was able to sneak the child across the YAMUNA River and leave it with the cowherd Nanda and his wife, YASHODA, who thus becomes Krishna's (foster) mother.

The Jain *puranas* credit Vasudeva with 26 wives. The most complete story of the life of Vasudeva is found in the Jain text *Vasudevahindi* (c. third century C.E.), a work in the Prakrit language. The text was an adaptation of the earlier *BRIHATKATHA* story cycle, an ancient Indian story.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Jagdishchandra Jain, *The Vasudevahindi: An Authentic Jain Version of the Brhatkatha*. L. D. Series 59 (Ahmedabad: L. D. Institute of Indology, 1977).

Vatsyayana (c. 400–500 C.E.) See *KAMA SUTRA*.

Vayu

Vayu is the god of the wind in Indian mythology. He makes his first appearance in the VEDAS. He is associated with INDRA, king of the Vedic gods. He is seen as moving along in a chariot pulled by many horses. Most importantly he is regarded as the father of the monkey god HANUMAN. BHIMA, one of the five PANDAVA brothers in the MAHABHARATA, is said to be the son of Vayu. The term *vayu* is also used for one of the five elements in Hindu physics; in that context it is best translated as “air.”

Further reading: Cornelia Dimitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

Veda(s)

Veda is derived from the word, *vid*, “to know.” A *Veda*, then, would literally be a compendium of

knowledge. In Indian tradition the four Vedas (sometimes collectively referred to as “the *Veda*”) are the ancient scriptural texts that are considered the foundation for all of Hinduism. The four are the RIG, SAMA, YAJUR, and ATHARVA VEDAS.

The Rig Veda (c. 1500 B.C.E.), the most ancient extant Indian text, is the most important of the four. It consists of over 1,000 hymns, the great majority of them from five to 20 verses long. Very few exceed 50 verses. The hymns praise a pantheon of divinities. A few of them are cosmogonic—they tell of the creation of the universe; these were extremely important in the later development of Hinduism.

By far the greatest number of hymns in the Rig Veda are devoted to INDRA, king of the gods, a deity connected with storms and rain who holds a thunderbolt, and AGNI, the god of fire. The rest of the hymns are devoted to an array of gods, most prominently MITRA, VARUNA, SAVITRI, SOMA, and the ASHVINS. The most important gods in the later Hindu pantheon, VISHNU and SHIVA (in his Vedic guise as RUDRA), were far less frequently mentioned in the Rig Veda. A number of goddesses are mentioned, most frequently USHAS, GODDESS of the dawn. ADITI is said to be the mother of the gods.

Scholars have categorized the religion of the Rig Veda as henotheistic: that is, it was polytheistic, but it recognized each divinity in turn as supreme in certain ways. Later Hinduism maintained and enriched this henotheistic concept; in time Hindus have even been able to accept Christ and Allah as supreme “in turn.”

A very powerful ritual tradition was central to the Rig Veda, with fire always a central feature. At public and private rituals (YAJNAS) worshippers spoke to and beseeched the divinities. Animal sacrifices were a regular feature of the larger public rites in the Vedic tradition.

Two of the other Vedas, the Yajur and Sama, were based on the Rig Veda. That is, it supplied most of their text, but the words were reorganized for the purposes of the rituals. Yajur Veda, the Veda of sacrificial formulas, has two branches, the

Black and the White Yajur Vedas; it contains the chants that accompanied most of the important ancient rites. The Sama Veda, the Veda of sung chants, is largely focused on the praise of the god Soma, the personification of a sacred drink imbibed during most rituals that probably had psychedelic properties. Priests of the three Vedas needed to be present for any larger, public ritual.

The Atharva Veda became part of the greater tradition somewhat later. It consists primarily of spells and charms used to ward off diseases or influence events. This text is considered the source document for Indian medicine (AYURVEDA). It also contains a number of cosmogonic hymns that show the development of the notion of divine unity in the tradition. A priest of the Atharva Veda was later included in all public rituals. From that time tradition spoke of four Vedas rather than three.

In the Vedic tradition, the Vedas are not considered to be human compositions. They were all “received” by *RISHIS* or seers whose names are frequently noted at the end of a hymn. Whatever their origin, none of the texts was written until the 15th century C.E. They were thus passed down from mouth to ear for at least 3,000 years. It is an oral tradition par excellence. The power of the word in the Vedic tradition is considered an oral and aural power, not a written one. The chanting itself has the power to provide material benefit and spiritual apotheosis. Great emphasis, therefore, was laid on correct pronunciation and on memorization. Any priest of the tradition was expected to have an entire Veda memorized, including all its components, as detailed in the following.

Each of the four Vedas is properly divided into two parts, the *MANTRA*, or verse portion, and the *BRAHMANA*, or explicatory portion. Both parts are considered revelation or *SHRUTI*. The Brahmanas comment on both the mantra text and the rituals associated with it, in very detailed, varied, and esoteric fashion. They repeatedly equate the rituals and those performing them with cosmic,

terrestrial, and divine realities. Early Western scholars tended to discount these texts as priestly mumbo-jumbo, but later scholarship has recognized the central importance of the Brahmanas to the development of Indian thought and philosophy. It is not known when the various subdivisions of the Vedas were identified and named.

The name *Brahmana* derives from a central word in the tradition, *BRAHMAN*. *Brahman* is generically the name for “prayer,” specifically the power or magic of the Vedic mantras. (It also was used to designate the “one who prays,” hence the term *BRAHMIN* for priest). *Brahman* is from the root *brih* (to expand or grow) and refers to the expansion of the power of the prayer itself as the ritual proceeds. The *brahman* is said to be “stirred up” by the prayer. In later philosophy, *brahman* was the transcendent, all-encompassing reality.

The culmination of Brahmana philosophy is often said to be found in the *SHATAPATHA BRAHMANA* of the White Yajur Veda, which explicates the *AGNICAYANA*, the largest public ritual of the tradition. Shatapatha Brahmana makes clear that this public ritual is, in fact, a reenactment of the primordial ritual described in Rig Veda, X. 90, the most important cosmogonic hymn of the Vedas. That hymn describes the ritual immolation of a cosmic “man,” who is parceled out to encompass all of the visible universe and everything beyond that is not visible. That is, the cosmic “man” is ritually sacrificed to create the universe. Through the annual *agnichayana*, the universe is essentially re-created every year. The Brahmana understands that, at its most perfect, the Vedic ritual ground is identical to all the universe, visible and invisible.

The Brahmanas contained two important subdivisions that were important in the development of later tradition. The first is called the *ARANYAKA*; this portion of the text apparently pertained to activity in the forest (*aranya*).

The Aranyakas contain evidence of an esoteric version of Vedic *yajna*, or ritual practice, that was done by adepts *internally*. They would essentially perform the ritual mentally, as though

it were being done in their own body and being. This practice was not unprecedented, since the priests of the Atharva Veda, though present at all public rituals, perform their role mentally and do not chant. However, the esoteric Aranyaka rituals were performed only internally. From this we can see the development of the notion that the adept himself was *yajna* or ritual.

The UPANISHADS, a second subdivision within Brahmanas, were the last of the Vedic subdivisions, commonly found within the Aranyakas. Many of these texts, as did the Brahmanas in general, contained significant material reflecting on the nature of the Vedic sacrifice. In fact, the divisions among Brahmana proper, Aranyaka, and Upanishad are not always clear. The most important feature of the Upanishads was the emergence of a clear understanding of the identity between the individual self, or *ATMAN*, and the all-encompassing *brahman*, which now was understood as the totality of universal reality, both manifest and unmanifest.

The genesis of this Upanishadic view that the self was in unity with cosmic reality can be clearly traced. Firstly, Shatapatha Brahmana explained that the most perfect ritual was to be equated to the universe itself. More accurately it was the universe, visible and invisible. Second, the Aranyakas began to make clear that the initiated practitioner was to be equated to the ritual itself. So, if the ritual equals all reality, and the individual adept equals the ritual, one easily arrives at the idea that the individual equals all reality. The Upanishads, then, were the outgrowth not of philosophical speculation, but of self-conscious ritual practice. The later orthodox Upanishads (those physically associated with a Vedic collection) barely mention the rituals; they merely state the derived abstract concepts.

Another key breakthrough in the Upanishads was the explicit discussion of REINCARNATION and the theory of KARMA, the notion that actions in this birth would have consequence in a new birth. There is evidence that karma, or ethi-

cally conditioned rebirth, had its roots in earlier Vedic thought. But its full expression in VEDANTA (Hindu philosophy) had to wait for the Upanishads. There, the earlier notion of reaching unity with the ultimate reality was seen not merely as a spiritual apotheosis, but also as a way out of the trap of rebirth (and redeath).

Many texts have called themselves the “fifth Veda” to emphasize their importance in the tradition. The ARTHASHASTRA, the NATYASHASTRA, and the MAHABHARATA all have claimed that designation. Sometimes the TANTRA also refers to itself as the fifth Veda.

Tamil SHAIVITES or the Tamil Vaishnavites refer to their sacred texts, respectively, the TEVARAM and the Nalayira Divya Prabantham, as the Tamil Veda. Other local traditions in various languages do likewise.

The term Veda is also sometimes used generically in other fields of knowledge. Medicine, for example, is referred to as the “Veda of Life” (*AYURVEDA*), and the study of war is the “Veda of the Bow” (*Dhanurveda*).

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Vedangas

The Vedangas, or “branches of the VEDA,” are six ancillary sciences of traditional Brahminical learning: *shiksha* (proper pronunciation), *kalpa*

(mastery of the ritual details), *vyakarana* (SANSKRIT grammar), *nirukta* (etymology or derivation of Sanskrit words), *chandas* (prosody or verse metrics), and *jyotish* (astronomy/astrology). The adept had to know all these to be considered fully educated.

Further reading: Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Jagadguru Shankaracharya, *The Vedas and Vedangas* (Kumbakonam: Sri Kamakoti Research Centre, 1988).

Vedanta

Vedanta, literally the end or conclusion (*anta*) of the VEDA, is the most important philosophical school in Indian tradition. It is a wide and capacious field that includes those who adhere to a strict non-dualist (*ADVAITA*) perspective, those who believe in a non-dualism with certain reservations, and those who believe in the type of dualism (*DVAITA*) that states that God and the human soul will never be one.

The one basic requirement of Vedanta is that it rest upon the three basic texts: the UPANISHADS, the VEDANTA SUTRAS, and the BHAGAVAD GITA. Most commonly known in both India and the West is the Vedanta of SHANKARA, the seventh-century philosophical savant. This Vedanta understands that the world is illusory, *MAYA*, and only the transcendent ultimate reality, the *BRAHMAN*, is real. That *brahman* has no characteristics and does not act in any way. It is a pure plenum or totality that is sometimes characterized as infinite being (*sat*), infinite consciousness (*cit*), and infinite bliss (*ANANDA*). (See [SAT-CHIT-ANANDA](#).)

A second type of Vedanta might best be described as BHAKTI Vedanta or devotional Vedanta. Here the oneness of the godhead is also understood, but the world is seen to be real and permeated by God in the form of VISHNU, usually, or his incarnations RAMA or KRISHNA. (Vedantas that emphasize SHIVA in this way are rare.) There is no

duality of soul, world, and God, but God is seen as supreme and all other realities as subsidiary. It is non-dualism with the reservation that the godhead has supreme power to act.

Finally, there is the rare minority sect of Vedanta championed by Sri MADHVA, who argues that the soul, the world, and God are all separated from each other eternally and will never be one. All is dependent upon the radically transcendent God.

In the Neo-Vedanta of the followers of RAMAKRISHNA, reality is still one, but “God” may be characterized as “Allah” or “Christ” as well as in the usual Hindu ways. Because of the power of the word *Vedanta*, even systems like that of SRI AUROBINDO that resemble the TANTRA will be characterized as Vedanta. His followers have sometimes called his system Integral Vedanta.

All systems of Vedanta (except that of Aurobindo) agree that the highest goal is to break the bonds of KARMA and realize *mukti*, or liberation.

Further reading: Surendranath Dasgupta, *The History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vols. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1975); Swami Tapasyananda, *Bhakti Schools of Vedanta (Lives and Philosophies of Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva, Vallabha and Chaitanya)* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1990).

Vedanta Centre/Ananda Ashrama See [PARAMANANDA](#).

Vedanta Societies/Ramakrishna Math and Mission

The Vedanta Societies are part of a missionary movement created by the monastic disciples of Sri RAMAKRISHNA Paramahansa (1836–86), the Indian saint of *ADVAITA* (non-dual) VEDANTA, who was considered an incarnation of God. Ramakrishna’s message was that truth can be found in all of the world’s religions. The basic tenet of Vedanta is that reality is non-dual and that one divine reality



Ramakrishna Temple, in Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Bengal (Constance A. Jones)

encompasses all. Swami VIVEKANANDA, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, first introduced Ramakrishna's ideas of Vedanta to the UNITED STATES when he addressed the WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS in Chicago in 1893. His message was so well received that he lectured throughout the country and founded the first Vedanta Society in the United States in New York City in 1896.

Other swamis or monastics in the order founded other Vedanta Societies in major cities. Swami ABHEDANANDA served the New York society and taught throughout the United States from 1897 to 1921. In San Francisco, Swami Trigunatita oversaw the construction of the first Hindu temple in the United States in 1906. Swami PARAMANANDA (1885–1940) lectured all over the United States and established centers in Los Angeles and Boston. In 1923 he established ANANDA ASHRAMA at La Crescenta, California. Swami Nikhilananda founded a center in Manhattan in 1933. Swami Prabhavananda (1914–76) established centers in Portland, Oregon, and Hol-

lywood, California. The Vedanta Society in Hollywood became the Vedanta Society of Southern California, with several monasteries, a convent, and the Vedanta Press. The writers Gerald Heard (1889–1971), Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), and Christopher ISHERWOOD (1904–86) were disciples of Prabhavananda.

The Vedanta Societies remain under the authority of the central monastery, the Ramakrishna Order, headquartered in Belur Math, India. The larger organization, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, administers a network of Ramakrishna Missions in major cities and some rural areas of India. Missions sponsor hospitals in addition to religious services. SWAMIS are trained at the math and are sent to direct Vedanta centers outside India. At present, all swamis are male, although nuns are part of the organization and convents are provided for nuns through the Sarada Math, named for SARADA DEVI, the wife of Ramakrishna. Several swamis have left the Vedanta Society because of its traditional authority structure.

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Vedanta Sutra (first century C.E.)

The Vedanta Sutra is said to have been composed by VYASA, but it is also known as Vedanta

Sutra and as such is attributed to Badarayana, an ancient sage. A SUTRA is a short aphoristic line of text; *Vedanta Sutra* can thus be translated as “lines relating to the VEDANTA.” There are about 560 lines in this text.

The work was composed to resolve difficulties in the interpretation of the UPANISHADS and to refute the views of certain opposing schools. Chapter I systematically and with great specificity discusses the Upanishad passages dealing with BRAHMAN (the universal reality) and ATMAN (the soul or self). Chapter II is devoted to a refutation of the other interpretations, as presented by the schools of SAMKHYA, YOGA, NYAYA, VAISHESHKA, MIMAMSA, CHARVAKA, Buddhism, and JAINISM. Chapter III discusses the PRAMANAS, the valid methods of obtaining knowledge (such as perception, inference, or scripture) in order to understand the *brahman* and *atman*. The fourth and final chapter discusses the results of *brahman* realization.

The Vedanta Sutra, Upanishads, and BHAGAVAD GITA form the traditional foundational texts for Vedantic philosophy. As a result, Vedanta Sutra has attracted numerous and varied commentaries. SHANKARA, RAMANUJA, and MADHVA all wrote extensive commentaries, which strongly disagree with one another, largely because the extremely concise style of the individual lines often admits to varied interpretations.

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Vedantic Center See [TURYASANGITANANDA, SWAMI](#).

Vedic See [VEDA\(S\)](#).

vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is highly valued in Indian culture. In general orthodox BRAHMINS will eat neither meat nor eggs. Castes who desire to gain respect and perhaps eventual advancement in the hierarchy will adopt vegetarianism as a way to “Sanskritize” or become more Brahminical. Hindus who are on any spiritual quest in India will remove meat and other things such as spices from their diet in order to ensure spiritual purity. Meat is considered to be *tamasic* (see [GUNAS](#)), or spiritually negative, and is believed to cause excessive desire for sexuality and a tendency toward violence.

Most scholars agree that vegetarianism was not originally part of the Vedic or Brahminical system, though this remains a controversial conclusion. The solid evidence of the Vedic texts themselves as well as authoritative DHARMA (right conduct) texts such as the *DHARMASHASTRA* of Manu, indicate quite clearly that meat, including beef, was eaten by all sectors of Indian society including Brahmins.

The Jains (see [JAINISM](#)) and Buddhists, however, were extremely critical of the Brahminical animal sacrifices and of the habit of eating meat. The Jains were most radical in this regard; Jain monks (and to a lesser degree the laity) practiced AHIMSA (noninjury) from as early as 900 B.C.E., as did the BUDDHA from around 600 B.C.E.

For the Jain monks, every motion of the body had to be calculated to minimize its effect on invisible microscopic beings that were believed to exist in air, water, fire, and earth. (This may have been the first human conception of microorganisms.) All the more did they refrain from slaughtering and eating large animals. Strict vegetarianism was required for monks, and the laity followed their example. One could never be a Jain in India, then or now, and eat meat or eggs. Buddhists were vegetarian in their monasteries

but were allowed to eat meat received as alms. They were less absolute, but they too discouraged MEAT-EATING.

The Brahminical tradition began to move in the direction of *ahimsa* toward the end of the last millennium before the Common Era. Law codes such as the *Manu Smriti* or the *Dharmashastra* of Manu allow Brahmins to eat the meat of sacrificial animals, but other meat eating is discouraged. The influence of *ahimsa* is clear in the argument that ritually sacrificing an animal is not *himsa*, or “killing” per se.

As time went on, and Vedic ritual began to recede in importance in the culture, Brahmins took on strict vegetarianism as a sign of purity. They also followed the Jains and Buddhists in preventing any needless killing of any being. While Jainism and Buddhism remained localized or minority traditions, Brahmin conduct was always the model for the Hindu majority. Vegetarianism soon became the pan-Indian ideal.

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vehicles of the divinities

In the post-Vedic iconography of India, gods and goddesses are commonly seen in association with what is described in SANSKRIT as their *vahana* (vehicle). Often they are pictured astride an animal; at other times there is a depiction of the animal standing alone in the foreground or background. Vedic divinities did not have such mounts, but mounts were created for them in later times to make their images accord with those of the non-Vedic gods.

The vehicle of VISHNU is the man-eagle GARUDA; the vehicle of SHIVA is the bull NANDI; DURGA is often depicted astride a lion or tiger;

SARASVATI is seen in association with a swan or peacock; KARTTIKEYA, the younger son of Shiva and PARVATI, has a peacock vehicle; GANESHA, the elephant-headed divinity, is seen in association with the lowly rat. LAKSHMI is unique in having a lotus that she is always shown seated upon, which serves as her vehicle.

There are, however, many prominent divinities who do not have iconographic vehicles. These include RAMA and SITA, PARVATI and KRISHNA. Among the Jains the TIRTHANKARAS (perfected beings) were usually depicted in association with particular animals, perhaps in imitation of the Hindu notion. However, since the Jain tradition is so old, it is quite possible that the practice originated with them.

Further reading: Cornelia Dimitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds. and trans., *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Margaret Stutley, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

Videha

Videha was an important region or country of ancient India, located in what is now northern Bihar state. With its capital Mithila it was mentioned in both the MAHABHARATA and the RAMAYANA. King Janaka of Videha was famous for his daughter SITA, who became Lord RAMA’s wife, and for reaching a perfected state through action alone, as recounted in the BHAGAVAD GITA. The king is also mentioned in the UPANISHADS as a knower of BRAHMAN. Videha is also mentioned in the Buddhist Jataka stories and the *Majjhima Nikaya*; the Buddha traveled there. MAHAVIRA, the great Jain TIRTHANKARA (perfected being), was born in this country.

Further reading: Yogendra Mishra, *History of Videha: From the Earliest Times to the Foundation of the Gupta Empire, A.D. 319* (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1981).

vidya

Vidya (knowledge) from the SANSKRIT root “to know” is an important philosophical term in Hindu tradition. Initially it connoted the knowledge of the Vedic MANTRAS and ritual, and it bestowed great power. When the UPANISHADS concluded that Vedic rituals alone could not help break the cycle of birth and rebirth, Vedic knowledge began to be called the “lower knowledge” (*apara vidya*) while the Upanishadic knowledge was called the higher or liberating knowledge (*para vidya*). Buddhism also used the term to refer to knowledge of the path that breaks the cycle of birth and rebirth.

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Vidyaranya (c. 1450 C.E.) Vedantic philosopher

Vidyaranya was a well-known philosopher in the tradition of SHANKARA. He is thought to be the brother of Sayana; Sayana is the commentator on the VEDAS. Vidyaranya composed several texts. The Sarvadarshanasangraha is a discussion of different philosophical views. The Panchapadikavivarana is considered an excellent and thorough summary of the non-dualist philosophical perspective; Vivarnaprimeyasangraha explores the same theme in a more scholarly fashion.

Vidyaranya’s Jivanmuktiviveka discusses those beings who have already been liberated from the cycle of birth and rebirth but remain in embodied existence. Finally, Panchadashi is a popular compendium in verse of Vedantic thought, known for its clarity and accessibility. Here he outlines his own understanding of the nature of the ultimate *brahman*, describing the *maya* or illusory world appearance as being in a sense a power of the BRAHMAN. *Brahman* is the underlying pure reality, while all names and forms are the false discoloration over the pure whiteness, as it were, of the ultimate reality.

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Vijayadashami See NAVARATRI.

Vijayanagara (1336–1630)

Vijayanagara, the “City of Victory,” was a fortress city founded by an alliance of kings as a bulwark against the Muslims in the south of India. Its vast ruins can still be seen at the site of Hampi in Karnataka.

The city was the capital of a sprawling empire that controlled almost all of India south of the Krishna and the Tungabhadra Rivers at its height under King Krishnadevaraya. The empire took the name of the city, the Vijayanagara empire.

Vijayanagara played a key role in Hindu history, by successfully fending off many Muslim invasions and preserving and promoting Hindu culture for nearly 300 years, at a time when the rest of India was suffering complete Muslim domination. Two princes, Harihara and Bukka, created the kingdom in 1336. Harihara I (1336–57) planned and built the great new city of Vijayanagara, which became the capital of the empire in 1343. In 1346, the Hoysalas, the last remaining South Indian rivals to the Vijayanagara kingdom, were defeated.

The city covered 20 square miles and had seven concentric lines of fortifications. It had at its height a population of 500,000 people. It was an international city with wide trade ties, which helped finance beautifully carved and embellished buildings. The culture saw a flowering of South Indian civilization with support for all the sects of Hinduism, including Vaishnavite, Shaivite, and the GODDESS, and for the heterodox Jains as well (see JAINISM).

Further reading: K. A. Nilakanta Shastri, *A History of South India from Prehistoric Time to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1996); Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Vimalananda (1942–) *founder of Yoga House Ashram*

Vimalananda, founder of Yoga House Ashram and a former member and teacher of the ANANDA MARGA YOGA SOCIETY, currently teaches yoga throughout northern California.

Dadaji, as he is known to his friends and disciples, was born in 1942 to a BRAHMIN family in Badwel in South India. He had spiritual experiences as a young boy and at age six experienced a bright light filling his room and a voice urging him to commit himself to the inner path of enlightenment. Dadaji answered the call of the inner life; by the time he was 16 he was adept as a YOGA instructor.

In 1962 he developed a relationship with Sri ANANDAMURTI, founder and creator of the ANANDA MARGA YOGA SOCIETY. He delighted in the services the society provided for the sick, the poor, and the elderly. Very quickly he was promoted to yoga teacher. In 1966 Dadaji felt the need to spread the words and programs of the society to help humanity. He left India as an emissary of the society to found centers in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. He was honored by the United Nations for his heroic work in the aftermath of the great earthquake that struck Manila in 1968.

In 1969 Dadaji went to the UNITED STATES and assisted in developing the Ananda Marga Society there. However, in the mid-1970s he left the society, created the Yoga House Ashram, and developed his own following. He settled in the San Francisco area and continued to teach that service to humanity was as important as yoga or MEDITATION. His life has been devoted to bridging

the rivers that separate the East and West through traditional yoga techniques.

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Vindhya Mountains

The Vindhya Mountains, 1,000 to 3,500 feet in elevation, are a range of hills forming a natural barrier between northern and southern India. They mark the northern edge of the central Indian or Deccan plateau. From Gujarat state on the west, they extend about 675 miles across Madhya Pradesh state to touch on the GANGES River valley near BENARES (Varanasi) in Uttar Pradesh. These mountains are mentioned in the Indian epics and are mythologically associated with numerous personages including AGASTYA, who is said to have caused them to bow down permanently in his travels to South India. DURGA is sometimes said to have her home in the Vindhya in the form of the goddess VINDHYAVASINI.

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Vindhyavasini

Vindhyavasini (she who dwells in the VINDHYA MOUNTAINS) is an example of a local indigenous GODDESS who was incorporated in the larger tradition of the great Goddess in ingenious ways. Among the many Hindu local goddesses she is rare in maintaining the face of a bird and not a human, in keeping with non-Aryan tribal notions of divinity.

Vindhyavasini is depicted with the face of a bird and the body of a woman, having four arms.

In her hands are a conch, a club, a war discus, and the “fear not” gesture of the hand (*ABHAYA MUDRA*). Her vehicle is a lion. She is also depicted as KALI is with a garland of human skulls. To her right is the elephant GANESHA and to her left is a *yogini*, a demigoddess, seated on an elephant. Vindhyavasini is mentioned in the *Devi Mahatmya*, an important text that presents the various incarnations or forms of the great Goddess (Mahadevi). She is also mentioned in an early 19th-century local text called the *Vindhya Mahatmya*. In both she is understood to be the BRAHMAN, or ultimate reality, in its totality. She is also assimilated to Mahalakshmi, or LAKSHMI, conceived of as the ultimate divinity.

Vindhyavasini is primarily connected with the Vaishnavite tradition. The story goes that when KRISHNA was given to his foster mother Nanda to escape being killed by the evil king Kamsa, in exchange VASUDEVA, Krishna’s father, received a divine child, Vindhyavasini. Kamsa, getting word that a birth might have occurred, went to Krishna’s mother DEVAKI’s house and tried to seize the new girl child. She escaped the king’s grasp and prophesied, before returning to the Vindhya, that Kamsa would be killed by Krishna.

A different account of Vindhyavasini’s birth (resembling the tale that KALI emerged from PARVATI) tells of a goddess, Kaushiki, who was formed when Parvati shed her dark complexion to become golden or light in color (earning her the standing epithet *Gauri*, or white one). Kaushiki immediately went to the HIMALAYAS to take up her role as Vindhyavasini.

There is an active and elaborate PILGRIMAGE to Vindhyavasini around the village of Vindhychal at the northern foothills of the Vindhya, where they touch the GANGES between ALLAHABAD and BENARES (Varanasi). The temple of Vindhyavasini has elements that resemble those of Kali, and animal sacrifices are performed.

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Virashaivas

The Virashaivas are a BHAKTI, or devotional, movement in the southern Indian state of Karnataka that was founded in the 12th century by their leader, BASAVANNA. The Virashaivas were socially radical, condemning all forms of caste, establishing equality of the sexes, and rejecting ritual of all kinds as empty posturing. Most important for them were the GURU, the saints as a group, a personal relationship with Lord SHIVA, and high regard for the wandering seeker who embraces poverty and defies convention. One Virashaivite saint, for example, AKKA MAHADEVI, was a woman who wandered about naked.

Virashaiva orthodoxy has eight elements: (1) the GURU who leads the self to Shiva; (2) the LINGAM, the sole symbol of Shiva, worn on a necklace by anyone; among the Virashaivas there is no indication that the lingam is considered a phallic symbol; (3) the *jangama*, the male or female wandering religious teacher who is considered God incarnate; the guru, lingam, and *jangama* all have sanctifying power; (4) the holy water that has touched the feet of the guru and been drunk as a sign of devotion; (5) PRASADA (grace), food blessed by the guru; devotees take this food from the feet of the guru together; commensality and community sharing occur regardless of CASTE, in defiance of ordinary social behavior in Indian tradition; (6) holy ash, which is worn as a sign of Shiva; (7) *rudraksa* beads, a necklace made of seeds from a special plant and worn as a sign of Shiva; they are sacred to all who worship Shiva; and (8) the five-syllable MANTRA, *Om Nama Shivaya*; this is an important mantra for all Shaivites.

The Virashaivas recognize a number of important saints born from the 10th to the 12th centuries. The poem-songs of these saints are sung and recited as part of devotion. These saints are Basavanna, Akka Mahadevi, Allama Prabhu, and Devara Dasimayya.

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Vishishtadvaita

The term *Vishishtadvaita* is very commonly misinterpreted as “qualified” (or “modified”) (*vishishta*) non-dualism (*ADVAITA*). A more accurate (though still imprecise) translation is “non-duality with differentiation.” This reflects Vishishtadvaita’s understanding of the three reals: Ishvara (God), *cit* (consciousness) and *acit* (unconsciousness). The conscious and unconscious existence are real aspects or attributes of God, non-dual or non-different from God from the point of view of God, but they are also eternally distinct (differentiated), in that they are attributes only.

God or *BRAHMAN* and the world are seen to have the relation of soul and body. The manifest universe is the body of God, but in his plenitude he is also an unchangeable infinity beyond the world, untouched in any way by the negatives or impurities of the world of manifestation.

Vishishhadvaita tradition begins with the 12 *ALVARS*, the mystic poet-singers of Tamil Nadu who date from the eighth to the 10th centuries. The songs of these Alvars inspired and shape the tradition of Vishishtadvaita. The philosophy expressed in these songs was first systematically explored by the teacher Nathamuni, probably in the ninth century C.E. Nathamuni is said to have received the verses of *NAMMALVAR*, which he put to music in Vedic style. These verses are still sung in the temples of Tamil Nadu, in addition to verses in *SANSKRIT*, and are part of the Vaishnavite *VEDA* in Tamil.

Nathamuni is credited with composing three Sanskrit texts that still inform the tradition. He had 11 disciples, the most important of whom were Pundarikaksha, Karukanatha, and Shrikrishna Lakshminatha. Pundarikaksha’s student Rama Mishra became the guru of the famed Yamunacharya, who

was also the grandson of Nathamuni. Yamunacharya was probably born in the early 10th century. He was a king who renounced everything to go to *SRIRANGAM*, one of the most important shrines for the Sri Vaishnavite tradition, which supports the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita.

Yamunacharya had many disciples, of whom 21 became prominent. *RAMANUJA* (born at the end of the 11th century), the greatest *ACHARYA* of the lineage, was born to the elder sister of one of Yamunacharya’s disciples, Mahapurna. Yamunacharya composed six important Sanskrit works developing the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita. As with other great *acharyas* of the Vishishtadvaita tradition he was a great devotee, as well as a great scholar; one of the six works he composed was a praise poem to Lord *KRISHNA*.

Yamunacharya apparently lived to a ripe age but died before he could meet Ramanuja. Ramanuja’s own guru understood that his student would one day outshine him and tried to have him killed, but Ramanuja was miraculously saved from this attempt. Eventually, Ramanuja took Mahapurna, his uncle, to be his guru and followed him to Srirangam. He arrived just after Yamunacharya died.

From seeing three of Yamuna’s fingers twisted, after death, he learned that he should do three things: (1) convert the people to the Vaishnavite doctrine of surrender, (2) write a commentary to the *VEDANTA SUTRA*, and (3) write extensively on Sri Vaishnavism. All these things he did. Not long afterward, he renounced the householder life and went to Srirangam to head the order and devote himself to the divinity of that shrine. Ramanuja is famed for his Sri Bhashya, his commentary on the Vedanta Sutra, but he also wrote a commentary on the *BHAGAVAD GITA* and several other major Vedantic works.

All Ramanuja’s works were written in Sanskrit. Two important philosophers followed Ramanuja, Parashara Bhattar, who wrote a Sanskrit commentary on the Sanskrit *Thousand Divine Names of Vishnu*, and Pillan or Kurukeshu, who wrote a

Tamil commentary on the hymns of the Alvars, which became a philosophical backbone for later Vishishtadvaita thought. The most prolific later teacher among many later philosophers in this lineage was Venkatanatha of the 15th century, who wrote numerous works in Sanskrit and Tamil.

Most significant in the philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism is a vision of a personal divinity that is worshipped with great passion and devotion. At the same time that divinity, Vishnu, is understood to be the transcendent *brahman* of the UPANISHADS. The Alvar's faith was passionate and mystical. Ramanuja's commentaries were subtle philosophy that sought to legitimate their path in terms of Vedanta. The two paths together constitute what Sri Vaisnavas call the "Double Vedanta" (*Ubayavedanta*), which relies on both Sanskrit and Tamil textual bases.

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Vishnu

Vishnu in his various forms is one of the most worshipped gods in the Indian pantheon. His tradition, known as VAISHNAVISM, constitutes the second largest sect within Hinduism.

Vishnu first appears in the VEDAS as a rather insignificant divinity, with only minor ritual importance. There are only 64 mentions of him in the RIG VEDA, most of them in passing, with only a handful of hymns addressed to him alone. He is celebrated in the Vedas mostly for his "three steps" that saved the world, in his incarnation as VAMANA AVATAR.

Vishnu first gains prominence in the later Vedic period, apparently after being identified with VASUDEVA, a non-Vedic god popular in west-ern India in the last centuries before the Common

Era, and with the god Narayana of the Vedic BRAHMANA literature. By the time of the MAHABHARATA and RAMAYANA epics his prominence was assured. He was identified both with the gods KRISHNA, hero of the Mahabharata, and RAMA, hero of the Ramayana.

Eventually, Vishnu's cult reached full development when he was recognized as Mahavishnu (great Vishnu), preserver of the universe, who entered into the world when needed in successive AVATARS or "descents." Before the world is created, Vishnu sleeps on the cosmic MILK OCEAN on the back of the divine serpent ADISHESHA. Out of his navel grows a lotus from which BRAHMA the creator god emerges to create the universe. Once



Lord Venkateswara, popularly known as Balaji, is one of the manifestations of Lord Vishnu. (*Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, California*)

the world is created Vishnu reigns in his heavenly realm of Vaikuntha.

Iconographically, Vishnu is depicted as being of dark blue color with four arms. He is seated on a throne. In his four hands he holds a conch, a war discus, a mace, and a lotus. He wears the Kaustubha gem around his neck and has a tuft of hair on his chest called Shrivatsa. His vehicle is the man-eagle GARUDA. His spouse is LAKSHMI, or Sri. In the highest understanding he exists as all things and also transcends them.

Vishnu as the sustainer divinity takes human or animal incarnations when needed to maintain or defend the world. The BHAGAVAD GITA says that whenever there is a decrease in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness in the world, Vishnu (there KRISHNA) sends himself forth. Only Vishnu among the gods is seen to take on incarnations as part of a divine duty. Other gods such as SHIVA and the Goddess will be found in various forms, but these will not be referred to in general as avatars or incarnations.

There are different lists of avatars or incarnations of Vishnu in different texts and traditions, variously containing 10, 12, or 22 god names. The most common list of avatars is MATSYA (fish), KURMA (tortoise), VARAHA (boar), Narasimha (man-lion), VAMANA (dwarf), PARASHURAMA (RAMA with the axe), Rama of the RAMAYANA, KRISHNA, BUDDHA, and KALKI (his future incarnation). Sometimes Krishna's brother BALARAMA is made the 11th avatar and sometimes both Krishna and Balarama are classified as one avatar.

Whenever Vishnu takes an avatar, he is subject to birth and death just as a human is. Krishna of the MAHABHARATA, for instance, dies by being shot in the heel.

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Vishnudevananda, Swami (1927–1993)

See SHIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA CENTERS.

vishuddha chakra

The *vishuddha* chakra is the fifth CHAKRA (energy center) from the base of the spine in the KUNDALINI YOGA system. It is located on the spine at the throat area. At this chakra worldly emotions are transcended and higher spiritual qualities begin to emerge, particularly higher spiritual insight (JNANA). Accordingly, its element is the refined element ether (see ELEMENTS, FIVE). Its deity is Panchavakra Shiva or five-faced SHIVA. Its SHAKTI or energy is *shakini*, the embodiment of purity. It has 16 bluish gray petals.

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Vishva Hindu Parishad

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council) is one of the most visible of several

Hindu nationalist groups. It arose as the religious wing of the militant RASHTRIYA SVAYAM SEVAK SANGH (RSS).

The VHP was founded in 1964, in order to redefine *Hindutva*, or Hinduism, in a simplified but rigorous form that could compete with other world religions. It is an attempt to create a single, unified Hindu culture. Two leaders of the SHANKARACHARYA ORDER were present at its formation.

The VHP devised a uniform religious practice, which it publicized in the 1980s. All Hindus were expected to worship SURYA (the Sun) at dawn and dusk, wear the OM symbol around their neck, keep a copy of the BHAGAVAD GITA in their home, maintain a shrine to their personal deity, and attend temple services.

The VHP's writings give no importance to the four VEDAS, which have always been considered the most sacred Hindu scripture. Instead, they exalt the military ethos of the BHAGAVAD GITA and RAMAYANA. The focus of worship for the VHP has been on BHAKTI (devotional) practices, combined with sacrifices and PILGRIMAGES, with little attention to SELF-REALIZATION or renunciation. A unique practice introduced during the 1980s was the worship of bricks with the name of RAMA inscribed upon them. Bricks like these were used as weapons against Muslims in the murderous riots of 1992 and 2002 (see [HINDU NATIONALISM](#)). Though the VHP courts the lower castes, it exalts the KSHATRIYA or warrior caste.

In North America the VHP operates secretly. Its visual presence is best seen through the affiliated Hindu Student Congress.

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Vishvakarma

Vishvakarma, “the one who does all action,” is the architect and artisan among the Vedic gods. He fashions buildings for them and makes their weapons and implements. On Earth he is said to have fashioned the entire world, including men and women. He shares in sacrifices made by people to the other gods. The Ribhus, who make chariots and other objects for the gods, are said to be his pupils.

Vishvakarma persists in the mythology of the PURANAS, where he maintains his role as divine architect and artisan. There he is the son of BRAHMA and is said to have three eyes, a club, a gold crown, and a gold necklace, though there is no proliferation of iconography of him.

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Vishvanath Temple, Benares

The Vishvanath Temple to Lord SHIVA in BENARES (Varanasi) replaced a temple destroyed in the 17th century by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, who built a mosque on the same site. The temple was rebuilt beside that mosque in 1776 by Rani

Ahalyabai of Indore. Its magnificent 70-foot spire is totally covered with over a ton of gold plate, giving it its popular name of the Golden Temple. It enshrines a Shiva LINGAM that is considered one of the 12 *jyotirlingas* , or lingams of divine light, in India.

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Vithoba (Vitthoba, Vitthala)

Vithoba is a form of VISHNU or KRISHNA; his main shrine is in Pandharpur, Maharashtra. This was the favored shrine of the Maharasthran saint TUKARAM, whose poetic songs are often addressed to this divinity. Vithoba is worshipped in Maharashtra and in Karnataka (where he is called Vitthala). The god is generally depicted standing on a brick (his name derives from the Marathi word for brick) with his arms resting on his hips. In one hand is a pouch with pebbles in it and in his other hand is a conch.

It is said that Krishna, accompanied by the RISHI (seer) NARADA, once went to visit a certain Pundalika to observe his devotion to his elderly parents. They arrived while he was taking care of his parents. Without stopping his work, he threw a brick at Krishna and asked him to wait.

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Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), founder of the Vedanta Society in the United States and the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India (Courtesy Vedanta Society, San Francisco)

Vivekananda, Swami (1863–1902) founder of Vedanta Society and Ramakrishna Math and Mission

Swami Vivekananda was a great teacher of Hinduism for the modern world. His missionary work played a major role in the consolidation of ADVAITA VEDANTA in India and its spread to the West. He founded the VEDANTA SOCIETY in the United States and the RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION in India.

Narendranath Datta was born on January 12, 1863, in Calcutta (Kolkata), West Bengal, to aristocratic Bengali parents: Viswanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. He meditated from a very early age and entertained spiritual questions from childhood. His inquiries about God

led him as a youth to the BRAHMO SAMAJ, a reform movement founded by Rammohun ROY, but he was not satisfied with the spirituality of the movement.

In November 1881, while studying at Calcutta University, he visited Sri RAMAKRISHNA, the famous mystic and priest at the KALI temple of Dakshineswar near Calcutta. Narendra was fascinated by Ramakrishna's claim that he saw God clearly, and he wanted to know more. Although responsible for the care of his poverty-stricken family upon the death of his father, Narendra continued his work at the university and his study with Ramakrishna. He spent five years in training with Ramakrishna, during which he became committed to renouncing all of life in quest of God-realization. Ramakrishna died of throat cancer in August 1886. Then Narendra and a small group of Ramakrishna's disciples took vows to become monks and renounce the world. In 1887 he took the vow of SANNYAS and became Swami Vivekananda (bliss of discernment).

With some other young monks, Vivekananda wandered all over the subcontinent, begging for food and lodging. In his travels he learned firsthand of the imbalances in Indian society and the inhumanity of the CASTE system. He began to see the need for social service for millions of poor Indians, not traditionally an interest of spiritual seekers in India.

In 1893 Vivekananda attended the WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS in Chicago, with the intent of representing the message of Hinduism to the West. He was the most popular speaker at the parliament, giving classical, erudite dispositions on the nature and value of Hinduism, which excited many. From this success he began a tour of the United States, lecturing in the Midwest and New York City, where in 1895 he founded the Vedanta Society of New York, the first Hindu organization founded in the United States.

Upon his return to India in 1897, he found that his success in the West had increased his

renown. He gathered his brother monks and founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, whose very name emphasized Ramakrishna's unification of the monastic life with social service. He found a site for the monastery at Belur and began relief work in nearby Calcutta. He worked with SARADA DEVI, Sri Ramakrishna's widow, to serve the poor. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission is today one of the largest monastic orders in Hinduism.

His teaching centered around *advaita* Vedanta and he constantly pointed to the identity of each person with the highest BRAHMAN. He believed that no one could be free until all are free. Even the desire for personal salvation should be relinquished in favor of tireless work for the salvation of others.

Vivekananda wanted to raise the inferior status of women in Hinduism by including them in spiritual life. He worked with many women in India, including Sarada Devi and Sister NIVEDITA, and with many Western disciples in promoting the education of and service to women. He insisted that the women of India must be able to meet the modern age with adequate education; it was the topic of one of his many books.

Vivekananda made a second visit to the West in 1899–1900, during which he founded other Vedanta Centers.

He was only 39 when he died on July 4, 1902, at Belur Math near Calcutta.

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vows (*vratas*)

Vows or *vratas* are a central feature of Hinduism and JAINISM. They are undertaken for myriad reasons, but always with the desire of pleasing the divinity. Vows are often taken to do a particular thing in exchange for help from God. For instance, a mother might promise to donate a sum of money to a certain divinity's temple, if her gravely ill child should recover. A person might carry out a vow to shave his or her head and make a PILGRIMAGE to a god's temple in exchange for success on exams or to get a male child.

In times past very severe vows were sometimes taken. People were known to starve themselves to death in exchange for a divinity's promise to remove a curse on their family; others vowed that if a son were born they would offer him up to a renunciatory order upon his coming of age. Indian mythology records innumerable severe vows. Ravana the demon king, for instance, took a vow to stand on one toe for 10,000 years in order to win overlordship of the universe.

Most vows in modern times involve fasting, celibacy, pilgrimage, study of sacred books, feeding of BRAHMINS or mendicants, or limited vows of abstention. *Vratas* can be classified in different ways. One classification divides them into those that are bodily, those that pertain to speech, and those that pertain to the mind. Another type of classification is related to duration and timing of the vow, whether for a day, several years, until the fortnight is over, or until a certain star appears. A third classification is according to the divinity for whom the vow is performed. Last are vows that are specific to certain CASTES or communities.

To be valid, vows must almost always begin in a condition of ceremonial purity. Most vows begin early in the morning. Festivals, in general, often entail vows taken by various family members; typically they involve fasting, but they may

also involve celibacy, service to the divinity, and pilgrimage.

There is a long list of special days appropriate to specific vows, usually entailing particular obligations of worship and observances. A devotee might vow to worship the Sun and fast on the day of Acalasaptami; to worship LAKSHMI at the base of a tree during Navaratri; to abstain from plowing on AMBUVACHI; to abstain from fish on Bakapan-caka; or to bathe three times and make special offerings to the ancestors on Bhismapanchaka. Certain days of the month are auspicious for particular vows. The 11th of the month is observed as a fast day by many Hindus. The *Caturvargacintamani* of Hemadri (c. 13th century) lists nearly 700 such vows.

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vratas See VOWS.

Vrindavan See BRINDAVAN.

Vyasa (or Vedavyasa)

Vyasa (arranger or compiler) is the sage or RISHI who compiled all the VEDAS. He did not “write” them—they are eternal MANTRAS that are received by different *rishis* in different eras, as the world is re-created. He is identified with the Vyasa who recited the ancient MAHABHARATA story to the god GANESHA, who wrote it down. In the Mahabharata Vyasa is also called Krishna Dvaipayana. The Vedavyasa who composed the most commonly consulted Sanskrit commentary

on the YOGA SUTRA is also considered to be the same person.

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W



women and Hinduism

Hinduism, because of its extreme diversity throughout the ages, has encompassed complex systems of thought and social hierarchies, which defy any simple generalizations. This overview of the status and role of women in Hindu India, and of the culture's attitudes toward them, reflects that variety. It should be born in mind that social correlates of gender, such as CASTE, class, stage of life, age, and family membership, are all variables that significantly affect the position of women in Hindu society, so that women in Hinduism demonstrate significant differences in their lives.

It is the case that in prehistory everywhere there were significantly more autonomy and sexual freedom for women (and men) than in later times. There are indications, certainly, that in pre-Vedic times in India (before 1500 B.C.E.), such freedom and autonomy existed among the pre-ARYAN tribal people who inhabited every corner of India. Tribal groups such as the Santals to this day do not restrict women's sexuality and action in any way as their more staid counterparts in the larger culture do. Ancient Tamil poetry, dated as early as 300 B.C.E., shows women freely choosing sexual partners before marriage and relying upon love marriages rather than family arrangements.

Also, groups such as the Nayars show that matriline and matrilocality, which must be associated with more supportive lives for women, were probably fairly common in the Indian, pre-Aryan substratum that provides the cultural undergirding for much of later Hinduism.

A pattern develops, visible in the Brahminical texts, of women's having roles in the early Vedic culture (1500–800 B.C.E.) that began to be denied them even in the late Vedic period. Some *RISHIS*, for instance, were arguably women, and in the White YAJUR VEDA there are chants that can be performed only by a woman who knows Sanskrit. Though Hindu tradition even up to the present day understands that women were *never* allowed to recite the VEDAS or even witness a Vedic ritual, these examples indicate that this rule was not strictly observed in early Vedic tradition.

When hierarchies of society begin to be created in association with the creation of historical cities worldwide (in India beginning around 800 B.C.E.), such social developments generally result in the restriction of the rights of women. So was it in India, where women began to be subjugated more and more to family and husband and began to lose their role as independent actors. But as soon as the early urban period had come to fruition, perhaps

as early as 400 C.E., women began to participate as direct actors in the devotional movements and play important roles there. A good example is Karaikkal Ammaiyar (400 C.E.), who became the first of the 63 Shaivite saints.

Movements like these pointed toward spiritual equality for women and, though the women saints form the exception to the rule of social constraints for women, they were prominent and numerous for many centuries leading up to the modern era. More than one movement, such as the VIRASHAIVAS of Karnataka in the 11th century, called for spiritual equality for women and equal access to spiritual leadership. Sikhs, starting in the 15th century, held similar views, and the saint-poets of North India directly questioned the notion that gender should have any role in determining spiritual development or accomplishment.

When modernity comes forward in the 18th through 20th centuries and radically changes traditions such as child marriage, dowry, the ban on widow remarriage, and the custom of the childless wife's burning herself on the funeral pyre of her older husband, it must be understood that these traditions had not been unchallenged and contested in different regions and different movements within Hinduism's large umbrella. It is important to emphasize that modern India's legal rectification of these negative cultural sanctions upon women was complete, even though legal actions have not completely solved these problems. Histories of oppression are not solved overnight by the passing of just laws, but these bold legal measures are significant for a young postcolonial, independent nation.

MODERNIZATION

Modernization is dramatically affecting the social and religious lives of women in India. Since independence, India has sought to throw off the cloak of traditional prejudices related to caste, race, religion, and gender. While traditional practices that contribute to the low status of women in India, such as child marriage, *sati* (widow self-immola-

tion), dowry, and female infanticide, are illegal, these practices continue in some areas and among groups who have low socioeconomic status.

Traditional Indian cultural practices have usually been given religious justification, even when the scriptural bases for such practices were nonexistent, as was often the case with women's issues. In the extremely heterogeneous society that is India today, cultural practices cannot easily be distinguished from the religiously sanctioned prescriptions and proscriptions of Hinduism.

Hindu women in India occupy a broad range of statuses, varying from the most modernized, educated, and independent to some of the most traditional, least educated, and subordinate. Within India today, social class is more important in determining the status of women than is caste membership. Educated, urbanized women often marry outside caste, religion, and nationality. It is becoming more common for newly married couples to choose their own place of residence after marriage, so that they are not within the joint family system. As a result, many elderly women and men no longer receive care from younger generations but are being placed in nursing homes where neglect can be a problem.

FEMINISM

On the whole, Indian women, even proponents of women's rights and equality, resist the term *feminist*, which is often associated with aggressiveness, sexual permissiveness, immodesty, and a lack of womanly virtues; feminists are assumed to be against motherhood, family values, and men. For many the image of feminism is too directly discordant with the image of the "ideal woman" in Hindu society as defined in the Brahminic scriptures or *puranas*. Even filmmakers, writers, and artists whose work aims to castigate male privilege and sexist attitudes often reject the label *feminist*.

Modern reform movements to improve the status of women first arose in the 19th century, after the country had entered the mainstream of world civilization under British imperial rule. Both

women and men worked together to improve the conditions of women's lives. Reform was strongest in Bengal and Maharashtra and tended to focus on ideals of family and society, rather than the independence and autonomy of women.

A new women's movement emerged in India in the 1970s, unaligned with any political parties and uninfluenced by foreign or government funding. Primarily composed of female volunteers, these women have sought to highlight the misogynist aspects inherent within Hinduism, advocate for women's rights over their own bodies and sexuality, and undermine tolerance for domestic violence. They have had to contend not only against nationalist elements, but also against Leftist resistance to discussing the oppression of women.

The opening up of the domestic economy to liberalization and globalization since the early 1990s has affected the outlook of the feminist movement in India. Various nongovernmental organizations funded by foreign aid have shown interest in some of the demands of the women's movement.

WOMEN AND THE SACRED

Hindu women have the feminine divine before them all the time, as the Hindu tradition preserves a worship of the GODDESS that probably dates from the Neolithic. Many divine tales recount the supremacy of the female aspect of the divine over the masculine. Through this access, women gain power in being and bearing; yet, in the social sphere, women have generally not been given freedom to reflect the powerful goddesses overtly. In Hindu society one can often hear a man say that his sister or wife is the "goddess" and, therefore, should be treated well and respected. Social conditions, however, support significant oppression of Indian women, especially those of lower social standing.

The goddesses who become role models for Indian women are not those that show autonomy and independence but those that embody subordinate roles. SITA, the obedient wife of Lord Rama,

is the traditional role model for Hindu women. Women understand that the fierce goddesses (which Western women often view as inspiring) are goddesses that are not to be imitated. Uncontrolled by society and convention, powerful goddesses are not seen as role models. One of the greatest insults to an Indian woman is to be called a KALI.

As is the case in most of the world, women in India have throughout the centuries been the main cultural transmitters of myths and story and simple religious practices. While history records the lives of great male SWAMIS and teachers, little is recorded of the prayers, vows, and devotions of Hindu women who take on the tasks of assuring the welfare of their families by asking for divine intercession and aid. Yet, it is this integrative function performed by women that connects the everyday world to the cosmic order, even as it sacralizes the universe—an essential Hindu practice. While males, in the main, were free to develop philosophies and movements, women, forced into more limited roles, creatively reached out to the forces of the universe to preserve and protect their loved ones and provide for a harmonious and fruitful society. For every wandering ascetic who did his renunciation for higher spiritual gain, one could count, contemporaneously, thousands of individual women who practiced vows, fasts, and disciplines to ensure the welfare of those around them. This role of women as powerful religious and spiritual actors, although recognized in the culture, is largely unrecorded. The paucity of women saints in the history of Hindu tradition belies the agency that women have exerted in the temples, shrines, and households of India over the centuries. This agency has been central to the continuity of Hinduism over time.

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Woodroffe, Sir John (Arthur Avalon)
(1865–1936) *scholar of tantric texts*

Sir John Woodroffe was an Englishman, Indian civil servant, and scholar who pioneered the modern study of the tantric literary tradition.

Woodroffe was born December 15, 1865, the eldest son of James T. Woodroffe, advocate-general of Bengal and occasional member of the government of India, and his wife, Florence. John was educated at Woburn Park School and University College, Oxford, where he studied law. He was called to the Bar by the Inner Temple in 1889. He soon served as advocate of the Calcutta (Kolkata)

High Court and was made a fellow of Calcutta University and appointed Tagore Professor of Law. He served as judge on the High Court and in 1915 served as chief justice.

In addition to his practice and writing on jurisprudence, Woodroffe studied SANSKRIT and Hindu philosophy extensively, particularly TANTRIC literature. As a result of long and assiduous study of classical texts and contacts with tantric pundits of Bengal, he translated important tantric texts and added his own commentary and introductions. His publication *The Garland of Letters* is a clear and authoritative exposition of the *Mantra Shastra* and includes his explanation of the philosophy underlying tantric philosophy and practice.

Around 1910, Woodroffe was initiated by Shrivachandra Vidyarnava. He did not take students, but rather remained a scholar, intent upon providing clear and authoritative translations and expositions that would be appreciated only decades after his death.

His publications have left an enduring legacy of original resources translated into English and valuable commentary on tantra. He collaborated with a fellow initiate, Atal Behari Ghose, in producing the first translations and interpretations of tantra in a Western language. Because Ghose remained anonymous in his publications, Woodroffe also published under a pseudonym, Arthur Avalon. Under the name Avalon, he published *Shakti and Shakta*, commentaries on the *Shakta Tantra Shastra*, and under the name Woodroffe, he published *The Garland of Letters*, a commentary on the *Mantra Shastra*. He lectured in England and India, including addresses to the Royal Asiatic Society and the Vivekananda Society. After retirement from legal work in India, he returned to England and served as reader in Indian law at the University of Oxford. He died there on January 18, 1936.

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World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893)

The World Parliament of Religions was the first interfaith religious convention in the West to introduce major Eastern religions to a public audience. Held in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair, the opening ceremonies were attended by 4,000 people in the newly opened Hall of Columbus. Originally the idea of Charles Carroll Bonney, a Chicago attorney with an interest in comparative religion, the parliament was organized by a Presbyterian minister, John Henry Barrows (1847–1902), as one of 20 congresses covering a number of topics, including women's progress, temperance, commerce, literature, music, and agriculture. Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Confucianism, Buddhism, JAINISM, Hinduism, and Protestantism addressed the audiences over the course of two weeks, creating a climactic event for the closing of the 19th century. A number of Christian faiths refused to send representatives to a forum that would valorize "false faiths."

Unprecedented attention was given to Asian religions; their beliefs and practices were explained directly by adept practitioners from the Orient. Hinduism was represented by Swami VIVEKANANDA and Nara Sima Charyar; JAINISM by Virchand R.

Gandhi; the BRAHMO SAMAJ by Protap Chunder Mozoomdar and B. B. Nagarkar; and THEOSOPHY by G. N. Chakravarti. The largest Asian contingent was made up of representatives of Buddhism, from Sri Lanka and Japan. The goal was to have a personal spokesperson for every religion, an ambitious and impossible ideal to meet. In fact, major Asian religions were represented by practitioners of only one or two sects within each larger religious complex. In the case of Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda's remarks represented VEDANTA philosophy and practice but gave no understanding of popular forms of SHAIIVISM or VAISHNAVISM.

Most presentations and papers focused on the areas of agreement between Western and Eastern religions. Several problems between East and West were addressed repeatedly, particularly the misrepresentations of Oriental religions in the West and the destructive ardor and arrogance of Christian missionaries in the East. The entire September 22 session was "Criticism and Discussion of Missionary Methods." Both negative and positive assessments of the parliament were made by missionaries, yet, whatever the final evaluation, missionary delegates revealed a new awareness of the appeal of Asian religion and the need for changes in missionary methods.

Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, representative of the Brahmo Samaj, while vociferously condemning the social abuses of India, explained the "world's religious debt to Asia." He cited a higher view of nature, recognition of the value of introspection, and the crucial roles of devotional activity and self-discipline in a full religious life. His prominence at the world parliament was the second time he had influenced American audiences with his words of tolerance. His visit in 1883–84 to the United States preceded the parliament by a decade and constituted the first visit of a Hindu teacher to the United States.

Swami Vivekananda, with fluency in the English language and a commanding stage presence, was a sensation with all of his addresses. He became a celebrity as he adroitly rejected, in

memorable phrases and stories, Western notions of Hinduism as polytheistic and idolatrous. Vivekananda's clear exposition of tolerance toward other faiths as the essence of Hinduism was a revolutionary addition to the West's understanding.

The press noted the masterful oration and erudition of Oriental delegates and commented on the arrogance of Western churches that sent partially educated students of theology to instruct the wise and accomplished spiritual leaders of the East. One missionary to India for many years, the Reverend Thomas Slater of the London Missionary Society, observed, "The Hindus, by instinct and tradition, are the most religious people in the world."

A number of delegates from the East had been or were in 1893 members of the Theosophical Society. Peppered throughout the remarks from Asian representatives were ideas about synthetic religion, a clear influence from Theosophy. Theosophists termed the parliament a "distinctly Theosophical step."

Although most of the population of the UNITED STATES and the West in general were unaware of the proceedings of the parliament, the concluding remarks of the session lauded the event as perhaps the most important religious gathering ever assembled. The parliament encouraged a growing conviction that the features that believers held in common were essential characteristics of all religions, and that tolerance and charity among all religions were more important than differences in belief. Most certainly, the parliament created a new appreciation of Oriental religions.

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World Plan Executive Council See [TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION](#).

World Vaishnavite Association (est. 1994)

The World Vaishnavite Association was formed in 1994, in large part to heal the splintering that had occurred around the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in the years following the death of its founder, Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami PRABHUPADA (1896–1977). ISKCON taught a form of devotional (BHAKTI) yoga in the tradition of CHAITANYA Mahaprabhu (1486–1533). ISKCON had been the leader and role model for this form of worship in the 20th century. It rapidly expanded during the 1960s, but in the years since Prabhupada's death in 1977, the organization has faced a variety of leadership problems and experienced a number of schisms in different parts of the world. Additionally, new organizations emerged in India from the GAUDIYA MATH, the spiritual home of Prabhupada prior to his founding of ISKCON.

The World Vaishnavite Association was formed to address issues and heal the divisions that had occurred within the movement. Despite unity of faith and practice, numerous differences concerning organization and the nature of leadership existed. Some groups thought that the leadership style followed by Sri Prabhupada should continue and that current SWAMIS should be venerated in the same exalted manner as Prabhupada. Others thought Prabhupada unique and eschewed any veneration of the current GURUS. More than two dozen factions emerged.

Efforts began in the 1980s to gather together the factions. Gradually the idea of forming an association emerged. At a meeting in 1994, the group convinced the 97-year-old Srila B. P. Puri Maharaj to take charge of the association. They also invited the leaders of splinter groups to participate. In February 1994, they published the initial copy of a periodical. The *World Vaisnava Association Newsletter* was distributed to every group from the Gaudiya Math lineage to keep them apprised of developments. In November 1994 a founding meeting was held with 120 participants. Twenty-eight *ACHARYAS* and *SANNYASIS* became founding members.

The WVA does not facilitate guru-student relationships; nor does it create *ASHRAMS*. Its role is to

promote the teaching and spiritual enhancement of *SANATANA DHARMA*, the vital and legitimate teachings of Hinduism. Its theological approach is theist, a belief in a personal deity that deserves love and veneration. The WVA tries to help communities through troubling times in the regions where it has a presence and to promote missionary efforts outside India. The WVA attempts to mediate between affiliated groups. Any ISKCON-based group can join. The headquarters of the association is in the sacred city of BRINDAVAN, India, the mythological home of KRISHNA.

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Y



yajna

Yajna is from the SANSKRIT root *yaj*, “to honor a god with oblations.” A *yajna* is a ritual involving oblations in the Vedic tradition. It may be simply an offering of clarified butter into a fire, or it may involve 17 priests in an elaborate 12-day ritual including the building of a large fire altar as in the *AGNICHAYANA*. The ritual of the *yajna* always includes a fire, Sanskrit MANTRAS, and some sort of offering. In the larger public rituals a sacrifice of some animal or animals has been common. The word *yajna* is frequently translated roughly as “sacrifice.”

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Yajnavalkya (c. 700 B.C.E.)

Yajnavalkya was the most prominent sage named in the UPANISHADS. He was a student of Aruni. His teachings are recorded in dialogues in the BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD and the CHANDOGYA

UPANISHAD. In one teaching he is asked how many gods there are and he answers: “Three hundred and three and three thousand and three.” Pressed to be clearer he says there are 33. He is questioned again and again and eventually arrives at the statement that there is only one “God,” the BRAHMAN, or all. In another dialogue one of his wives asks him whether wealth could make her immortal and he propounds a notion that everything that exists is underlain by one reality, which is what is to be held dear, not wealth.

Yajnavalkya was said to have been the source for the White YAJUR VEDA. The Yajnavalkya whose name is attached to an important text of DHARMA-SHASTRAS is unlikely to be the same individual.

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Yajur Veda

The Yajur Veda is the VEDA of the sacrificial formula, the YAJUS. The priest of the Yajur Veda, the ADHVARYU, is responsible for the major sacrificial duties at the Vedic ritual, including pouring oblations and killing the sacrificial animals in the prescribed way. The formulas from the Yajur Veda must be uttered in proper fashion at the proper times.

The Yajur Veda consists to a large extent of passages from the RIG VEDA rearranged for sacrificial purposes. The Yajur Veda has two recensions: the White and the Black. The White Yajur Veda consists of hymns alone, numbering around 800. The Black Yajur Veda includes the exact same hymns, but it intersperses the explanatory BRAHMANA sections among the hymns. It is apparently this “muddled” or mixed aspect of the Veda that caused it to be named the Black Yajur Veda.

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yaksha (fem. *yakshi*)

In the VEDA a *yaksha* was a deity or divinity. Later the term designated certain semidivine beings. These *yakshas* could change form at will; they lived in caves, mountains, forests, trees, bodies of water, and even magic cities in the sky. They are roughly analogous to gnomes, fairies, or sprites in the European tradition. *Yakshas* or *yakshis* were often associated with sacred trees in villages. Indian temple iconography often depicts trees with beautiful *yakshis* sensuously entwined.

Such *yakshas* and *yakshis* turn up in the MAHABHARATA and the RAMAYANA, and in greater numbers in the PURANAS and in the works of such great SAN-

SKRIT poets as KALIDASA and BHAVABHUTI. The earliest Indian sculptures, which tend to be Buddhist (c. 200 B.C.E.), are replete with *yaksas* and *yakshis*; they are well known in Buddhist literature as well.

Yakshas also appear in Jain sculpture and literature (see JAINISM). Some Jain temples show *yakshis* particularly in subsidiary shrines. Finally, in the Hindu *puranas*, *yakshas* are also frequently encountered. In physical form they tend to be very handsome or beautiful, and they are very prosperous as well. KUBERA, the god of wealth, is always depicted as attended by *yaksas*.

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Yama

Yama is the Indian god of death and the underworld. He is the son of Visvasvat, the Sun. In the VEDAS he is seen as the first mortal to die and thereby becomes king of the world of the dead. According to the Atharva Veda, he is accompanied by two four-eyed dogs in his realm. There he dwells with the ancestors, who receive offerings of food from men.

In the Vedic context, the realm of the dead is quite unlike the Christian hell; it is an afterworld of satisfaction and pleasures. One verse of the RIG VEDA mentions Yama's twin sister, Yami, who asks him to mate with her to create the human race. Yama refuses.

The ancient Iranian Avesta knows Yama by the name Yima. In later *puranic* descriptions Yama's realm is depicted less pleasantly; karmic retributions are even meted out (see KARMA). Yama in his role as guardian of the realm of the dead appears in many contexts in Indian tradition. In the KATHA UPANISHAD he offers the wisdom of BRAHMAN, ATMAN, and liberation to the young NACHIKETAS. In the MAHABHARATA he plays an important role in the story of SAVITRI and Satyavan.

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yama

The eightfold path (ASHTANGA) of Patanjali's yoga stresses observance of the "five yamas" or moral restraints: *AHIMSA*, avoiding causing pain or injury to any creature; *satya*, speaking the truth; *asteya*, not stealing; *BRAHMACHARYA*, sexual abstinence; and *aparigraha*, not being acquisitive. All of these restraints are developed to ever higher levels as YOGA progresses, so that "speaking the truth" becomes a struggle to avoid even the desire to lie.

Though some say that these constraints are not part of yoga per se, in fact a focus on these constraints is a common yogic practice. Furthermore, the other branches or elements of the eightfold path such as "concentration" (*dharana*) are seen as enhancing and perfecting the *yamas*.

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Yamuna (Jumna) River

The Yamuna River flows past Delhi and past the sacred sites of Mathura and BRINDAVAN and meets the GANGES at ALLAHABAD (Prayag). The deity

Yamuna is seen as a GODDESS mounted on a tortoise, carrying a blue lotus, a fly whisk, and a water pot. (A beautiful sandstone statue of her is found at Aihole in Karnataka, dating from the seventh century.) Sometimes Yamuna is understood to be the sister of the god of death, YAMA. One of the greatest Indian festivals, the KUMBHA MELA, is celebrated at the conjunction of the Yamuna and the Ganges.

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yantra

A *yantra* is a meditative and ritual drawing or design used particularly in Indian TANTRIC YOGA. It is almost always drawn with colored powder on the floor or ground in a ritual process. It is usually a geometric pattern, with flowers or flower petals. Once it is completed, a MEDITATION is performed, focusing on the center of the *yantra*, which is most often the *BINDU*, a condensed point of consciousness out of which the universe is seen to evolve.

The *yantra* is usually seen as the subtle form of the divinity; when one creates a *yantra* one manifests an alternative form of the totality of the divinity for more focused ritual and worship. In ritual and meditation, one moves outward from the *bindu* to the other aspects and junctures of the design. Or, one may begin at the outer edge of the design and work inward toward the *bindu*. The *yantra* may in certain circumstances be worshipped in and of itself and in other circumstances will form a part of a much larger ritual. As with most tantric rituals, these are rarely performed in public.

Sometimes *yantras* are referred to as *mandalas*. The SRI YANTRA is sometimes called Sri Chakra. Buddhism and JAINISM also use *yantras*, though in Buddhism they will generally be referred to as *mandalas*.

Further reading: Madhu Khanna, *Yantra, the Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2003); P. H. Pott, *Yoga and Yantra: Their Interrelation and Their Significance for Indian Archaeology*. Translated from the Dutch by Rodney Needham (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1966); S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Sri-Chakra: Its Yantra, Mantra, and Tantra* (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1982).

Yantra, Sri

The Sri YANTRA, or Sri Chakra, is an important cult object for the Sri VIDYA tradition of TANTRISM. It is understood as being the subtle form of the goddess Sri Lalita.

The yantra's geometric design combines five downward-pointing triangles representing the Goddess, or SHAKTI, with four upward-pointing triangles representing SHIVA. In the "nine circuits," all the parts of the design are worshipped in turn: the junctures of the triangles, the central BINDU, certain outlying features such as circles of lotus



Sri Yantra, symbol of the Goddess and ritual design for meditation

petals, and the outer border that looks like a set of four entrances to a temple. The process can either begin with the *bindu* and work out to the edge, or follow the opposite path.

A new Sri Chakra is always carefully drawn whenever a *PUJA* to Sri Yantra is performed. The *pujas* that are done in this tradition are always performed privately, except for *pujas* done to the few large Sri Yantras found in select temples. An example is the KANCHIPURAM temple to Kamakshi, who is sometimes identified with Sri Lalita. In this temple there is a very large Sri Yantra that is worshipped by a designated priest in a secret way. This ritual is never witnessed by anyone, except the priest.

Further reading: Madhu Khanna, *Yantra, the Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2003); S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Sri-Chakra: Its Yantra, Mantra, and Tantra* (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1982); S. Shankaranarayanan, *Sri Chakra* (Pondicherry: Dipti, 1970).

Yashoda

Yashoda is the cowherd woman, wife of Nanda, who became the foster mother of KRISHNA. The evil king Kamsa had determined to kill the first male child of Krishna's mother, DEVAKI, wife of his minister VASUDEVA, to avoid a prophecy that he would die at the hand of a son of Devaki. By divine intervention, when Krishna was born, all of the king's guards who kept watch over the couple fell asleep and he was delivered to Yashoda, who raised him. Yashoda has a special place in Krishna worship; poems and songs to her and of her can be found in every part of India.

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age Dramas from Brindavan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Yasodhara Ashram Society See [RADHA, SWAMI SHIVANANDA](#).

Yayati See [DEVAYANI AND YAYATI](#).

yoga (yogi, yogini)

Yoga is an ancient Hindu practice and belief system that aims at releasing the adept from the bonds of the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. The word *yoga* is derived from the root *yuj*, “to yoke,” probably because the early practice concentrated on restraining or “yoking in” the senses. Later the name was also seen as a metaphor for “linking” or “yoking to” God or the divine.

The earliest form of yoga may have been the Jain yoga (c. 900 B.C.E.), which involved severe sensual denial and restraint (see [JAINISM](#)). To free the soul from birth and rebirth Jains felt it was necessary to restrain the senses completely so as to be beyond both “love” and “hate,” or more accurately, beyond any positive or negative emotion. The early Jain monks and [TIRTHANKARAS](#) (perfected beings) would train themselves to ignore the body completely and to train the mind to ignore even the strongest positive and negative stimuli. The details of these ancient Jain practices are lost to us. Jain yoga today is focused more on restraining oneself to prevent injury to any living being, which was always a concern in that tradition.

An element of worldly denial has always been part of all yoga, and even today yogis can be found who perform extreme feats of restraint. Yoga of this sort is ultimately about controlling all bodily functions, so that even the autonomic nervous system can be under the adept’s control. When [SWAMI RAMA](#) first traveled to the United States in the 1970s, he demonstrated such control by stopping his heart completely for more than a minute while being attached to a heart monitor.

The [BUDDHA](#)’s yoga (c. 600 B.C.E.) was created specifically to counter the earlier push toward complete bodily denial. He declared that mental control was the final object of yoga and did not need to be accomplished by hurting the body. Central to his yoga were watching of the breath and observing of the sensations of the body.

The [UPANISHADS](#) (c. 900–300 B.C.E.) do not discuss yoga per se, but they point toward a mental practice that aims to realize the unity of one’s own self with the ultimate Self. This yoga is known as [JNANA YOGA](#), sometimes called “the Yoga of Knowledge.” Nothing is said about postures and only one Upanishad speaks of sitting in a quiet place to meditate. A form of [MEDITATION](#), however, seems to have been central to this type of yoga. A number of passages in the Upanishads imply both bodily denial and attention to the breath.

The [BHAGAVAD GITA](#) (c. 200 B.C.E.) makes the first mention of a yoga that uses focus on God as the central practice (in the later [YOGA SUTRA](#), a focus on God is an adjunct practice to the central disciplines). The yoga developed in the [Bhagavad Gita](#) was called “devotional yoga,” or [BHAKTI YOGA](#). One focused one’s mind in the same yogic way as in other practices, but one used God as a focus point for all consciousness. Nowadays the chanting of the [Gita](#) itself or other texts will be part of the practice.

The [Bhagavad Gita](#) also contains the earliest reference to [KARMA YOGA](#)—in which the focus is on good conduct in the world. One acts in a disinterested way without regard to the fruits of one’s actions. This makes everyday life a form of yoga. [MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI](#) considered this the most important yoga; he wrote extensively about this practice.

The [ASHTANGA](#) (eight-limbed) [YOGA](#) of [PATANJALI](#) (c. second century C.E.) involved a sitting yoga, sometimes called [raja yoga](#), which focused on breathing. As one observed the breath, one developed ways of concentrating the mind and eventually controlling the mind. [ASANAS](#), or postures, are well developed in today’s versions of

PATANJALI yoga, but his Yoga Sutra does not list any postures; these may have been later additions to the practice, or they may have developed separately and then merged with the Patanjalian school. There are strong resemblances between the practices found in the early Buddhist texts and those found in Patanjali.

HATHA YOGA is an amalgam of practices that may have emerged separately and were later combined. It includes the basic practices that can be found in Patanjali as well as postures. The term *hatha* originally meant “violent,” and it is possible that this style of yoga originated in certain types of severe yoga that were softened for protection of the body.

In some systems hatha yoga includes KUNDALINI YOGA as part of its path. The focus of breath control becomes the “serpent” or “Goddess Energy” (kundalini) at the base of the spine, which must be awakened and forced upward to pierce the psychic centers or CHAKRAS that run parallel to the spine. The NADIS or subtle bodily channels are used to guide breath into the central spinal channel to help the raising of the kundalini through the centers. Finally, the rising kundalini meets the god SHIVA at a point above the head called SAHASRARA CHAKRA. This meeting provokes absolute enlightenment. Kundalini yoga practice itself can vary; the kundalini methods used in hatha yoga are somewhat different from those used in TANTRA yoga.

Tantra is the most esoteric of all of the yogas. All yogas, and in fact all paths toward spiritual advance in the Indian tradition, depend upon the guidance of a GURU. However, the tantra yoga practices are so complicated and often dangerous that a guru is of the utmost importance. The basic realization of tantra yoga is that the phenomenal world is nothing but the divine truth—the transcendent and the earthly divinity are one and the same. Whereas other yogas look toward a retreat from the sensual, tantra plunges into the dangers of the senses in order to reach the highest realization.

This is true in particular of the notorious practices of “left-handed” tantra. In the process of

worship the devotee (most often a male) drinks alcohol, eats the forbidden beef, and has sexual intercourse with a low-caste partner or “goddess.” The sexual union is seen as the union of the divinity in its transcendent form with the divinity in its mundane aspect. The practice aims to produce an understanding of the divinity in its totality. Alcohol too helps teach about the “bliss” of the infinite. Eating forbidden beef and other acts normally thought as “polluting” teach that even the dirt and refuse in the world are essentially divine. “Right-handed” tantra yoga does not resort to these forbidden practices. It includes much ritual and chanting of MANTRAS to guide the consciousness to its chosen goal.

Apart from these general categories of yoga, many specialized disciplines have emerged, including KRIYA YOGA and Integral Yoga (see Sri AUROBINDO).

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Yogananda, Paramahansa (1893–1952)
kriya yoga teacher and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship

The founder of the influential SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP (SRF), Paramahansa Yogananda was one of the most successful missionaries for yoga in the West.

Born Mukunda Lal Ghosh on January 5, 1893, into an affluent Bengali family in Gorakhpur,

Paramahansa Yogananda learned Hindu spirituality early in life. His father, a railway executive, was a disciple of LAHIRI MAHASAYA, one of those who revived *KRIYA YOGA* in the 20th century. Mukunda relates that, as a child, he was healed by a photograph of Lahiri. After high school, Mukunda joined a hermitage in BENARES (Varanasi), the Sri Bharat Charma Mahamandal, where he met Sri YUKESWAR Giri. Sri Yukeswar gave him the vows of *SANNYAS* (renunciation) in the Shankaracharya Order, Giri branch, in 1914 and he became Yogananda, meaning the “bliss that comes from yoga.”

In 1916 he discovered the techniques of Yogoda, a system of life-energy control for physical and spiritual development, which, combined with traditional yoga, became the central concern of his teachings. Yogananda expressed a sustained interest in education. He attended Scottish Church College and later transferred to Serampore College to be near Yukteswar. In 1917, he founded a school for boys, Yogoda San-Sanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya, at Dihik, Bengal, and in 1918 moved the school to Ranchi. His school included high school subjects as well as yoga and MEDITATION.

In 1920 Yogananda went to the United States to speak at the International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston, where he remained to teach for three years. In 1924 he conducted a lecture tour of the United States that resulted in the establishment of several centers in his name. An American headquarters for these centers was set up at Mount Washington in Los Angeles. His personality was extremely effective in relaying his message and the ancient wisdom of India to a Western audience.

Yogananda taught *kriya yoga*, which he describes as a scientific technique for God-realization. The practice is conveyed in an initiation ceremony and involves meditation and visualization. His approach to *kriya yoga* is presented as a form of raja yoga but also includes concepts and exercises similar to those of KUNDALINI YOGA.

Yogananda originally called his work the Yogoda Satsang Society, but, in 1935, he incorpo-



Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), master of *kriya yoga* and founder of Self-Realization Fellowship (Courtesy Self-Realization Fellowship, Encinitas, California)

rated his organization as the Self-Realization Fellowship. His lectures were collected into a home correspondence course for students to study in any location. Also in 1935, he visited India for the last time and was given the title *Paramahansa*, meaning “great swan,” because his guru recognized that Yogananda had reached the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* (irrevocable God-union).

Once back in the United States, Yogananda wrote his most famous book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, perhaps the most widely read account of a Hindu teacher, published in 1946. His account is an absorbing story of a search for truth, interwoven with explanations of the subtle laws by which yogis perform miracles and attain self-mastery. He describes his years of training in India under Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri and his meetings with exceptional persons of the

age, including Mohandas Karamchand GANDHI, Luther Burbank, Therese Neumann, and Rabin-dranath TAGORE. In 1942 he opened the Church of All Religions in Hollywood and later the Self-Realization Lake Shrine and Mahatma Gandhi World Peace Memorial in Pacific Palisades, California. Self-Realization Fellowship is currently headed by Sri Daya MATA at Mount Washington, California.

His death on March 7, 1952, was noted by his disciples as an extraordinary event because of the “absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda . . . even twenty days after his death, according to a notarized testimony from Forest Lawn Mortuary in Glendale, California.”

Further reading: Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1971); ———, *Whispers from Eternity* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1958); ———, *Yogoda* (Boston: Yogoda Satsang Society, 1924); *Paramahansa Yogananda, in Memoriam* (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1958).

Yoga Sutra

The Yoga Sutra of PATANJALI outlining ASHTANGA YOGA is the earliest and most important text of the HATHA YOGA, or “posture yoga,” tradition. It is dated around the second century C.E. The SUTRA designation refers to the text style: a collection of very concise lines that often need further explanation to be understood fully. The Yoga Sutra totals 195 sutras divided into four books: Book I is on concentration; Book II outlines the practice and means of reaching the highest goals; Book III details powers gained in the practice of yoga, including supranormal powers; Book IV describes various aspects of the nature of things but particularly the nature of the liberated state. Scholars believe the four chapters may have been written at different times, but all the hatha yoga traditions consider them to be a single authoritative text.

Book I begins with a definition: “Yoga is the practice of ceasing the false identification with the fluctuations of the mind.” It then lists the types of mental fluctuations and discusses how to curb their influence on the self, soul, or *PURUSA*. It deals with types of concentration (*dharana*), the obstacles that get in the way, and methods of overcoming them. Finally, it discusses God as a special self and presents the goal of a stable mind and attaining undisturbed calm.

Book II begins with methods for overcoming the mental “afflictions,” things that cause distractions. It discusses the origin of KARMA, the causes of sorrow or pain, how to escape these through yoga, the eight branches of yoga (Ashtanga Yoga), abstentions (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), postures (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), and withdrawal of sense organs from their objects (*pratyahara*).

Book III begins by discussing the internal practices of yoga, including MEDITATION (*dhyana*) and various levels of concentration, including SAMADHI, the highest. It goes on to discuss seedless concentration (i.e., concentration without an object) and different categories of mental tranquility. Finally it discusses the attributes and powers one can achieve through these practices, including supernormal powers.

Book IV discusses philosophy, including arguments against other Indian philosophical systems. It ends with a discussion of the highest state of liberation and tranquility.

The Yoga Sutra is usually studied together with the ancient commentary of Vedavyasa (VYASA), which expands in detail upon each of the subjects covered in the brief sutras. Most yoga schools rely on this commentary explicitly or implicitly. There are many subcommentaries to the commentary of Vedavyasa, which are used by different schools in support of their particular practices.

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Metaphysical Schematic: Purusa and Prakriti in the Yogasūtra, Adyar Library Pamphlet Series, no. 55 (Chennai: Adyar Library and Research Centre, 2001); Ian Whicher and David Carpenter, eds., *Yogas: The Indian Tradition* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga-System of Patanjali*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 17 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972).

Yogendra, Sri (1897–1989) *pioneer teacher of hatha yoga*

Sri Yogendra was one of the important figures in the modern revival of HATHA YOGA, both in India and in the UNITED STATES. He founded the Yoga Institute and helped provide a scientific basis for the practice of yoga.

Yogendra was born on November 18, 1897, as Manibhai Harihai Desai in rural Gujarat, India. As a student at St. Xavier's College in Bombay (Mumbai), he met his GURU, Paramahansa Madhavadasaji. After several years, however, he ceased to be a disciple. Desai did not wish to lead a celibate life; instead, he wished to find out whether there could be a scientific underpinning for the practice of hatha yoga. In 1918 he founded the Yoga Institute of India.

In 1919, Desai, who had by this time assumed the name *Yogendra*, moved to the United States to work with several medical doctors who shared his interest in the yogic arts. Among the people he met was Benedict LUST (1872–1945), founder of the new medical system called naturopathy. Lust saw the value of hatha yoga for his work and studied it with Yogendra. Along with the early experiments on yoga, Yogendra completed his first books while in America: *Light on Hatha Yoga* and a volume on Rabindranath TAGORE.

In 1922 Yogendra returned to India. He planned a second visit to the United States in order to continue the research, but in 1924 Congress passed new immigration laws that prevented Asians from entering the country and Yogendra was not allowed to visit again. Lust

was left to spread the practice of hatha yoga on his own.

Unable to continue his work in America, Yogendra threw himself into the task of building his Yoga Institute. He provided his own funding with royalties from his invention of a new type of boot polish. He found a helpmate in the form of Sita Devi, whom he married in 1927.

The 1930s became a time of significant expansion. A magazine, the *Journal of the Yoga Institute* (now *Yoga and Total Health*), was launched, and Yogendra wrote several books on the basics of hatha yoga, a practice that had largely disappeared over the centuries in India. Yogendra continued his efforts to present hatha yoga practice to the United States by working with an American student, Theos Bernard (1908–47), whose Ph.D. dissertation for Columbia University was eventually published as *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience* (1943). (See BERNARD, PIERRE ARNOLD.)

After the disruptions of World War II, Yogendra purchased land in Mumbai as a permanent home for the institute. In the 1950s, the institute began to build a global reputation through the steady arrival of Westerners to study there. Yogendra continued to write, turning out a series of books. He was active well into his eighties, but in 1985 turned over directorship of the institute to his eldest son, Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra.

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Yogoda Satsang Society See YOGANANDA, PARAMAHANSA.

yoni

The *yoni* (vagina or womb), seen as the embodiment of the great GODDESS, is worshipped in

emblematic form in many Indian traditions. It can take the form of a pot or other vessel, a cleft rock, or a pond, lake, or pool. In certain esoteric rituals, a human vagina is worshipped directly. The association of female genitals with the divine female principle, and the correlation of women's reproductive and sexual cycles with the Earth's seasonal and vegetative cycles, have given the *yoni* cosmological significance.

Considered the gateway between life and death, as well as the generative force behind all existence, the *yoni* has had special importance particularly in the *KAULA*, *SHAKTA*, and *TANTRA* traditions. However, even ordinary Shaivite devotees worship the *yoni* together with the *SHIVA LINGAM* (phallus); the popular icon consists of a rounded stone shaft placed upright on a horizontal circular base that forms the *yoni*.

All of these practices are probably based on pre-Vedic, prepatriarchal civilizations. Many female figurines have been discovered in a pre-Harappan site in the Zhob Valley dating to the midfourth millennium B.C.E. Many of these figures had pronounced breasts and *yonis*, perhaps signifying their generative function. Cowry shells, a common representation of the vulva, were also found at these sites. Scholars believe women most likely used these objects in rituals, perhaps together with their own menstrual and sexual fluids, in order to ensure a fruitful harvest.

Numerous seals, ritual objects, and *yoni/lingam* structures from the later *INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATIONS* of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa also point to an early understanding of the sanctity of female sexuality and its association with the Earth's fertility. Reverence of the female principle and the belief that it controls the perpetuation of the human and vegetative life cycles seems to lie at the base of these civilizations.

In the fourth century C.E., the cult of the goddess Lajja Gauri arose across the subcontinent. The most well-known images depict a woman with her legs bent and open and her vulva completely exposed. Often, her head has been replaced

with a pot filled with vegetation. In some depictions vegetation emerges from her *yoni*. These iconographical representations of the Goddess seem to have originated in the early Indus Valley, or even pre-Indus Valley civilizations. Lajja Gauri and another goddess of vegetation, Sakhambhari, are worshipped today as the embodiment and generator of fertility, fortune, abundance, and life-force energy, qualities that are also associated with the *yoni*. The Goddess in general is conceived as the elemental source of all animal and plant life, as creative power personified.

Creative female sexual power is represented in various symbols even today. The lotus has become a quintessential symbol of the *yoni*. In *SHAKTA* and *TANTRA* texts, the *yoni*, as is the lotus, is a symbol of perfection, symmetry, and beauty. In Hindu cosmology waters are considered the perennial source and equated with the Goddess's womb. As the lotus rests on the water and remains unsaturated by water, not soiled by mud, to Shakta tantrics, so the *yoni* remains perpetually pure.

In Hindu architecture, the temple is conceived as a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic whole. The inner sanctum of Hindu temples, regardless of religious sect, is called the *garbhagriha*, which means "womb-house." In Guwahati, Assam, at the site of the Kamarupa Temple, the Goddess in her form as the Great Yoni is worshipped. Here she is worshipped in aniconic form as a dark wet rock over which a natural spring flows. Each summer this water turns red and is worshipped as the Goddess's menstrual blood.

KAMAKHYA, in Assam, is a *PILGRIMAGE* site to Shaktas, Kaulas, and Tantrikas who worship a woman's menstrual blood as the sacred and potent elixir of life. In these traditions, women's menstrual cycles relate to processes of the universe. The body itself is considered the link between earth and cosmos, a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic whole. In *Kaula*, *Shakta*, and *tantric cosmogony* women play a divine role due

to the nature of their sex. In these ideologies liberation (*MOKSHA*) is possible to humans within this lifetime, but only through ritual sexual practices and the worship of the *yoni*, female sexual fluids, and menstrual blood.

In the first section of the Yoni Tantra, Shiva tells DEVI, the Goddess, that all gods and their power of creation, maintenance, and destruction originate in the *yoni*. In the Yoni Tantra the Mahavidyas, 10 tantric goddesses of spiritual liberation, are each associated with different parts of the *yoni*.

The tantric Sri Chakra cult also gives special importance to the *yoni*. The main iconic emblem of the Goddess, the SRI YANTRA, is composed of interlocking triangles. Five of these, symbolizing the *yoni*, point downward; the other four, symbolizing the LINGAM, point upward, in reference to the union of feminine and masculine qualities and representing the mysteries of creation and destruction.

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Yudhishtira

Yudhishtira, “he who is steadfast in war,” is the oldest of the five PANDAVAS brothers of the MAHABHARATA story. He is the son of Kunti by the god Dharma. Yudhishtira has a prominent place in the story. He is addicted to gambling and, therefore, the source of sorrow for his brothers and their

mutual wife DRAUPADI. Twice he loses in dice to the brothers’ rivals the KAURAVAS; on the second occasion he loses everything, forcing the Pandavas and their wife into 13 years of exile. Generally, however, Yudhishtira is regarded as wise, righteous, and pure and is given the title “king of the right” (*dharmaraja*).

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Yuga

In Hindu cosmology a Yuga, or “Age,” is the smallest unit of cosmological time. Four Yugas make up one MAHAYUGA, or Great Age: the Golden Age (KRITA, or Satya, YUGA), the Silver Age (TRETA YUGA), the Bronze Age (DVAPARA YUGA), and the Iron Age (KALI YUGA, no connection with the goddess Kali). The Yugas are named after an ancient dice game, in which a 1, or *kale*, was the worst throw and a 4, or *krita* (literally, the one that makes it!), is the best.

The Yugas decrease in duration: Satya Yuga lasts 1,728,000 years, Treta 1,296,000 years, Dvapara 864,000 years, and Kali 432,000 years. The figures are sometimes given in “god-years,” each divine year equal to 360 human years. Then the Satya Yuga is 4,800 divine years; the Treta Yuga 3,600 divine years; the Dvapara Yuga 2,400 divine years; and the Kali Yuga 1,200 divine years. Each Mahayuga totals 12,000 divine years.

As the Yugas follow one another, every aspect of human life suffers a decline, including human height, longevity, and morality. We are currently in the Kali Yuga, the most corrupt of the ages. At its end, a new Satya Yuga will begin. Mahayugas

follow one another cyclically; after a long series, the universe undergoes a dissolution, or *pralaya*. After this interlude, the progression of the Yugas resumes. The process goes on to infinity. Jain tradition has a similar progression of ages with different names.

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Yukteswar, Sri (1855–1936) *kriya yoga* teacher

Sri Yukteswar was an important link in the lineage that revived *KRIYA YOGA*, especially through his pupil Paramahansa YOGANANDA.

Priya Nath Karar was born in 1855 in Serampore, a suburb of Calcutta (Kolkata). He received his primary education at a modern English school and was later admitted into Calcutta University but left the university when he found his physics teacher to be incompetent. He continued to study informally by auditing classes in physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, and anatomy at the Calcutta Medical College. Especially talented in mathematics, he also studied astronomy and astrology. He would later become a famous spiritual teacher and astrologer. He married, but his wife died after giving birth to his daughter. As a widower, he cared for his daughter and widowed mother.

In 1883 he met LAHIRI MAHASAYA, who initiated him into the practice of *kriya yoga*. *Kriya* means "work," in this case a specific set of mental and physical practices for SELF-REALIZATION. He mastered the system and soon became a guru of *kriya yoga* himself.

Having been raised in Serampore, a center for Christian missionaries, Priya Nath was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Holy Bible and Jesus Christ. He wrote his own interpretation of

the Bhagavad Gita and also drew comparisons between the teachings of KRISHNA and the teachings of Christ.

In 1894 Priya Nath went to ALLAHABAD for the KUMBHA MELA, a PILGRIMAGE festival that occurs four times every 12 years, attended by millions of people from all over the world. Here he first met BABAJI, his teacher's teacher, a semilegendary saint who appeared and reappeared at long intervals. Although not yet a *SANNYASI* (renunciant), he was honored as such by Babaji. In this encounter, Babaji encouraged Priya Nath to write about the similarities in the Hindu and Christian traditions, certain that the West could benefit from learning of these connections. Babaji assured him that they would meet again when the book was finished; indeed, when *Kaivalya Darshanam, the Holy Science*, was published, Babaji appeared under a tree near where Priya Nath took his daily bath in the GANGES River.

By the early 1900s Priya Nath was teaching to wider audiences; in 1902 he established Sat Sanga Sabha, a religious cultural institution that offered educational, social, and spiritual programs, including courses in *kriya yoga* and the Yogashastras. At this time, he received the vows of *SANNYAS* and was given the name Swami Sri Yukteshvar Giri (union with God) by Swami Krishna Dayal Giri. In 1913, he met his student Mukunda Lal, later known as YOGANANDA, and later bestowed on him the title of *Paramahansa* (great swan). Yukteswar took *mahasamadhi* (died) in 1936 while meditating in the lotus position. His body is buried in his ASHRAM; his tomb has become a sacred place for initiates of *kriya yoga*.

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