
UNIT 1 INDIC RELIGIONS: HINDUISM, JAINISM AND BUDDHISM

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The religions of Indian origin have some features common to them. A broad feature is that all the religions want to uplift the individual, and liberate him from the cycle of births and deaths. These religions address the individual need, rather than the divine command, as in the case of Semitic religions. Religion provides an aid to the individual, a means to overcome the cycle of eternal rebirth, and provide means of achieving it. The cycle of births and deaths is not caused by external factors, but by the individual action, which is called *Karma*, which, when translated loosely would mean 'deed'. The individual has to work, through the guidance provided by the religion, to escape the cycle of births and deaths, and attain 'Moksha' or 'Nirvana,' or 'Kaivalya' (liberation / Salvation), as per his approach.

The place of worship in these religions is a shrine, where people congregate, and address the deity on an individual capacity, not in a group. Thus, these religions differ from Christianity and Islam, where people congregate and are addressed by speakers from the pulpit. Many thinkers in India, like Tilak, and leaders of "Prarthana Samaj" thought that it is a weakness of Hindu religion, and tried to make it a congregating religion, by organising Ganesh Puja, and mass prayers. Gandhi also used to hold prayer meetings. Also, Indic religions do not have the concept of believer and non-believer, and do not try to attract people to their religion. They address only the individual good, and accept all religions to be true and have different ways to achieve salvation.

Gandhi was born in a traditional Hindu family, with the society having a Jain ethos. Hence his individual values are Hindu and Jain, predominantly. He was educated in the West, and hence his work ethic is western. When he launched 'Satyagraha', it was a device where an individual demanded the truth on an individual basis for a social purpose.

Aims and objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The main sources and thrust of Indic religions, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.
- The main precepts of these religions
- How Gandhi's view of life was shaped by these religions
- The roots of Gandhi's eclectic philosophy.

1.2 HINDUISM: SOURCES AND BASIC DOCTRINES

The word, 'Hindu' is derived from the word 'Sindhu', the main river in undivided India. The inhabitants of the riverbanks were called 'Hindus' in Parsi language, and the religion followed by them is known as Hinduism. Compared to Semitic religions, Hinduism is diverse, multi-faceted religion, which can be easily described as a way of life.

Sources of Hinduism

Prasthanatrayi: Three works (in Sanskrit referred to as Prasthanatrayi) are considered to be the authoritative works for Hinduism, like the Bible for Christianity and Qur'an for the Muslims. They are, *firstly* Vedas and specially Upanishads, which come at the end of Vedas, both literally and as essence. The authorship of Vedas is not known, and they are considered 'Apourusheya', meaning that they were not composed by any man, but inherited by a divine transmission. Vedas also contain, in addition to Upanishads, Mantras (poetic compositions), Brahmanas (dealing with ritualistic aspects) and Aranyakas (forest treatises).

Second authoritative work is "Brahmasutra", which is said to have been authored by Badarayana Vyasa. It contains aphorisms, and all the three leading philosophical schools of Hinduism, Advaita (non-dualism), Visishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism), and Dvaita (dualism) have learned treatises written by the leading proponents and teachers of these schools, commenting on the aphorisms found in this text. The commentaries of these three Acharyas (teachers) on Brahmasutra are the foundation of philosophy of these schools.

The *third* authoritative work is Bhagavad Gita, which is literally a part of the great epic, Mahabharata. The Author is Badarayana Vyasa, and it is in the form of dialogue between Krishna, whom the Indian tradition considers to be the Godhead, and Arjuna, the warrior prince. This work, whose title means 'song divine' has inspired many, including Gandhi.

Smriti: Smriti (meaning memory) is a collection of works that lay down the law codes, rules regarding social and personal behaviour, inter-relationship between man and society etc. Well known among them is the Manu Smriti, which is often quoted and referred all over India. Smriti literature contains Dharmashastra, as it gives the rules to follow the Dharma.

Puranas: In addition to these three authoritative works, there are *eighteen Puranas*, (ancient treatises), out of which *Bhagavata Purana* is famous. It contains the accounts of the God's ten incarnations, which includes Krishna's incarnation.

Epics: There are *two epics*, Ramayana (tale of Rama), and Mahabharata. The latter contains within it the Bhagavad Gita, one of the three authorities. The Epics are widely read, and incidents in it are quoted as examples.

Schools of Philosophy: There are six schools of philosophy, known as Darshanas (Darshana means an aid to see). They are Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. They are divided into two groups: one material, and another, theist. There are commentaries on these Darshanas, which have been written in the form of aphorisms. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* is the work on one of the Darshanas, Yoga.

Varna system: Varnashrama, or the concept of stage of life depending on one's vocation, is also found in the dharmashastras. The concept is that each man should follow a vocation as per his Varna (literally meaning colour), which are four in number, namely, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Varna is supposed to be based on the kind of work one does, and the skill (guna and Karma). Vocation, based on Varna is not ordained by birth, as per Dharmashastras. For example, agriculture and animal husbandry could be practised by people of all the four Varnas, without any restriction. Also, in the time of distress, people could follow vocations outside their Varna, with some restrictions (Apad Dharma).

Ashrama: Ashrama refers to one's stage in life. There are four ashramas- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. First is the learning stage, second the householder's stage, third after the completion of householder's duty proceeding to the forest for tapasya (meditation) for realisation of self and the final stage is freeing oneself from all the social bondage.

Purushartha: Purushartha concept is also in the Dharmashastras. And it means that a man (or a woman) has to do a deed, which results in a worthy act. The four Purusharthas are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Vyasa is of the opinion that both Artha (wealth) and Kama (desire) have to be practised to achieve Dharma (righteousness in life.). Moksha is the salvation from the cycle of births and deaths, and it is the last Purushartha. Thus, it was ordained that a man should work to achieve these goals, all the time.

1.3 HINDUISM AND GANDHI

Gandhi was a strong believer in Hinduism, which he called the 'Sanatana Dharma' (the eternal religion). He wrote, "Hinduism of my conception is no narrow creed. It is a grand evolutionary process as ancient as time, and embraces the teachings of Zoroaster, Moeses, Christ, Mohammad, Nanak, and other prophets I could name." Then, he quotes a verse from Manusmriti, which translates as follows:

"Know that the true religion is one which the wise and the good and those who are ever free from passion and hate follow and which appeals to heart". (CWMG, vol.75, p.375).

Gandhi defined 'Hindu' in *Young India* of 14-10-1926. According to him, a Hindu is one who believes in

- God
- Immortality of the soul
- Transmigration
- Law of Karma
- Moksha

And one who practises:

- Truth and Ahimsa in daily life;
- Cow -protection in its widest sense;
- Tries to act according to the laws of Varnashrama.

Gandhi had read the classics early in life, from 1907, onwards, but his intense study of the scriptures happened when he was in the Yerawada jail, near Pune, from March, 1922 to February, 1924. His jail diary indicates that he read about 150 books, most of which were classics, including scriptures. At that time, he was 54 years old, young enough to exert and old enough to understand.

Gandhi's view of scriptures may look very personal and revolutionary, but he had his own way of interpreting the ancient texts and scriptures. To an American, who subscribed herself as a lifelong friend of India, he wrote, "non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. I do not regard Jainism and Buddhism as separate from Hinduism" (Young India, 20-10-1927).

The influence of Bhagavad Gita on Gandhi was enormous. "I have studied Bible, Koran, Zend Avesta, and other scriptures of the world with the same reverence that I have given to Gita. They have illuminated many a passage in the Gita."

'I run to mother Gita whenever I find myself in difficulties and up to now she has never failed to comfort me' (Young India, 13-11-1930). He called Gita his spiritual dictionary, for it never failed him in distress, and he found it was free from sectarianism and dogma, and had universal appeal (Harijan, 16-2-39).

The characters in the epics did have influence on him. Harishchandra captures his heart, for his principled effort to keep his word. Gandhi asks why not everyone should be truthful like Harishchandra. He also quotes the examples of Rama and Pandavas, who kept their word by undergoing all difficulties. He cites the examples of Prahlad, Sudama, Dhruva, and Shrivana, who gave up all worldly comforts for the sake of virtuous principles.

Of Mahabharata, Gandhi says that it is like a rich diamond mine, from which the deeper you dig the more diamonds you find. He was of the opinion that the burden of Ramayana and Mahabharata is to teach Ahimsa (letter to P.D. Gupta, 19.11.26). He has repeatedly said that both Ramayana and Mahabharata tell the story of the victory of the good over evil.

In the issue of *Navajivan*, dated 6.2.1921, Gandhi vehemently declared that he is a Sanatani Hindu, or a Hindu as ordained by Scriptures. At that time, a movement against orthodox Hinduism was building up through Brahma Samaj and Prarthana Samaj; Gandhi had no hesitation in declaring that he is a 'Sanatani Hindu'. He states that he possesses in some measure the qualities described in Narsimha Mehta's song, 'Vaishnavajana', and strives to perfect and cultivate the qualities of the Vaishnava. So, he says, "I do not therefore, hesitate to call myself with all firmness, though humbly, a strict Sanatani Hindu and a Vaishnava."

At the same time, Gandhi's views were iconoclastic, and rebellious. He says that he has understood the Shastras from the view of Dharma. He says that it is possible to attain Moksha (salvation) without reading the Vedas. He also says that the Shastras are not above reason and any Shashtra, which reason cannot follow, can be rejected.

Gandhi has his own views on Varnashrama. He said that he believed that there are no more than four Varnas. He believed that one acquired the caste by birth, and even though one acquires the qualities and character of another, the body does not cease to belong to his Varna. He expressed his desire to cleanse the Hinduism of the caste distinctions that crept in it. He held that Hinduism has sinned by giving sanction to untouchability.

Gandhi did not formally study the Upanishads, but many Upanishads were under his regular study and reference. In the Ashram prayers, part of Isa Upanishad, which, when translated, reads as follows, was recited everyday.

“Enveloped by the Consciousness is everything whatever that fluctuates in the universe. Therefore, enjoy with renunciation and do not covet what is due to others.”

The Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad gave him the concept of supremacy of Dharma over the Khshatra, the temporal power, and even the weak can overcome the strong, with the help of Satya, which is based on Dharma. Taittiriya Aranyaka, which he refers, says that everything is founded on Dharma, the highest good that drives away evil. And Satya and Ahimsa are traditionally identified with Dharma, the cosmic law that governs the human conduct. Kenopanishad also had a profound influence on him.

1.4 JAINISM: SCHOOLS, VOWS AND BASIC DOCTRINES

Jainism, like Buddhism, started as a protestant religion against the ritualistic Hinduism. It claims great antiquity, and it is said that Aristhtanemi, the earliest monk and a teacher, died 84000 years before Mahaveera, the last “Teerthankara”, as the guru of ancient tradition in the Jain religion is known. Mahaveera was a contemporary of Buddha, but is not considered the founder of the religion, but the first teacher is said to be Rishabha, and Mahaveera is said to have been preceded by Parswa, in a line of 24 Tirthankaras.

Even though Jainism did not spread outside India, as it did not have preachers who could go overseas to spread the religion, it had a profound influence on life in India. It can be said that vegetarianism became the most accepted way of life in India, may be due to this religion. Also, emphasis on morals and ethics received a boost, as this religion had ethics as its main plank, and produced vast literature in all the languages upholding the path of morality and austerity.

Schools of Jainism

There are two schools within Jain religion, one being ‘Digambara’ (meaning space-clad, ie., wearing no clothes), and the other, ‘Swetambara’ (meaning white robed). There are no major doctrinaire differences between the two cults, except for small differences like writing down the scriptures and not writing them. Also, Digambaras, the more orthodox of the two schools, maintain that perfect saints like Tirthankaras live without food, and that a monk who owns any property or wears clothes cannot attain moksha, and that women cannot attain moksha (salvation). Later, after the two sects separated, about 84 different schools of Jainism came into existence, called ‘Gachhas’. They differed from one another only in minute details of conduct. Both the schools of Jainism have preserved their separate line of succession of teachers from Mahavira downwards. But for this, the relations between the two groups have been peaceful, and both have prospered due to their faith.

Metaphysical View

The Jain view of life is unique compared to other religions, in that it categorises living beings on the basis of senses. The plants and trees are supposed to have one sense, and worms are supposed to have two senses. At the highest scale, man who has mind or reason, has six senses, so do the 'devas'(gods) and the narakas (inhabitants of hell). In between, there are creatures having five senses, like all the animals having vertebrae. The four sensed beings possess all but intelligence. They are bees, butterflies, etc. The three sensed beings are ants, bugs, etc. In Jain philosophy, the four elements earth, water, fire and wind are animated. Thus, the whole world is full of living beings, and the whole space is packed with minute beings, called 'nigodas'. These 'nigodas' replace the space emptied by the souls that are liberated.

Further, the reality according to Jainism is of two types, *jiva* and *ajiva*. When liberated from Karma, the *jiva* is a pure spiritual being. If *jiva* is tainted by Karma, he becomes impure, just like the brightness of the lamp is reduced by soot. The *jiva*, when it comes under the influence of the Karmic forces, is like gold covered with rust. When the person attains the *jnana* (ultimate knowledge), he starts shining like gold from which rust has been removed. By practising the ethics, the *jiva* can get rid of the Karma, and get back his original purity.

The other part of reality, *ajiva*, consists of Dharma and Adharma, in addition to Pudgala, which means matter, and it is called 'astikaya' as it occupies space, and it is made of atoms, without size, and is eternal. The category of 'Akasha' is that entity which pervades the mundane universe (*loka*) and the transcendent region of the liberated souls (*aloka*), which allows the subsistence of all other substances like Dharma, Adharma, *jiva*, and Pudgala. The meaning of Dharma in Jainism is not as commonly understood in Hinduism, and does not have any ethical implications. Dharma means motion, and Adharma is state of rest, which gives rise to immobility. While Dharma and Adharma have attributes of extension, the time is infinite, just as the universe is eternal. The universe goes through a number of cycles over the period of time. Dharma is the condition under which movement takes place, like water, which permits the fish to swim in it. Adharma is the one, which makes the things stable, and gives rise to immobility.

Jainism takes a realistic, practical, and pluralistic view of reality. The concept of 'Ahimsa', 'Anekantavada' and 'Asceticism' are central to Jain philosophy:

1. **Ahimsa:** The doctrine of non-violence, non-injury, non-killing, is a major concept in the Jain philosophy. The concept is extended to such an extent that there should be no violence even against an enemy. Of Mahavira, the Sutras say, "Always well guarded, he bore the pains caused by grass, cold, fire, flies, and gnats. In his travel, when the dogs bit him, when he was struck with a stick, when they cut his flesh, he endured them all, undisturbed, proceeded on his way to Nirvana".

Ahimsa extends to all forms of life. It is the first among the five vows taught by Mahavira. A man should neither kill living beings, nor help others to do it. Hence as a precautionary measure, one should meditate on five things: carefulness in speech, carefulness of mind, in walking, in lifting and laying down things, and thoroughly seeing one's food and drink. Ahimsa produces the Karma that liberates one from the karmic elements, (that make one get struck in the cycle of birth and death).

All the monks and orthodox Jains practise the principle of Ahimsa even today. They strain

the water in white muslin before drinking it. The monks clean the area where they sit and where they walk, with a small broom, so that they do not harm the insects by stepping on them. They do not take food after the sunset, for the fear that they may not be able to see the food and water clearly, and by that act, they may harm the insects and lowly creatures.

The principle of ahimsa is not just borne out of compassion for the fellow creatures, but causes Karma that leads to the freedom from bondage.

Jainism has devised *five vows* and *three jewels* to get over the Karma that lands one in the cycle of births and deaths. Apart from the first vow, *Ahimsa* (non-violence), the second one is *Satya* (truthfulness), the third is *Asteya* (non-stealing), and fourth one is 'brahmacharya (abandoning lust for all kinds of things). And the last is 'aparigraha'(non-greed, non-attachment).

The five vows are to be practised according to the status of the individual. For a monk the vows are very strict and flexible for a householder. The strict practice is referred to as *mahavrata* and a relaxed interpretation of the rule for a householder is called *anuvrata*. For the householder *brahmacharya* means monogamy, and *aparigraha* means possession of only essential commodities. But a monk cannot own anything, and if he owns, he cannot attain salvation. He has to practise the five vows and three 'jewels', with care and caution, without any concession though it is slightly relaxed in the case of a householder. The monk has to aim at *kevala*, the perfect knowledge, or the knowledge par excellence, which liberates him from the cycle of births and death. All the vows and jewels are to be practised simultaneously, unlike in Hinduism, where one can choose one's own path according to his disposition.

The *three jewels* are *samyak darshana* (right faith), *samyak jnana* (right knowledge) and *samyak charita* (right character). A monk, or a householder, has to practice all the three jewels, and should not stray away from them, to escape from the 'Karma' that leads to bondage.

2. Anekantavada: Anekantavada is the central theme of Jain philosophy. It reconciles the stand of Vedanta philosophy that the nature of reality is unchangeable and that of Buddhism that there is no unchanging substance and everything is changing, and there is a universal flux (aniccha). It views reality as being pluralistic, and is expressing itself in many forms, and no absolute statement of reality is possible. Unlike Western dualistic approach, which states, 'either it is so or it is not', this Jain epistemology emphasises seven. i.e. *Sapta Bhangi* that are (seven situations), as following:

- a) A thing may be
- b) A thing may not be
- c) A thing may be or may not be
- d) May be is, but inexpressible or indescribable
- e) May be is not and inexpressible
- f) May be is, and not expressible
- g) May be is, is not, and inexpressible.

These seven situations exhaust the possibilities of reality, and lead to the spirit of free enquiry. This principle prevents intellectual arrogance, and gives person humility to listen to the argument of other person and appreciate it. The example of several blind men seeing the elephant, and each describing differently, one declaring that it is like a snake, feeling the tail, other saying that it is like a pillar, feeling the leg is the classic example of this perception. The complexity of the truth should make the seeker of truth humble, and make him accept the point of view of others with respect. This philosophy of the Jains contributed to the tolerance of different thoughts in India.

3. Asceticism: According to the Jain tenets, which are based on the ethics and *jewels* given above, asceticism should be followed all through life, not just in the fourth stage of life, as in Vedic religion. It does not mean that a person should lead a life devoid of joy and bliss, but lead a life in right path, which produces good results and prevents the person from indulging in bad Karma. Taking a practical view, it is advised to steer clear of the pitfalls, fully knowing them. The vows of asceticism are very strict for the monk, or mendicant, who cannot consider anything to belong to him, whereas a householder can claim limited possessions for carrying on the normal life. The purpose of practising this is to reduce the hold of Karma, and make man follow an uncluttered life voluntarily, so that he can proceed on the way to achieve his goals. The first goal is to achieve the state of *Kevala*, the state of supreme knowledge. The other one is to see his world more clearly. The first step in understanding the life is to understand its limitations. This principle does not mean running away from the world, or becoming passive.

The Jain emphasis on austerities is famous all over India. Fasting is an essential austerity, which can be followed by the monks and householders in different ways. A monk cannot claim to possess anything, and the householder has to have limited possessions. The austerities are both mental and physical. Jainism is known for its physical austerities, which to a layperson look extremely difficult and self-punishing. But the goal of all these, including fasting, is self-purification, to overcome the evil effects of Karma and nothing else.

4. Non-Theism: Jainism does not recognise God to be maintainer or creator of the world order. One sutra (aphorism) urges the mendicant not to believe in the power of God. The Jain view denies that the world is an effect, caused by an all powerful reality, and asks, if a Supreme Being created the world, who created the Supreme Being. If one has to assume that God made the universe, then the same argument should apply to the man who digs the ground and claims that he created new space. Mahapurana, a Jain classic, holds that no one should be attributed for creating this world. If God created the world, where was he before the creation, the Purana asks. Jains saw that the world operates as per the natural law, and prevented men from rationalising their deeds in terms of God's will. Only the man is responsible for himself, and by following a good path, he should attain freedom from Karma, and no supernatural being will come to his help. The views of Jainism on God or Supreme Being are same as that of the Buddhist school. The seventh and sixth centuries before Christ saw great upheaval in the beliefs of India, and Jainism came up to satisfy a particular need of the hour.

1.5 GANDHI AND JAINISM

Gandhi acknowledges the influence of Jainism in his upbringing, and subsequent career; his entire outlook is moulded by Jainism. Porbandar, where he was born, and the state of Gujarat, where he received his early education, has a significant Jain population.

The first influence on Gandhi was that of his mother, who took up fasting for self-purification, even though they were not Jains. Fasting was a part of her life, and this influenced the children profoundly. Even later, when he undertook fasting for self-purification, the fasting of his mother, which was a regular affair, was at the back of his mind. His mother would take up a kind of fasting, where she would not eat without seeing the sun. The children would line up outside, to spot the sun on a cloudy day, and when they spotted him, would call out the mother to see. Gandhi recalls, that ‘by the time she came out, the sun would disappear, disappointing all the children’. Fasting, which is essentially an all-religious practice, has acquired the flavour of Jainism in Gujarat, and it had an influence on Gandhi. Just as the Jain tenets preach fasting for self-purification, Gandhi would also do it for the same purpose, not to pressurise or influence others.

Gandhi also followed the asceticism, as enjoined by the Jainism, though he did not accept people calling him an ascetic. His concept of simple living and high thinking is the one prescribed by the religion. For the inmates of Sabarmati Ashram, he prescribed eleven vows, out of which many are vows of the Jainism.

There were eleven vows that were prescribed to the residents of the Sabarmati Ashram. The first five vows of truth, non-violence, non-stealing, Brahmacharya, and non-possession were extended to suit the requirements of the Ashram. The first five are the vows of Jainism, and he said that all of them are inter-related, and the violation of any one of them would lead to the total violation of the entire code of conduct of the Ashram. Ahimsa for Gandhi was not just a means or a way, but a creed and a religion, a philosophy of life. When the civil disobedience movement turned violent, in a village called Chauri Chaura, Gandhi withdrew the entire movement, stating that the people were not ready for the principle of non-violence, and that the movement has to be resumed after the country was ready for that. He writes, “non-violence is a spiritual food we have to take continually. There is no thing as satiation” (Harijan, 2.4.1938).

Gandhi defined non-violence in different contexts and circumstances, and some of them are inspired by the Jain thought-form:

- Non-violence is a law of suffering.
- Not a weapon of the weak.
- Soul force, an attribute of the soul.
- As long as physical existence is there, perfect non-violence cannot be practised.
- Goodwill towards all life.
- Not being violent even to snakes, scorpions and other poisonous creatures.

Gandhi and Anekantavada

If Gandhi did not take an extreme stand on any issue, we may say that it is the result of inherent Jain tenet of Anekantavada, which does not take a rigid stand on any issue, but aims at approaching the truth with humility, with respect to the opinion of the other person. When someone pointed out that there was contradiction between his two statements, he said that always, the later statement should be taken, and the earlier statement should be ignored, as it was made under the circumstances that existed earlier.

Gandhi writes in *Young India*, 21.1.1926: “My Anekantawada is peculiarly my own....I

very much like the doctrine of manyness of reality. It is this doctrine which has taught me to judge a Mussalman from his point of view and a Christian from his. Formerly, I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love.”

Gandhi's theory of Karma also comes close to the Jain perception. In Jainism, Karma is both the cause and the effect. Karma is a cause for getting the past corrected, and also necessary for future, so that good deeds lead to good happenings in future, as per the belief of Gandhi. Gandhi's adherence to the tenet of Ahimsa is legendary, and his non-violent resistance attracted the world attention, and brought in many practitioners, who by following the principle, brought about dramatic changes in their society.

1.6 BUDDHISM: FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS AND THE EIGHT FOLD PATH

The Life and Time of Buddha

The seventh and sixth centuries before Christ were a time of turmoil and upheaval in Indian philosophy. There were at least three currents of thought. The first was that of sacrificial Karma, and by the force of magical rites, one could achieve his desire. The second was that of Upanishads, by which the self-realisation was the ultimate goal, and everything else was unimportant. The third was the nihilist school of thought, which propagated that there was no law, no abiding reality, and everything comes to being by some unknown fate. At such time, Buddha was born.

Buddha was born near Kapilavastu, a small town north of Banares, in Nepal, in 563 B.C. His father, a king of Sakya tribe, named his son as Siddhartha, the wish fulfilling one. The sages warned his father that his son would become a ruler or a mendicant; his father surrounded him with great luxury, so that he is not affected by the day-to-day life of the common people. One day, travelling through the city, Siddhartha first saw a man crippled by old age. Then after that, he saw a man, rendered helpless by fever, then a corpse being carried to the cremation ground, and finally a wandering mendicant with calm and serene composure. Seeing all these, he was moved so much that he decided to forsake all his luxuries and seek the truth. He returned to the palace, and had a look at his wife and son for the last time, and set out on his 'great renunciation' that very night. He entered the forest for meditation.

Hoping to get enlightenment, he spent six years in penance, but with no results. Near Bodh Gaya, he met five ascetics. Soon, he realised that they could not help him, and set out to attain enlightenment through meditation. For seven weeks, he sat under a papal tree, and according to legend, evil forces tried to dissuade him from his goal. Determined, he carried on, and at the end of seventh week, he arrived at the much-sought enlightenment. Then he became the Buddha, the enlightened one, and the exalted one.

His enlightenment occurred around 528 B.C. His first disciples were the five ascetics. Thus began the Sangha, the Buddhist ascetic order. For the next forty years, he travelled and preached, gathering more and more followers. In his eightieth year, when he was journeying to Kusinagar, with his disciples, he realised that his end was near, as he suffered from food poisoning. All the followers gathered, and Buddha preached his last sermon, and told them to work for their deliverance, and attain 'nirvana'. Thereafter, he

gave up his worldly body, and remained in the world as source of enlightenment.

Early Buddhist Literature: The early Buddhist literature is in Pali language, and consists of three different collections. The first is called the Sutta, that relates to the doctrines; the second is Vinaya, relating to the discipline of monks; and the third is Abhidhamma, which has the same subject as Sutta, but has dealt with it in a more theoretical and technical manner.

Sects in Buddhism

There are two sects in Buddhism, by name, Hinayana and Mahayana. 'Hinayana' means a smaller vehicle and the 'Mahayana' means a bigger vehicle. (Hina:small, Maha:big, Yana:vehicle). The ultimate goal of the Hinayana adherent is to attain his own Nirvana, whereas the ultimate goal of the Mahayana adherent is to not only seek his own salvation, but also to seek the salvation of all beings. The Hinayana goal was lower, and hence the instruction he received, the efforts he made to achieve salvation was lower than what a Mahayana adherent would be expected to do. The Hinayana adherent could achieve salvation in three lives, and the Mahayana adherent had to go on and on to achieve his own salvation, and the salvation of all beings. Since the goals are different in matter and substance, the sects get the names accordingly.

The Four Noble Truths

Buddha's teaching had *four noble truths*. They are:

1. There is suffering (dukkha) in the world.
2. The suffering has a cause
3. The suffering can be overcome by removing the cause of suffering
4. The eight-fold path to salvation is the means of overcoming suffering.

Firstly, suffering is universal, and no one is exempt from sorrow and disappointment. The *second* principle clearly indicates that there are specific causes of suffering, and Buddha declared that the desires are the great causes of suffering. Cravings for wealth, power, fame, and material things, thinking that they would bring happiness, are the root cause. Instead of bringing happiness, craving stimulates greed, jealousy, and anger that cause violence. The only way to get away from suffering was to move away from desire.

The *third* truth, based on the cause and effect relation, states that suffering can be made to cease by removing the cause of suffering. Buddha stated that there is a determinable solution as well as the cause. Just as an effect is caused due to a prior event, it can be overcome by a subsequent act to remove the cause. The *fourth* noble truth indicates that suffering can be overcome by following the eight-fold path, which is interrelated.

The Eight Fold Path

The eight fold path is as follows:

1. **Right views:** Truth should be separated from the falsehood, right from the wrong, and immortality from the death. When the right view is grasped one realises the rightness of the four noble truths.

2. **Right resolve:** After knowing the truth, one should resolve to practise it. He should move steadfastly in the direction of the truth he has discovered. Taking a step in the right direction, he is one step nearer to the goal.
3. **Right speech:** The third step is Right speech. The Buddhist text, Dhammapada says if a man speaks or acts with evil thought, evil will follow, like the wheel following the foot of the ox that draws carriage. In his 'Sermon on Abuse', Buddha underlines the importance of not slandering or vilifying another.
4. **Right conduct:** The fourth step is the right conduct. Thinking and talking are incomplete without action. Right resolution and right speech should lead to the right conduct. The five important principles for right conduct are abstaining from destroying life, from theft, fornication, lying and drunkenness.
5. **Right livelihood:** The fifth step is the right livelihood, as it enjoins one to earn the livelihood by honest means. A living can be earned without harming others. Any livelihood, which debases and cheapens life or uses others for achieving one's own ends, is not right.
6. **Right effort:** The sixth step is the right effort. Continuous effort is needed to reach one's goal, and evil thoughts have to be banished and right ones have to be adopted.
7. **Right mindfulness:** The seventh step is the right-mindfulness. The quality of thought determines the person's life, and Buddha says, just as the rain breaks through an ill thatched house, so passion will break through an unreflecting mind. Mind is the source of bliss or corruption.
8. **Right concentration:** The eighth step is the right concentration, an intense form of right-mindedness. Right concentration separates the good from the evil, and the truth from falsehood. It perfects one's wisdom and virtue.

The four noble truths provide both the goal and means of reaching it. The eight-fold path was described by Buddha as the 'middle path', a path between indulgence and mortification. He said that the truths are not divinely revealed, but are a product of reason and experience. They allow one to be in line with Dhamma (righteousness), and view the reality in terms of Karma, and based on the doctrine of 'aniccha' (impermanence).

1.7 GANDHI AND BUDDHISM

Gandhi considers all the great religious leaders as great teachers. He says, "Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad- they were all warriors of peace in their own style. We have to enrich the heritage left by these world teachers" (Harijan, 28-1-1939).

"Gautama himself, when he saw oppression, injustice, and death around him and when he saw darkness in front of him, at the back of him and on each side of him went out in the wilderness and remained there fasting and praying in search of light"(Speech at a public meeting in Toungoo, Burma, 18.4.1929).

Following are the excerpts of his speech delivered as reply to the Buddhists' Address, Colombo, on November 15, 1927.

"It is my deliberate opinion that the essential part of the teachings of the Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India today to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama effected in Hinduism".

“Gautama was himself a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the best that was in Hinduism, and he gave life to some of the teachings that were buried in Vedas, and which were overgrown with weeds.”

“Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. He gave it a new life and a new interpretation”.

“His whole soul rose in indignation against the belief that a being called God required for His satisfaction the living blood of animals in order that he might be pleased—animals who were his own creation. He therefore, reinstated God in the right place and dethroned the usurper”.

1.8 SUMMARY

Hinduism, very often has been described as a way of life, rather than as religion. It encompasses schools from atheism to polytheism, and has six schools of philosophy. Pluralism is an essential feature of this religion. The three authorities of Hinduism have been commented upon, written about by all the eminent teachers and theoreticians of various schools of Vedanta philosophy.

Gandhi was proud to be a Hindu, but questioned many a practice contained in these codes. He felt that many laws were inserted subsequently without authority and wanted everything to be examined in the light of social well-being. Gandhi was influenced by the Jain concept of metaphysics, philosophy, and cosmology and its main tenet non-violence, which had to be practised even under extreme circumstances. The principles of ‘Anekantavada’ also influenced Gandhi. In Buddhism, Gandhi was impressed by the message of compassion given by Buddha and the four noble truths and the eight fold path to Nirvana.

1.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Bring out the influence of Indic religions on Gandhi’s concept of Ahimsa.
2. Explain the sources of Hinduism.
3. How did Gandhi conceptualise Hinduism?
4. Discuss the impact of Jain tradition on Gandhi.
5. Examine Eight Fold Path to *Nirvana*. Why did Buddha call them ‘middle path’?
6. Write short notes on the following:
 - a) Anekantavada
 - b) Jain Atheism

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