

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATIONS OF

MARDIYEVA G.K.

**NATIONAL RELIGIONS.
ZOROASTRIANISM.
BUDDHISM.**

(Educational and methodological manual)

*(For international students
of higher educational institutions)*



SAMARKAND 2026

**THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH CARE OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN
SAMARKAND STATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY**



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Annotation

This teaching-methodological guide in Religious Studies focuses on three major world religions: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

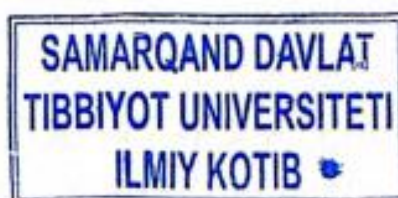
The guide provides brief and structured information about their history, core beliefs, sacred texts, rituals, and cultural influence. It also includes a comparative approach to help learners understand similarities and differences between these religions. The material is designed to support teaching and learning in Religious Studies, develop students' analytical thinking, and promote understanding of religious and cultural diversity.

This educational and methodological manual entitled "National religions. Zoroastrianism.Buddhism." was recommended for publication as an educational and methodological manual for students of non-specialized education, based on the protocol of Samarkand State Medical University No. 11 dated June 24, 2026.

**Secretary of the Academic Council,
Associate Professor**



U.U.Ochilov



INTRODUCTION

Religious Studies is a multidisciplinary academic field that explores the origin, development, doctrines, rituals, ethical systems, and cultural significance of religions across different historical periods and geographical regions. It connects history, philosophy, anthropology, and cultural studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs shape human civilization. This teaching-methodological guide has been developed to support systematic learning and teaching of three major world religious traditions: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

These three religions are among the most influential spiritual systems in human history. They emerged in different cultural environments, yet each has significantly contributed to the development of ethical thinking, philosophical inquiry, and social organization. The comparative study of these religions allows learners to understand both the uniqueness of each tradition and the shared human concerns that they address, such as the meaning of life, suffering, morality, and salvation.

Zoroastrianism is one of the earliest known monotheistic religions, originating in ancient Iran. It introduced powerful theological concepts such as the dualistic struggle between good and evil, the moral responsibility of human beings, and the final judgment of souls. Its teachings influenced later religious traditions, especially in areas related to ethics, eschatology, and cosmology.

Buddhism originated in ancient India and presents a deeply philosophical approach to human existence. It focuses on the problem of suffering (dukkha) and offers a practical path toward liberation through ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom. Its teachings emphasize impermanence, compassion, mindfulness, and the idea that enlightenment can be achieved through personal effort and mental discipline.

Hinduism represents a highly diverse and complex religious tradition that includes a wide range of beliefs, rituals, deities, and philosophical schools. It is based on key concepts such as dharma (moral duty), karma (cause and effect), samsara (cycle of rebirth), and moksha (liberation). Hinduism has significantly shaped the cultural, social, and spiritual life of South Asia for thousands of years.

The main aim of this guide is to provide students and educators with a structured, clear, and academically reliable resource that facilitates deep understanding of these religious traditions. It is designed to support both theoretical knowledge and practical teaching methods, including comparative analysis, discussion-based learning, and critical interpretation of religious texts and concepts.

In addition, this guide encourages interdisciplinary learning by linking religious studies with history, ethics, philosophy, and cultural studies. Students are encouraged to analyze religions not only as systems of belief but also as historical phenomena

that have influenced law, art, literature, politics, and social structures throughout human history.

Another important objective of this material is to develop students' analytical and critical thinking skills. By studying similarities and differences between Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, learners can gain a broader understanding of how human societies respond to universal questions about existence, morality, and the afterlife.

Furthermore, this guide aims to promote intercultural awareness and mutual respect. In a globalized world, understanding religious diversity is essential for peaceful coexistence and cultural dialogue. By learning about different religious traditions, students develop tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for the richness of human spiritual heritage.

Overall, this teaching-methodological guide serves as a comprehensive educational resource that supports academic study, enhances teaching quality, and contributes to the development of well-informed, culturally aware, and critically thinking learners in the field of Religious Studies.

TOPIC 1: NATIONAL RELIGIONS

Aim of the Lesson

The main aim of this lesson is to help students understand the concept of national religions, their historical development, and their role in shaping cultural and social identity. Students will learn how religions such as Shinto, Judaism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are closely connected with specific nations and ethnic groups.

The lesson also aims to develop students' ability to:

- identify the main features of national religions;
- compare national and universal religions;
- understand the relationship between religion, culture, and identity;
- analyze the role of religion in historical and modern societies.

Importance of the Lesson

This topic is important because national religions play a key role in the formation of cultural identity and historical continuity of different peoples.

Understanding them helps students to:

- develop respect for different cultures and traditions;
- recognize the diversity of religious beliefs in the world;
- understand how religion influences social values, traditions, and national identity;
- improve critical thinking about the connection between religion, history, and society;
- build tolerance and intercultural awareness in a globalized world.

A national religion (also called a state religion or ethnic religion) is a belief system that is closely connected with a particular nation, ethnic group, or culture, rather than being open equally to all people worldwide. It often develops together with the history, language, traditions, and identity of a specific people. National religions usually have these characteristics:

- ❖ **Ethnic or cultural connection:** They are strongly tied to one nation or ethnic group. Membership is often linked to birth or ancestry rather than conversion.
- ❖ **Close link with national identity:** Religion becomes part of the nation's culture, history, and traditions.

- ❖ **Geographical limitation:** They are mostly practiced within a specific country or region.
- ❖ **Traditional rituals and customs:** They preserve ancient ceremonies, festivals, and cultural practices.
- ❖ **Mythology and history:** They often include stories about the origin of the people and their ancestors.

Some well-known national religions include: Shinto – traditional religion of Japan, closely linked with Japanese culture and the imperial family; Judaism – strongly connected with the Jewish people, their history, and identity; Hinduism – deeply tied to Indian culture, society, and traditions, especially in India and Nepal; Confucianism – a philosophical-religious system that shaped Chinese civilization and East Asian societies.

National religions play an important role in society - they help protect traditions, language, and customs, they create a shared sense of belonging among people, they provide ethical rules and social behavior norms, in many historical cases, they supported governments and social systems.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest surviving religions in human history. It emerged more than 3,500 years ago in the southern Levant region, particularly in ancient Canaan. Judaism developed from the religious beliefs and traditions of the ancient Hebrew people and gradually became the foundation of Jewish civilization, culture, and identity. The religion is deeply connected to the historical experiences of the Jewish people and has significantly influenced the development of both Christianity and Islam. The sacred scripture of Judaism is the Tanakh, also known as the Hebrew Bible. The Tanakh not only describes the creation of the universe by God but also explains the special covenant established between God and the Jewish people. According to Jewish belief, this covenant began with the Prophet Abraham, who is considered the founding patriarch of the Jewish nation.

According to the Tanakh, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation. In return, Abraham and his descendants were required to obey God's commandments and practice circumcision as a sacred sign of the covenant. God also promised to guide and protect Abraham's descendants and grant them the Land of Israel as their homeland. Abraham's faith and loyalty to God were rewarded with the birth of his son Isaac. Isaac later became the father of Jacob, who was also called Israel. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Together, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are known as the Patriarchs of Judaism because they are regarded as the spiritual and physical ancestors of the Jewish people.

One of the central events in Jewish history is the Exodus from Egypt. According to Jewish tradition, the descendants of Jacob settled in Egypt but were eventually enslaved by the Egyptian rulers. God then chose the Prophet Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery and toward freedom. The Exodus became a symbol of liberation, faith, and divine guidance. During this journey, Moses received the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Torah, also known as the Five Books of Moses, contains the religious laws, moral teachings, and commandments that form the basis of Jewish

religious life. After receiving the Torah, Moses led the Israelites back toward the Land of Israel, where they eventually resettled.

Later in Jewish history, God appointed David as king of Israel. King David became one of the most respected rulers in Jewish tradition and was considered the “anointed one” or messiah. From this belief emerged the expectation that a future descendant of David, known as the Messiah, would one day come to restore justice, peace, and spiritual renewal for the Jewish people. David’s son, Solomon, built the First Temple in Jerusalem, which became the religious center of Judaism. The Temple symbolized both the unity of the Jewish people and their sacred connection to the Land of Israel. However, Jewish history was marked by periods of exile and suffering. In the 6th century BCE, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the First Temple, forcing many Jews into exile. Although the Jews later returned and rebuilt the Temple, it was destroyed again by the Romans in the 1st century CE. This second destruction had a major impact on Jewish history and led to the widespread dispersion of Jews across different parts of the world.

Following foreign conquests and political oppression, the Jewish people became a global diaspora. Jewish communities spread across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East while preserving their religious traditions and cultural identity. Two major cultural groups gradually developed:

- The Sephardim, who settled mainly in Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East;
- The Ashkenazim, who established communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

Between the 10th and 12th centuries, Jewish intellectual life flourished in Spain during what is often called the Golden Age of Jewish culture. During this period, influential philosophers and scholars such as Moses Maimonides made major contributions to philosophy, theology, and science. At the same time, Jewish mysticism, known as Kabbalah, gained popularity. Kabbalah explored the hidden and spiritual dimensions of God, creation, and human existence. It became an important mystical tradition within Judaism and influenced later Jewish thought.

In Eastern Europe, many Jews lived in small isolated communities called shtetls. In response to the rigid intellectualism of some religious traditions, a spiritual movement called Hasidism emerged in the 18th century. Hasidism emphasized emotional devotion, spirituality, prayer, and closeness to God. Over time, different branches of Judaism developed, mainly because of varying interpretations of Jewish law and tradition: Orthodox Judaism maintains strict adherence to the Torah and traditional laws; Conservative Judaism seeks a balance between tradition and modernity;






In the 20th century, debates concerning the role and status of women became important within Jewish communities. Traditionally, women had limited participation in religious ceremonies, despite Jewish identity being passed through the maternal line. In modern times, many branches of Judaism have expanded women’s roles in worship and religious leadership.

Throughout history, Jews often faced discrimination, persecution, and forced isolation because of their distinct religious identity and minority status. In many countries, Jews were confined to ghettos and became victims of violence, social

exclusion, and prejudice. From the 18th century onward, countries such as France and the United States granted Jews greater civil rights and freedoms. As Jews became more integrated into wider society, questions about Jewish identity emerged. Many debated whether Jewish identity should be understood primarily as a religion, ethnicity, culture, or nationality. This debate contributed to the rise of Zionism, a political movement advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. The movement gained strength after the tragic events of the Holocaust during World War II. In 1948, the modern State of Israel was established, becoming the national homeland for the Jewish people.

The sacred sources of Judaism form the spiritual, legal, and moral foundation of Jewish religious life. These texts contain divine commandments, historical narratives, ethical teachings, and religious laws that guide the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people. The most important and sacred source of Judaism is the Torah. According to Jewish belief, the Torah was revealed by God to the Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, also known in some traditions as Mount Tur. The Torah is regarded as the direct word of God and the primary source of Jewish law and religious teachings.

The Torah consists of five books:

-  Genesis
-  Exodus
-  Leviticus
-  Numbers
-  Deuteronomy

These books describe the creation of the world, the lives of the patriarchs, the history of the Israelites, the Exodus from Egypt, and the laws given to Moses. The Torah contains commandments related to worship, morality, social justice, family life, and relations between people and God. Because of its sacred status, the Torah occupies the central place in Jewish religious ceremonies and synagogue worship.

The second major source of Judaism is the Talmud. The Talmud is a vast collection of religious discussions, interpretations, legal rulings, and ethical teachings developed by Jewish scholars over many centuries. It explains and interprets the commandments found in the Torah and shows how they should be applied in everyday life. The Talmud consists of two main parts: The Mishnah, which contains the written collection of oral laws; The Gemara, which includes explanations and commentaries on the Mishnah.

The Talmud became an essential guide for Jewish religious practice, law, education, and tradition. It helped preserve Jewish identity and religious continuity, especially during periods of exile and diaspora. Together, the Torah and the Talmud form the core of Jewish religious literature and play a fundamental role in shaping Jewish theology, ethics, customs, and legal traditions. These sacred texts have preserved Jewish faith and culture for thousands of years and continue to influence Jewish communities throughout the world today.

Judaism in Central Asia. Judaism has a long and unique history in Central Asia. According to historical traditions and legends, Jewish communities began migrating to Central Asia in ancient times through Iran. These migrations were closely

connected with political conflicts, invasions, and periods of persecution in the ancient Middle East.

Historical accounts suggest that the migration of Jews started during the Assyrian persecutions in the 8th century BCE. During this period, many Jews were forced to leave their homeland in ancient Israel. Some sought refuge in regions such as Egypt and Iran, while others gradually moved eastward toward Central Asia.

Later, during the expansion of the Persian Empire into Central Asia, Jewish migration to the region increased further. Trade routes, especially those connected to the Silk Road, also contributed to the movement of Jewish communities into important cultural and commercial centers of Central Asia. According to historical sources, Jewish groups settled in Merv (present-day Mari in Turkmenistan) around the 2nd century CE during the period associated with the Sogdian civilization. From there, Jewish communities spread to major cities such as, Bukhara , Samarkand , Shahrissabz. The Jews of Central Asia mainly spoke dialects influenced by Persian languages and gradually developed a distinct regional identity.

The majority of Central Asian Jews became known as Bukharan Jews because many of them lived in and around the city of Bukhara. Over centuries, they formed a unique ethno-religious community that combined ancient Jewish traditions with Persian and local Central Asian cultural elements.

As political divisions emerged in Central Asia during the 18th century, Jewish communities also became divided into regional groups associated with: Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand, Afghanistan, Iran. Despite geographical separation, these communities preserved their religious identity, synagogue traditions, and Jewish customs.

According to the medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the region in the 12th century, approximately 30,000 Jews were living in Samarkand around 1165. His accounts provide valuable historical evidence of the significant Jewish presence in Central Asia during the medieval period. Jewish communities in the region were actively involved in trade, craftsmanship, textile production, and cultural exchange along the Silk Road. Their contribution played an important role in the economic and cultural development of Central Asian cities.

Today, Jewish communities continue to exist in Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia. During the Soviet period, religious activities were often restricted; however, after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, Jewish communities received greater freedom to preserve and practice their national and religious traditions. Currently, Jewish cultural and religious organizations operate in cities such as: Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand , National cultural centers representing Bukharan Jews and Ashkenazi (European) Jews actively work to preserve Jewish heritage, language, traditions, and religious practices. Several synagogues are also functioning in different regions of the republic, serving as important centers of worship and community life.

Hinduism. Hinduism is one of the oldest and most complex religions in the world. It developed over a long historical period in ancient India and has no single founder or unified system of belief. Hinduism emerged gradually from the religious traditions, rituals, and philosophical ideas of the ancient Indian peoples. It is

considered not only a religion but also a way of life that influences culture, ethics, social relations, and daily practices.





Modern Hinduism took shape between the 6th and 5th centuries BCE during the period of intellectual and religious competition between Brahmanism and Buddhism. As Buddhism spread throughout India, Brahmanical traditions adapted and transformed themselves in response to new religious and philosophical challenges. As a result, Hinduism emerged as a renewed and highly diverse religious system. Today, Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, followed by more than 80 percent of the country's population. It is also practiced in countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and among Indian communities around the world.

Hinduism includes many beliefs and traditions, but several important principles are widely recognized.

1. The Sacredness of the Vedas

The most ancient and sacred scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas. Hindus regard the Vedas as divine revelations containing spiritual knowledge, hymns, prayers, rituals, and philosophical teachings. The Vedas form the foundation of Hindu religious thought and have greatly influenced Indian culture and philosophy.

The four main Vedas are:

-  Rigveda
-  Samaveda
-  Yajurveda
-  Atharvaveda




These texts discuss religious rituals, moral duties, cosmology, and the relationship between humans and the divine.

2. Respect for Elders and Teachers

Hinduism teaches deep respect for parents, elders, teachers, and spiritual guides. Teachers, known as gurus, are highly valued because they provide religious knowledge and spiritual guidance. Respect toward elders is considered both a moral responsibility and a religious virtue.

3. Pilgrimage to Sacred Places

Pilgrimage is an important practice in Hinduism. Many Hindus travel to holy cities, temples, rivers, and sacred sites to pray, seek purification, and strengthen their spiritual connection with God. Important pilgrimage centers include:

-  Varanasi
-  Ganges
-  Haridwar

Bathing in sacred rivers, especially the Ganges, is believed to cleanse sins and bring spiritual purification.

4. The Sacredness of Sanskrit

Sanskrit is regarded as the holy language of Hinduism. Most Hindu sacred texts, prayers, and rituals were originally written in Sanskrit. Because of its religious importance, Sanskrit continues to play a central role in Hindu worship and ceremonies.

5. Reverence for the Cow

In Hinduism, the cow is considered a sacred and respected animal because it symbolizes life, motherhood, generosity, and nonviolence. Many Hindus avoid harming cows and consider cow protection a religious duty. The cow also has economic and cultural importance in Indian society.

Brahmins and Religious Leadership

In Hindu society, Brahmins traditionally occupy an important religious position. Brahmins are priests, scholars, and spiritual teachers responsible for performing rituals, preserving sacred knowledge, and guiding religious life.

Unlike some ancient systems, Hinduism gradually allowed religious influence not only among hereditary priestly families but also among ordinary people and, in some traditions, women. Over time, Hindu thinkers developed new religious ideas and movements to respond to changing social conditions and to challenge the influence of Buddhism. As a result, Hinduism evolved into a highly diverse religion containing numerous philosophical schools, sects, and spiritual traditions.

One of the most distinctive features of Hindu society is the caste system, known as varna. This social structure historically divided society into different social groups based on occupation and religious status. The four traditional varnas are:

- ✚ Brahmins – priests and scholars;
- ✚ Kshatriyas – warriors and rulers;
- ✚ Vaishyas – merchants and farmers;
- ✚ Shudras – servants and laborers.

Outside these groups were communities historically referred to as “untouchables,” who faced social discrimination for centuries. The caste system strongly influenced social relations, marriage, occupation, and religious life in India. Although modern Indian law prohibits caste discrimination, the system continues to affect aspects of society and culture in some regions.

Hinduism teaches several important philosophical ideas, including:

Karma – the belief that every action has consequences;

Dharma – moral duty and righteous behavior;

Samsara – the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth;

Moksha – liberation from the cycle of rebirth and union with the divine.

Hindus worship many deities, but these gods are often understood as different manifestations of one supreme spiritual reality called Brahman. Among the most important Hindu deities are: Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the preserver, Shiva – the transformer.

In Hinduism, one of the central theological concepts is the Trimurti, meaning “three forms” or “trinity.” The Trimurti represents the three principal divine powers responsible for the creation, preservation, and transformation of the universe. These three major deities are: Brahma – the creator of the universe, Vishnu – the preserver and protector of the world, Shiva – the god associated with destruction, transformation, and renewal. Although Brahma is traditionally considered the creator and the eldest among the Trimurti, worship of Brahma became less widespread over time. In contrast, Vishnu and Shiva gained much larger groups of followers and became the central figures of two major branches of Hinduism. As a result, Hinduism gradually divided into two major devotional traditions:

- Shaivism – the worship of Shiva;
- Vaishnavism – the worship of Vishnu.

Shaivism is one of the oldest and most influential traditions within Hinduism. Followers of Shaivism consider Shiva to be the supreme divine power. Shiva is often associated with asceticism, meditation, cosmic destruction, and spiritual transformation. In ancient Hindu texts such as the Rigveda, Shiva is connected with a deity called Rudra, who was regarded as a powerful and sometimes fearsome god linked to storms, wilderness, and healing. Over time, Rudra evolved into the more complex and compassionate figure of Shiva.

Vaishnavism centers on the worship of Vishnu as the supreme protector of the universe. In the Rigveda, Vishnu originally appeared as a solar deity associated with light and cosmic order. Over time, his role expanded greatly within Hindu theology. Vishnu is believed to descend to Earth in different incarnations, known as avatars, whenever humanity faces evil or disorder. Vishnu is often depicted with four arms holding symbolic objects: a conch shell, a discus, a mace, and a lotus flower. These objects symbolize divine authority, purity, power, and protection.

Krishna is one of the most beloved and important figures in Hinduism. He is regarded as both a divine hero and an incarnation of Vishnu. In Hindu mythology, Krishna combines human and divine qualities, making him a symbol of wisdom, love, courage, and spiritual guidance. Krishna is often portrayed as a fearless warrior, wise leader, and protector of justice. His teachings in the Bhagavad Gita form one of the most important philosophical foundations of Hinduism.

Two great epics hold a sacred and central position in Hindu culture and religion: Mahabharata and Ramayana. The Mahabharata is one of the longest epic poems in world literature and includes the Bhagavad Gita, which contains the spiritual dialogue between Krishna and the warrior Arjuna. The Ramayana tells the story of Rama, his wife Sita, and the monkey god Hanuman. It emphasizes moral duty, loyalty, courage, and devotion. Hanuman is one of the most respected deities in Hinduism. He is portrayed as a monkey god and devoted ally of Rama in the Ramayana. Hanuman symbolizes strength, loyalty, bravery, and selfless devotion. The monkey became a sacred symbol partly because of Hanuman's role in Hindu mythology. Similarly, many animals are treated with special respect in Hinduism because they are believed to be connected with gods or to serve as their companions.

Hinduism developed a highly complex ritual and ceremonial system over many centuries. Religious festivals and ceremonies are often celebrated over several days and include:

- ✚ prayers and hymns;
- ✚ temple worship;
- ✚ ritual bathing in sacred rivers or pools;
- ✚ offerings and sacrifices;
- ✚ gifts to priests and the poor;
- ✚ public religious processions.

Most ceremonies are traditionally performed under the guidance of Brahmin priests. Temples serve not only as places of worship but also as important cultural and social centers. Despite the development of sophisticated philosophical systems,

many ordinary people in India continued to practice folk traditions, including the worship of local spirits, idols, and natural forces. As a result, Hinduism became an extremely diverse religion that combines philosophy, mythology, ritual, and popular belief.

Jainism. Jainism is one of the oldest religious and philosophical traditions of India. It emerged around the 6th century BCE and developed alongside other important Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Jainism is known for its strict ethical principles, nonviolence, ascetic lifestyle, and emphasis on spiritual self-discipline. The founder and most important teacher of Jainism is traditionally considered to be Mahavira, also known as Vardhamana Mahavira. He was born into the Kshatriya caste, the warrior and ruling class of ancient Indian society. Mahavira is also called “Jina,” meaning “the Conqueror,” because he was believed to have conquered worldly desires, passions, and ignorance through spiritual discipline. The word “Jainism” is derived from the term “Jina.”

Jainism arose partly as a reaction against the rigid caste system and ritual practices of ancient Indian society. It emphasized personal spiritual purification rather than social status or sacrificial rituals. According to Jain tradition, the religion was not founded solely by Mahavira; instead, it was passed down through a line of 24 spiritual teachers known as Tirthankaras, meaning “ford-makers” or enlightened guides who show humanity the path to liberation. Mahavira is regarded as the 24th and last Tirthankara of the present age. He organized and spread the teachings of Jainism throughout northern India and established a disciplined religious community.

The central doctrines of Jainism are closely connected with the Indian religious concepts of karma, rebirth, and nirvana. Jainism teaches that every human action creates karma, a spiritual force that binds the soul to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Good actions create positive karma, while harmful actions create negative karma. According to Jain belief, the soul remains trapped in worldly existence because of accumulated karma. The ultimate spiritual goal is to free the soul from all karmic bonds and achieve liberation, known as nirvana or moksha. A person who reaches nirvana escapes the endless cycle of rebirth and attains complete spiritual freedom and purity.

Jainism places great importance on self-control, meditation, and renunciation of worldly pleasures. Followers believe that people must overcome desires, passions, greed, and attachment in order to purify the soul. Spiritual progress is achieved through discipline, moral behavior, and inner victory over selfish impulses. The weakening of karma gradually purifies the soul. As karmic influence decreases, the individual’s spiritual awareness increases. This process continues until the soul becomes completely liberated and reaches a perfect state of peace and freedom.

Jainism is especially famous for its strict moral code. Both monks and ordinary believers are expected to follow ethical principles that prevent harm to living beings and encourage spiritual purity. The five main moral vows of Jainism are:

Ahimsa (Nonviolence) – avoiding harm to any living creature;

Satya (Truthfulness) – always speaking the truth;

Asteya (Non-stealing) – not taking anything that is not freely given;

Brahmacharya (Chastity or Self-control) – controlling desires and maintaining moral purity;

Aparigraha (Non-attachment and Non-greed) – avoiding excessive possessions and material attachment. Among these principles, ahimsa, or nonviolence, is considered the highest ethical value. Many Jains avoid killing even the smallest insects and strictly follow vegetarian diets to minimize harm to living beings.

Over time, Jainism developed into two major branches:

1. Digambara. Digambara means “sky-clad” or “those clothed in the sky.” Followers of this tradition practice strict asceticism and believe that complete renunciation of worldly possessions is necessary for spiritual liberation. Digambara monks traditionally wear little or no clothing as a symbol of total detachment from material life.

2. Svetambara. Svetambara means “those dressed in white.” Members of this branch wear white clothing and follow somewhat less severe ascetic practices. Svetambaras emphasize the preservation and study of ancient Jain scriptures and interpret religious laws in a more flexible way than Digambaras. Unlike Digambaras, Svetambaras do not require complete renunciation of all worldly comforts for spiritual advancement.

Because Jainism demands a highly disciplined lifestyle and strict ethical practices, it did not spread as widely as some other world religions. Nevertheless, Jain communities have preserved their traditions for more than two thousand years.

Today, there are several million Jains worldwide, most of whom live in India, especially in regions such as: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh. Jainism has made important contributions to Indian philosophy, ethics, mathematics, literature, and art. Its teachings on nonviolence, tolerance, and respect for all living beings continue to influence modern discussions about peace, environmental protection, and animal rights throughout the world.

Sikhism. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries in India, particularly in the Punjab region. The word “Sikh” comes from the Sanskrit term *shishya*, meaning “disciple” or “student.” Therefore, Sikhism refers to the path followed by the disciples of the Sikh Gurus. The founder of Sikhism was Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who was born into the Kshatriya caste. Guru Nanak preached the unity of God, equality of all human beings, rejection of caste discrimination, and the importance of honest living, prayer, and service to humanity.

Sikhism originated in the Punjab region during a period of religious and social transformation in India. Guru Nanak laid the foundation of the religion, and after his death, his teachings were continued and developed by nine successive Gurus.

Among them, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) played a particularly important role in shaping Sikh identity and organization. He established the Khalsa, a spiritual and military community of initiated Sikhs dedicated to defending justice, equality, and religious freedom. The ten Gurus together contributed to the development of Sikh philosophy, religious practices, and sacred literature. Sikhism teaches belief in one universal God who is eternal, all-powerful, and beyond human limitations. Sikh theology combines elements that developed within the religious environment of both Hinduism and Islam, while maintaining its own distinct identity.

In Sikh thought, God is the creator and the protector, and the ruler of the universe. Unlike Hindu polytheism, Sikhism strongly emphasizes monotheism and rejects the worship of multiple gods or idols. Sikh theology describes God through two aspects:

Nirgun – God without form or attributes, beyond human understanding;

Sargun – God revealed through creation and accessible through divine qualities.

According to Sikh teachings, God is eternal, unborn, timeless, and immortal. God existed before the creation of the universe, exists in the present, and will continue to exist forever.

Sikhism emphasizes devotion to God, moral living, equality, and social responsibility. A Sikh should live honestly, help others, and remember God through prayer and meditation. One important feature of Sikhism is its rejection of extreme asceticism and monastic isolation. Sikh teachings state that spiritual perfection should not be sought by abandoning society or worldly responsibilities. Instead, a person should: work honestly, support family life, help the community, and remain spiritually devoted while living an active social life. According to Sikh belief, sincere devotion to God eventually frees the soul from the cycle of rebirth and unites the individual with the divine. Sikhism also teaches that every human being can communicate directly with God without the need for priests or intermediaries.

Sikhism emerged during a period of strong religious reform movements in India. Thinkers and spiritual leaders such as Ramananda, Gorakhnath, Chaitanya, Kabir, and Vallabhacharya influenced the religious atmosphere of the time. Both Hindu and Islamic ideas affected the development of Sikhism. Guru Nanak, like the poet-saint Kabir, criticized idolatry, ritualism, and social inequality. He sought to establish a simpler and more spiritual form of religion centered on devotion to one God. Sikhism rejects: idol worship, belief in magic and fortune-telling, caste discrimination and elaborate purification rituals connected with birth and death. The religion strongly opposed the caste system that dominated Indian society and reduced the religious authority traditionally held by Brahmins in ceremonies such as marriage and funerals.

The holy scripture of Sikhism is the Guru Granth Sahib. This sacred book contains: the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, hymns, prayers, and spiritual poetry. The Guru Granth Sahib is regarded not only as a religious text but also as the eternal spiritual guide of the Sikh community. Sikhs treat it with the highest respect, and it serves as the center of worship in Sikh temples known as gurdwaras. Today, Sikhism remains an important religion, especially in the Punjab region of India, although Sikh communities also exist throughout the world in countries such as: United Kingdom, Canada United States. Sikhs are recognized for their strong sense of community, charity, discipline, and social service. Sikhism has contributed greatly to Indian religious thought, social reform, and the promotion of equality and tolerance.

Confucianism. Confucianism originally emerged as a philosophical, ethical, and social doctrine rather than a formal religion. It developed in ancient China and became one of the most influential systems of thought in Chinese history. Confucianism shaped Chinese culture, education, government, morality, and social relationships for many centuries and continues to influence East Asian societies today. The founder of Confucianism was Confucius, also known as Kong Fuzi or Kongzi. He was born in 551 BCE and died in 479 BCE. Confucius lived during a

period of political instability and social disorder in ancient China, when different states fought for power and traditional moral values were weakening.

Confucius lost his father at an early age and was raised by his mother under difficult economic conditions. His mother also died when he was still young. Despite hardships, Confucius devoted himself to education, self-improvement, and the study of ancient traditions. At the age of nineteen, he married and later worked in minor government positions, including as a warehouse supervisor. However, his greatest passion was teaching and educating young people. He believed that moral education was the key to creating a peaceful and harmonious society. Confucius gradually became famous for his wisdom, ethical teachings, and thoughtful sayings. His ideas spread widely across China, attracting many students from different social backgrounds. Historical tradition states that he had around 3,000 students, among whom 72 became especially distinguished disciples. His followers included both noble families and ordinary people. Through his educational activities, Confucius became known as one of the first great teachers and enlighteners in Chinese civilization.

Confucius focused much of his attention on the problems of his time. He criticized:

- ✚ the suffering and helplessness of ordinary people;
- ✚ corruption and tyranny among officials;
- ✚ political conflicts between rulers;
- ✚ and the decline of ancient moral and spiritual values.

According to Confucius, social disorder resulted from the loss of morality, respect, and responsibility. He believed that society could become stable only if people followed ethical principles and fulfilled their duties properly. After the death of Confucius, his teachings gradually gained recognition. Several centuries later, Confucianism became the official ideological foundation of Chinese imperial government. Kings, officials, scholars, and ordinary people were encouraged to follow Confucian moral values in daily life and administration.

One of the most important concepts in Confucian thought is the idea of the “perfect person” or *Junzi* (sometimes written as Jun-shi or Szyun-si). The Junzi represents a morally superior and spiritually developed human being. According to Confucius, the ideal person should possess two essential qualities: Humanity and kindness toward others, a strong sense of duty and responsibility, especially toward family, society, and ancestors. The ideal person must be - honest and trustworthy; loyal and devoted; respectful toward parents and elders; responsible in public service and committed to moral self-improvement. Confucius taught that true greatness does not come from wealth or power but from moral character and ethical behavior. A virtuous person constantly strives for perfection, wisdom, and harmony.

Confucian ethics emphasize harmonious relationships and social order. Some of the most important virtues include: filial piety (respect for parents and ancestors), loyalty, honesty, humility, wisdom, justice and compassion. Family relationships were considered the foundation of society. Confucius believed that if harmony existed within the family, peace and stability would also exist within the state. Education also

occupied a central place in Confucianism. Confucius argued that all people, regardless of social class, should have access to learning and moral development.

Over time, Confucianism became deeply integrated into Chinese political and cultural life. For many centuries, government officials in imperial China were selected through examinations based largely on Confucian teachings and classical texts. Confucian ideas also spread to neighboring countries such as: Korea, Japan, Vietnam. In these societies, Confucianism influenced education, ethics, family structure, and state administration. Although modern China has undergone major political and social changes, Confucian values such as respect for elders, education, discipline, and social harmony continue to remain important in East Asian cultures today.

In Confucianism, moral and ethical issues occupy the central place. Confucianism focuses primarily on human behavior, social harmony, responsibility, and proper relationships within society rather than on supernatural beliefs or religious rituals. For this reason, many scholars describe Confucianism more as an ethical and philosophical system than a traditional religion. Confucius maintained a cautious and rational attitude toward religious and supernatural matters. During his lifetime, belief in spirits, ancestors, and supernatural forces was widespread in ancient China, yet Confucius avoided excessive discussion about mystical subjects. The main source of Confucian teachings is the *Analects*, also known as *Lunyu*. This text records the conversations, sayings, and philosophical ideas of Confucius and his disciples. He was also reluctant to discuss subjects such as fate, death, and the afterlife. When one of his students asked him about death, Confucius famously replied: “If we do not yet understand life, how can we understand death?” This response demonstrates that Confucius preferred to focus on practical moral living and human relationships rather than metaphysical speculation.

Nevertheless, Confucius respected traditional religious customs and ceremonies that had existed in Chinese society for centuries. He believed that rituals and ancestral traditions played an important role in maintaining social order, discipline, and cultural continuity. One of the most important teachings in Confucianism is the doctrine of *Xiao*, meaning filial piety or devotion to parents and ancestors. Confucius regarded filial piety as the foundation of morality and social harmony. According to Confucian ethics, every person must:

- ✚ respect parents and elders;
- ✚ obey family responsibilities;
- ✚ care for parents during their lifetime;
- ✚ and honor ancestors after death.

Confucius believed that no virtue was more important than filial devotion. If children learned to respect their parents sincerely, society itself would become more peaceful and stable. The doctrine of *Xiao* was closely connected with another important Confucian concept called *Li*, meaning rituals, customs, and proper behavior. Under these principles, children were expected to obey and serve their parents throughout their lives. Confucian tradition demanded deep mourning after the death of parents. According to classical customs, a child was expected to mourn for three years after the death of a parent, regardless of social position or occupation.

This practice symbolized gratitude, loyalty, and emotional devotion to one's family. Respect for parents and elders became one of the defining characteristics of traditional Chinese civilization.

Confucianism did not achieve immediate success during the lifetime of Confucius. Many rulers and political leaders of his era did not fully accept his teachings, and Confucius himself died without seeing his ideas become dominant. His disciples also struggled initially to spread his philosophy. However, several centuries later, during the Han Dynasty (3rd–2nd centuries BCE), Confucianism rose to the level of state ideology. The rulers of the Han Dynasty recognized the political and social value of Confucian ethics. Although they did not accept every aspect of Confucius's teachings completely, they used Confucian principles to strengthen government administration and social order.

After his death, Confucius gradually became a highly honored cultural and spiritual figure in China. A temple was built near his grave in the city of Qufu, where his students and followers preserved his belongings, writings, musical instruments, and personal items. Over time, this site became one of the most sacred cultural shrines in China. During the Han Dynasty, Emperor Gaozu of Han personally offered sacrifices in honor of Confucius. This marked the beginning of official state ceremonies dedicated to him. Later dynasties continued to elevate Confucius's status: during the Song Dynasty, noble titles were granted to Confucius and his family; during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, he received even greater honorary titles such as "Great Teacher" and "Supreme Sage." By the Middle Ages, Confucius had become almost deified within Chinese culture. His image symbolized wisdom, morality, learning, and righteous government. Temples dedicated to Confucius were built throughout China, and ceremonies honoring him became an important part of state and educational traditions. Confucianism deeply shaped Chinese civilization for more than two thousand years.

Taoism. Taoism, also known as Daoism, emerged in ancient China around the 4th–3rd centuries BCE. Taoism developed both as a philosophical system and later as an organized religion. It became one of the most influential spiritual traditions in Chinese civilization, deeply affecting philosophy, medicine, literature, art, politics, and religious life. The foundations of Taoist thought are traditionally connected with the legendary Chinese sage Laozi, also known as Lao Tzu, whose name means "Old Master." Taoist teachings are mainly expressed in the famous classical work the Tao Te Ching. This text consists of short philosophical statements, aphorisms, and poetic reflections concerning the nature of the universe, human life, and harmony with existence.

The central concept of Taoism is the Tao (Dao), which literally means "the Way." According to Taoist philosophy, the Tao is the ultimate principle that governs the universe. It is eternal, invisible, and beyond complete human understanding. The Tao is regarded as the source of all existence and the natural order that maintains balance in the world. Laozi taught that human beings should live in harmony with the Tao by following simplicity, humility, moderation, and naturalness. Instead of struggling against nature, people should adapt themselves to its rhythms and laws.

According to Laozi, there are four great powers in the universe: The Tao; Heaven; Earth; The ruler or king. Among these, the Tao is considered the highest and most fundamental reality, while heaven, earth, and rulers derive their authority from it. One of the major principles of Taoism is *wu wei*, meaning “non-action” or “effortless action.” This does not mean complete passivity but rather acting naturally and wisely without forcing events against the natural order.

Taoism encourages simplicity, inner peace, self-discipline, harmony with nature and spiritual balance. Unlike systems that emphasize strict laws or social obligations, Taoism values spontaneity, freedom, and personal harmony with the universe. Over time, Taoism evolved from a philosophical doctrine into an organized religion. Taoist religion developed temples, priesthoods, rituals, sacred texts, and systems of worship. In religious Taoism, a pantheon of gods and spiritual beings emerged. Among the important divine figures were: Shangdi – the heavenly god and supreme ruler of the sky; Laozi – who gradually became venerated as a divine sage; Pangu – regarded in mythology as the creator of the world. Shangdi was especially respected as the supreme sky deity and was traditionally connected with imperial authority. Chinese emperors were often viewed as ruling under heavenly mandate.

Taoism developed a rich religious tradition that included:

- + temples and sacred shrines;
- + rituals and ceremonies;
- + meditation;
- + prayer;
- + alchemy;
- + and practices aimed at achieving longevity and spiritual immortality.

Taoist priests performed religious ceremonies for healing, protection, purification, and communication with spiritual forces. Sacred texts and mystical symbols also played important roles in Taoist worship. Many Taoists believed that spiritual cultivation and harmony with the Tao could help a person achieve long life, wisdom, and even immortality. By the 5th century CE, Taoist doctrines and rituals had become more formalized, and Taoism gained recognition as an important religious tradition within the Chinese state. During certain historical periods, Taoism even functioned as a state-supported religion. At the time of its formation, Taoism possessed a strong philosophical and intellectual character. However, as it evolved into a complex religious system with rituals and supernatural beliefs, some of its original philosophical simplicity gradually weakened. Additionally, Taoism often promoted withdrawal from worldly affairs, ascetic practices, and the search for spiritual immortality. Because of these features, its social influence declined in some periods compared with other traditions such as Confucianism and Buddhism.

Despite changes over time, Taoism left a profound influence on Chinese civilization and East Asian culture. Taoist ideas shaped: traditional Chinese medicine, martial arts, meditation practices, painting and poetry, architecture and environmental philosophy. The Taoist emphasis on harmony between humanity and nature continues to attract interest in the modern world, especially in discussions about spirituality, ecology, and holistic living.

Shintoism. Shinto is the traditional national religion of Japan. It is one of the oldest belief systems in Japanese culture and is closely connected with mythology, rituals, nature worship, and the spiritual identity of the Japanese people. Shinto gradually developed as a distinct religious tradition between the 6th and 7th centuries CE. The word “Shinto” means “the Way of the Gods,” reflecting its central focus on divine spirits and sacred forces in nature.

Shintoism developed as an indigenous belief system in Japan, centered on the worship of spirits known as *kami*. Over time, it was influenced by Buddhism, which entered Japan in the 6th century CE. As a result of this interaction, a blended religious system known as *Ryōbu Shinto* (“dual Shinto”) emerged, in which Buddhist and Shinto practices were combined. However, despite this cooperation, there was also competition between the two religions, and Shinto rituals remained distinct, especially in imperial and local traditions.

A central idea in Shintoism is the belief in *kami*, which are divine spirits or sacred forces that exist in nature, objects, ancestors, and heroes. Kami are not considered all-powerful gods in the monotheistic sense, but rather spiritual essences that inhabit the world around humans. Shinto does not have a single supreme god or strict theological system. Instead, it emphasizes: harmony with nature, respect for ancestors, purity and cleanliness, and ritual practices.

According to Shinto belief, the Japanese emperor, known as the Emperor of Japan (historically called *Mikado*), is considered a descendant of the sun goddess and holds a sacred position in society. In Shinto tradition, the spirits of ancestors and heroic figures are deeply respected. Many Japanese people believe that after death, humans may become part of the spiritual world and continue to influence the living as ancestral *kami*. Shinto worship emphasizes maintaining a strong connection between humans, nature, and ancestral spirits. Sacred spaces such as shrines are believed to be places where *kami* reside and interact with people.

Sacred Texts and Tradition

Shinto does not have a single sacred book in the way many other religions do. However, important mythological and historical texts include works such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, which describe the origins of Japan, its gods, and imperial lineage. These texts preserve Japanese mythology and cultural identity. Shinto mythology includes many important *kami*. Among the most significant are:

Amaterasu – the sun goddess and ancestor of the imperial family;

Susanoo – the god of storms and sea;

Inari – the protector of rice cultivation, agriculture, and prosperity. These deities represent natural forces, fertility, protection, and cosmic order. Shintoism places strong emphasis on ritual purity and cleanliness. Purification rituals are performed to remove spiritual impurity, especially before entering shrines or participating in ceremonies. Two major national purification and renewal traditions in Japan are:

New Year celebrations; seasonal purification ceremonies, often held in mid-year and at the end of the year. During these rituals, people clean homes, visit shrines, and offer prayers for health, happiness, and success. Blood, death, and physical impurity are traditionally considered spiritually unclean in Shinto belief, so purification rituals play an important role in maintaining spiritual balance.

Shinto worship is carried out in shrines, which are sacred places dedicated to kami. Shrines are often located in natural environments such as forests, mountains, or near rivers, reflecting the connection between Shinto and nature. Shintoism has had a profound influence on Japanese culture, values, and identity. It emphasizes harmony with nature, respect for ancestors, cleanliness, and community unity. Although many Japanese people today also practice Buddhism, Shinto traditions remain deeply integrated into festivals, national ceremonies, and cultural life. Shinto continues to be an important spiritual and cultural foundation of Japanese society, preserving ancient traditions while coexisting with modern life.

TOPIC 2: ZOROASTRIANISM

Aim of the Lesson

The main objective of this lesson is to provide students with a clear understanding of Zoroastrianism as one of the oldest religions in the world and to introduce its historical origins, central teachings, and cultural importance. During the lesson, students will learn about the life and teachings of Prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), the main beliefs of the religion such as the worship of Ahura Mazda, the idea of the struggle between good and evil, and the importance of moral responsibility in human life. Students will also become familiar with the holy book of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, and the ethical principle of “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.” In addition, the lesson aims to develop students’ ability to analyze historical and religious information and to compare Zoroastrianism with other world religions.

Importance of the Lesson

The significance of this topic lies in its contribution to understanding the spiritual and cultural heritage of ancient civilizations, especially ancient Persia and Central Asia. Studying Zoroastrianism helps students recognize the roots of many moral and philosophical ideas that later influenced other major religions of the world. It also promotes respect for religious diversity, tolerance, and intercultural understanding in modern society. Furthermore, this topic strengthens students’ historical awareness and helps them appreciate how ancient beliefs continue to shape ethical values and human thinking today.

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest known monotheistic religions in the world. It originated in ancient Persia, in the region of modern-day Iran and parts of Central Asia, more than 3,500 years ago. This religion was founded by the prophet Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, who introduced a new spiritual and ethical worldview centered on the struggle between good and evil.

At the core of Zoroastrian teaching is the belief in one supreme god, Ahura Mazda, who represents truth, light, and goodness. Human beings are considered free to choose between good and evil, and moral responsibility plays a central role in the religion. The main idea is that good thoughts, good words, and good deeds lead to happiness and spiritual reward, while evil actions lead to suffering and punishment.

Zoroastrianism had a significant influence on the development of ancient civilizations, especially the Persian empires such as the Achaemenid Empire. It also

contributed to shaping religious and philosophical ideas in later world religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Concepts such as the final judgment, heaven and hell, angels, and the struggle between good and evil are believed to have been influenced by Zoroastrian thought. In addition, Zoroastrianism introduced important ethical and moral principles that emphasized truthfulness, justice, and respect for nature. Fire is considered a sacred symbol of purity and divine light, and it plays an important role in religious rituals.

Zoroastrianism is considered the oldest and first monotheistic religion in the world. Many scholars emphasize that its homeland is Khorezm. Therefore, we must provide students with comprehensive information about this great spiritual heritage that forms a major root of our cultural identity.

Zoroastrianism is one of the most ancient religions that emerged in Central Asia during the 2nd–1st millennia BCE, and it is often regarded as one of the earliest faiths believed to have been revealed through divine inspiration. Compared to many other religious traditions, Zoroastrianism had both a direct and indirect influence on the spiritual, philosophical, and cultural development of humanity. It introduced a number of fundamental religious concepts that later became significant in other major world religions.

For the first time in recorded religious history, Zoroastrianism articulated ideas such as divine judgment over every individual, the existence of heaven and hell, the concept of a Day of Judgment, the resurrection of the body, and the notion of an enduring unity between body and soul. These theological principles represented a major development in human religious thought and later found echoes in Judaism, Christianity, and other religious traditions, where similar eschatological ideas were further developed and systematized.

It is important to note that the exact time and place of origin of Zoroastrianism remain subjects of scholarly debate. Despite extensive research, these questions have not yet been definitively resolved. The religion is traditionally associated with the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), although this name is considered a conventional designation used in later historical and scholarly sources. In the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, the religion is referred to as “Mazdayasna,” which literally means “worship of Mazda.” The term “Mazda” is commonly interpreted as “wisdom” or “the wise one,” emphasizing the central importance of knowledge, truth, and enlightenment in the faith.

Zoroastrianism is also honored by the term “Behdin,” meaning “the best religion” or “the righteous faith.” According to its teachings, all forms of good existence and order in the world were created through the will of Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity. The name Ahura Mazda is formed by combining “Ahura,” meaning “lord” or “supreme being,” with “Mazda,” resulting in the meaning “Lord of Wisdom” or “Wise Lord,” who represents the ultimate source of truth, order, and creation in the universe.

In scholarly literature, the name Zoroaster appears in various forms, including Zarathustra, Zardust, and Zoroaster, reflecting differences in linguistic traditions and historical transmission. There is also ongoing scholarly debate regarding the historical existence of Zoroaster. Some researchers consider him a real historical

figure who played a foundational role in shaping the religion, while others interpret him as a symbolic or mythological figure representing the collective development of early religious ideas.

Regarding chronology, different estimates have been proposed. According to some sources, Zoroaster may have lived approximately between 1200–570 BCE, functioning as a religious reformer, philosopher, and poet. However, other scholars, including the English researcher Mary Boyce, suggest an earlier date, placing his life between 1500–1200 BCE, based on linguistic and cultural analysis of the Avesta and ancient Iranian traditions.

There are two main scholarly views regarding the birthplace of Zoroaster (Zarathustra) and the region where he began his early religious activity. These interpretations are commonly referred to as the “Western theory” and the “Eastern theory,” and both are based on linguistic, historical, and textual analyses of ancient sources.

The Western theory identifies Media (located in the territory of present-day Iran) as the homeland of Zoroaster and the earliest center of Zoroastrianism. Supporters of this view argue that Zoroastrianism was widely practiced in the ancient Iranian world and that its development is closely linked to the cultural and political history of the Iranian plateau. A key argument in favor of this theory is the existence of later commentaries on the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, which were written in the ancient Iranian-Pahlavi language. This linguistic continuity is considered evidence of the strong historical roots of Zoroastrianism in Western Iran.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Zoroastrianism functioned as a state-supported religion in three major Iranian empires—the Achaemenid Empire, the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire, and the Sassanid Empire—spanning from approximately the 6th century BCE to the 7th century CE. During this long historical period, Zoroastrianism played a central role in shaping the religious, political, and cultural identity of the Near and Middle East.

In contrast, the Eastern theory proposes that Zoroaster’s homeland and the earliest center of Zoroastrianism was Khorezm (Chorasmia), located in Central Asia. Many scholars of ancient historical sources support this interpretation, arguing that Khorezm represents a more accurate geographical and cultural context for the earliest development of Zoroastrian beliefs. According to this view, Khorezm is associated with the origins of the sacred Zoroastrian fire known as “Azarxurra,” and with the early connection between the prophet Zoroaster and the supreme deity Ahura Mazda.

The Avesta, which is the primary sacred text of Zoroastrianism, contains references that are central to this debate. It states that the sacred fire “Azarxurra” was first ignited in Airyanem Vaeja (also referred to in some sources as “Eran-vej”). The geographical, climatic, and environmental descriptions of Airyanem Vaeja found in the Avesta are considered by some researchers to closely correspond to the historical region of Khorezm, thereby supporting the Eastern hypothesis.

In addition, the Avesta describes a series of lands created by Ahura Mazda as regions of blessing, prosperity, and spiritual significance. The first among these is Airyanem Vaeja, described as a land “whose beauty cannot be matched in the world.” Following this are Sogdiana (Sogd), characterized as a land “rich in people and

livestock,” Mouru (Merv), described as “powerful and sacred,” and Bakhdi (Bactria), known as “the land of high-raised banners.” These descriptions not only reflect the sacred geography of Zoroastrian tradition but also provide valuable historical insight into the cultural landscape of ancient Central Asia and its surrounding regions.

In this religious and cultural environment, the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra) introduced a completely new and revolutionary worldview. He rejected polytheistic worship and taught that there is only one supreme and eternal god—Ahura Mazda—who represents truth, wisdom, light, order, and righteousness. According to Zoroaster’s teachings, the universe is not neutral or chaotic but is shaped by a continuous moral struggle between two opposing forces: good (Spenta Mainyu) and evil (Angra Mainyu). This dualistic worldview made moral responsibility a central part of human existence.

One of the most important contributions of Zoroastrianism is the emphasis on human free will. Human beings are not forced into destiny; instead, they actively participate in the cosmic struggle through their choices. Every person is responsible for maintaining cosmic order by following the principle of “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds” (*Humata, Hukhta, Hvarshata*). This ethical system became one of the strongest moral foundations of ancient religious thought.

Over time, Zoroastrianism became closely connected with the political and cultural structure of ancient Persia. It influenced the ideology of kingship, where rulers were seen as protectors of truth and justice under the authority of Ahura Mazda. The religion reached its highest level of influence during major Persian empires:

- The Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE)
- The Parthian Empire (247 BCE–224 CE)
- The Sassanian Empire (224–651 CE)

During these periods, Zoroastrianism played an important role in shaping state administration, legal systems, education, and cultural identity. Fire temples were established across the empire, and fire was regarded as a sacred symbol of purity, divine presence, and eternal truth. Priests (known as Magi) held an important position in society, as they preserved religious rituals and interpreted sacred teachings.

Zoroastrian sacred literature is known as the Avesta, which includes hymns, rituals, and philosophical teachings. The oldest part, the Gathas, is believed to contain the direct words of Zoroaster and focuses on morality, truth, and spiritual discipline. The religion also developed ideas about life after death, including judgment of the soul, reward in heaven, punishment in hell, and the final purification of the world, when good will ultimately triumph over evil.

Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, is traditionally regarded as the founder and spiritual leader of Zoroastrianism. Although the exact historical details of his life are uncertain, scholars generally place him between the 2nd millennium BCE and the 6th century BCE, most likely in northeastern Iran or Central Asia. He is believed to have been born into a priestly family within an early Indo-Iranian society.

According to tradition, Zoroaster grew up in a polytheistic environment where people worshipped many nature-based deities. At the age of around 30, he experienced a profound spiritual revelation while performing a religious ritual near a

river. During this vision, he encountered Ahura Mazda, whom he identified as the one true, supreme god. This event marked the beginning of his mission as a prophet.

Zoroaster's teachings introduced a new moral and religious worldview based on:

- belief in one supreme god, Ahura Mazda
- the cosmic struggle between good (truth, order) and evil (falsehood, chaos)
- the importance of human free will and moral responsibility
- the idea that every individual must actively choose between good and evil

He strongly emphasized ethical living, encouraging people to follow the principle of “**Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds**” as the foundation of a righteous life.

After receiving his revelation, Zoroaster began preaching his message, initially facing resistance from traditional priests and followers of older polytheistic beliefs. However, his teachings eventually gained support, especially after being accepted by local rulers, which helped spread his ideas more widely.

The belief system of Zoroastrianism is based on a clear moral and philosophical framework that explains the nature of the universe, human responsibility, and the final destiny of all beings.

Zoroastrianism teaches belief in one supreme and eternal god, **Ahura Mazda**. He is considered the creator of the universe and the source of truth, light, wisdom, and order. All moral and cosmic principles originate from him. One of the central ideas of the religion is the concept of cosmic dualism. The world is seen as a constant struggle between two opposing forces:

- **Good:** Spenta Mainyu (spirit of goodness, truth, and order)
- **Evil:** Angra Mainyu (spirit of destruction, falsehood, and chaos)

This struggle is not only cosmic but also moral, influencing every aspect of human life.

Human beings are given free will, meaning they are not forced into either good or evil. Every individual must consciously choose their path in life. This freedom makes humans active participants in the moral order of the universe. Because humans have free will, they are fully responsible for their actions. Zoroastrian ethics emphasize that every thought, word, and action has consequences. The famous moral principle is:

Zoroastrianism teaches that at the end of time, all souls will face a final judgment. Their actions during life will be evaluated, and they will be rewarded or punished accordingly. Ultimately, good will triumph over evil, and the world will be purified and restored to a perfect state.

The sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism is called the Avesta, which represents the most important source of religious doctrine, philosophy, ritual practice, and ethical law in the tradition. It is considered one of the oldest known religious texts in human history and provides valuable insight into the spiritual worldview of ancient Iranian civilization.

The Avesta is not a single book but a collection of texts written in different **periods**, compiled over many centuries. It reflects both the original teachings of

Zoroaster and later religious developments within Zoroastrian communities. Because of this, the Avesta combines theological ideas, ritual instructions, moral teachings, and liturgical prayers in one unified tradition.

One of the most sacred and important sections of the Avesta is the Gathas, a series of hymns believed to have been composed directly by the prophet Zoroaster himself. These hymns are written in an ancient poetic form and express deep philosophical ideas about Ahura Mazda, truth (*asha*), human responsibility, and the eternal struggle between good and evil. The Gathas are considered the oldest and most authentic part of the scripture.

In addition to the Gathas, the Avesta includes ritual and ceremonial texts, which describe how religious ceremonies should be performed. These texts provide detailed instructions for purification rituals, fire worship, and temple practices conducted by priests (known as Magi). Fire, in particular, is treated as a sacred symbol of purity and divine truth, and its preservation is an essential part of religious life.

The Avesta also contains legal and ethical codes that regulate personal conduct and social behavior. These rules emphasize purity of thought, honesty, respect for life, environmental care, and social order. Zoroastrian ethics strongly encourage individuals to follow the principle of *Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*, which is reflected throughout the text.

Another major component of the Avesta is its collection of prayers and liturgical formulas, which are recited during daily worship and religious ceremonies. These prayers serve to strengthen spiritual discipline, express devotion to Ahura Mazda, and maintain a constant connection between humans and the divine.

Historically, the teachings of the Avesta were preserved through a long oral tradition before being written down. Priests memorized and transmitted the texts across generations, which helped preserve their sacred meaning. However, many parts of the original Avesta were lost over time due to invasions, natural destruction, and historical changes.

Zoroastrianism is widely regarded as one of the oldest religions in the world. Historical and archaeological evidence suggests that between the 12th–6th centuries BCE, this faith was practiced among the peoples of Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Asia Minor. Over time, it became one of the most influential religious systems of the ancient world, shaping both regional belief systems and later world religions.

A major stage in the development of Zoroastrianism occurred during the rule of the Sasanian dynasty in Iran (3rd–7th centuries CE). During this period, its sacred texts—the Avesta—were systematically compiled by Zoroastrian priests from earlier oral traditions and were written down in a structured literary form for the first time. Some sections of the text, particularly the legal and disciplinary part known as the “Videvdad” (*Vendidad*), were later revised, edited, and expanded in accordance with religious and doctrinal needs.

Until the arrival and widespread establishment of Islam in Central Asia in the 8th century CE, Zoroastrianism remained the dominant religion of many local populations. This is supported not only by written historical sources but also by archaeological evidence, including fire temples, inscriptions, and ritual objects discovered across the region.

The Avesta is the primary sacred scripture and the most important source of Zoroastrian doctrine. Throughout history, it has been known under various phonetic and linguistic forms such as Apastak, Ovisto, Ovusto, Abisto, and Avasto. As a historical document, the Avesta is of exceptional value, as it provides unique insights into the pre-Islamic social structure, economic life, religious beliefs, worldview, customs, and spiritual culture of the peoples of Central Asia, Iran, and Azerbaijan. Its content was formed gradually over nearly two millennia and was transmitted orally from generation to generation before being written down.

Before Zoroastrianism became an officially recognized state religion, fragments of the Avesta were already circulating among the peoples of Turan and Iran. These fragments were regarded as divine revelations delivered through the prophet Zoroaster as messages from Ahura Mazda. Over time, these hymns, prayers, and ritual texts were collected and organized into a unified corpus known as the Avesta, a term often interpreted as meaning “established rules” or “firmly fixed teachings.”

However, the original form of this ancient text has not survived in its entirety. The medieval scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) provides important testimony regarding its loss. He writes that in the royal treasury of Darius, son of Darius, there existed a copy of the Avesta written in gold on twelve thousand cow hides. According to his account, when Alexander the Great conquered the region and destroyed fire temples along with their priestly institutions, this sacred text was burned, resulting in the loss of approximately two-thirds of the original material.

Similar accounts regarding Alexander’s destruction of the Avesta, its alleged translation into Greek, and the burning of sacred texts are also found in later Zoroastrian and historical writings, including the *Bundahishn*, *Shahristaniha-i Eran*, *Denkard* (9th century), *Arda Viraf Namak* (9th century), *Tansar’s Letters*, as well as in works by Islamic historians such as Al-Masudi’s *Muruj al-Dhahab* and *Fars-Nama*. These sources also describe the destruction of fire temples, the looting of religious treasures, and the persecution or displacement of Zoroastrian priests and scholars. According to Al-Biruni, only about two-fifths of the original Avesta survived. He further notes that the Avesta originally consisted of 30 “nasks” (sections), of which only about 12 were preserved among the Magi (Zoroastrian priests) in later periods.

Historical records indicate that for centuries Zoroastrian priests preserved the sacred texts primarily through oral transmission, passing them down from generation to generation. One of the reasons for this was the belief that the writing systems of conquered or foreign peoples were ritually impure, which led to a long-standing reluctance to commit sacred knowledge to written form. The systematic compilation of the Avesta began during the Arsacid (Parthian) period (1st–2nd centuries CE). Later, under the Sasanian rulers Ardashir Papakan (227–243 CE) and especially Shapur I (243–273 CE), significant efforts were made to collect, organize, and expand the religious corpus. During this process, sections dealing with astronomy, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, and ritual law were recorded and integrated into the broader textual tradition.

Today, two relatively complete manuscripts of the later compiled Avesta are preserved in India: one is housed at the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Mumbai, which serves as an important cultural and scholarly center for the Zoroastrian community, and the other is kept in the National Library of Kolkata. These manuscripts remain crucial sources for modern research on ancient Iranian and Central Asian religious history.

The religious symbolism of Zoroastrianism plays an important role in expressing its spiritual ideas, moral values, and understanding of the universe. These symbols are not only artistic representations but also carry deep philosophical meanings connected to truth, purity, and the struggle between good and evil.

1. Fire (Purity and Divine Light)

Fire is one of the most important and sacred symbols in Zoroastrianism. It represents purity, truth, and the presence of Ahura Mazda. Fire is not worshipped as a god but is seen as a visible sign of divine light and wisdom. In fire temples, an eternal flame is carefully maintained by priests, symbolizing the continuous presence of truth and righteousness in the world.

2. Faravahar (Spiritual Guidance and Human Soul)

The Faravahar is one of the most recognizable symbols of Zoroastrianism. It represents the human soul and its journey toward spiritual perfection. The symbol typically shows a winged figure with a human form, which carries several layers of meaning:

- The central figure represents the human soul
- The wings symbolize progress and spiritual evolution
- The circle represents eternity and the continuous cycle of life
- The two lower paths indicate the choice between good and evil

The Faravahar reminds individuals of their moral responsibility to follow the path of truth and righteousness.

The festivals of Zoroastrianism are deeply connected with nature, cosmic order, seasonal cycles, and the spiritual ideas of purity, renewal, and moral harmony. These celebrations are not only religious rituals but also cultural events that reflect the ancient understanding of the relationship between humans, the natural world, and divine truth (asha). They emphasize balance, gratitude, and the continuous victory of light over darkness, which is one of the central teachings of Zoroastrian belief.

1. Nowruz (New Year Festival)

Nowruz is the most important and widely celebrated festival in Zoroastrian tradition. It marks the arrival of spring and symbolizes the renewal of life, rebirth of nature, and the triumph of light over darkness. It is also considered the beginning of a new spiritual and moral cycle, where people are encouraged to purify their thoughts, actions, and environment.

Before Nowruz, families traditionally perform deep cleaning of their homes, which represents the removal of negative energy and moral impurities from life. People wear new clothes, prepare special festive meals, visit relatives, and strengthen social relationships. It is also a time of forgiveness, reconciliation, and emotional renewal, when conflicts are resolved and relationships are restored.

Nowruz is not only a religious festival but also a cultural heritage that has influenced many civilizations across Iran, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and other regions. It represents a universal idea of renewal and hope, connecting human life with the natural cycle of spring.

2. Sadeh (Festival of Fire)

The **Sadeh festival** is a traditional winter celebration dedicated to fire and light. It is usually held in the middle of winter and symbolizes the victory of warmth, light, and life over cold, darkness, and death. Fire plays a central role in this festival because it is considered a sacred symbol of divine truth and protection.

During Sadeh, large bonfires are lit in communities, representing purification, spiritual cleansing, and the destruction of evil forces. People gather around the fire, pray, sing, and celebrate together, strengthening community unity and cooperation.

The festival also reflects gratitude toward fire as one of the most important elements of life, given by Ahura Mazda. Fire provides warmth, protection, cooking, and survival, and therefore it is honored as a divine gift that sustains civilization.

3. Gahambars (Seasonal Festivals)

The **Gahambars** are a series of six seasonal festivals celebrated throughout the year, each corresponding to a different stage of creation in Zoroastrian cosmology. These stages include the creation of the sky, water, earth, plants, animals, and humans, showing the sacred structure of the universe.

These festivals are not only religious rituals but also social and ethical gatherings. They emphasize:

- harmony between humans and nature
- gratitude for divine creation and natural resources
- equality, cooperation, and community unity
- sharing food and helping those in need

Gahambars are traditionally considered times of charity and generosity, when people are encouraged to support the poor and strengthen social bonds. They also reflect the Zoroastrian idea that human beings must actively protect and respect creation as part of their moral duty.

Today, the followers of Zoroastrianism represent one of the smallest religious communities in the world, yet they remain highly significant from a historical, cultural, and spiritual perspective. Despite their limited numbers, Zoroastrians have preserved a continuous religious tradition that dates back more than three millennia, maintaining their identity through strong community bonds, rituals, and cultural practices.

Modern Zoroastrian populations are mainly concentrated in a few key regions. The largest community is found in India, where they are known as Parsis. They migrated there from Persia centuries ago and settled mainly in Gujarat and later in urban centers such as Mumbai and Pune. India today remains the most active center of Zoroastrian religious and cultural life. The second important center is Iran, especially cities such as Yazd and Kerman, where ancient Zoroastrian families have preserved their heritage despite historical pressures and religious changes over time.

In addition to these traditional homelands, smaller Zoroastrian communities exist in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, as well as in Western countries such as the

United States and the United Kingdom, where migration in the 19th and 20th centuries led to the formation of diaspora communities. Today, Zoroastrians are also found in Canada, Australia, and other parts of Europe, where they actively participate in multicultural societies while maintaining their religious identity.

Although their global population is estimated to be only around one hundred thousand people, Zoroastrians have a strong sense of cultural unity. They continue to practice essential religious traditions such as fire temple worship, daily prayers, and important festivals like Nowruz, Sadeh, and Gahambars. These practices help preserve their ancient values, including respect for nature, moral purity, and the principle of “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.”

Modern Zoroastrian communities are also actively involved in education, cultural preservation, and social development. Many organizations and associations work to promote Zoroastrian heritage, language studies, and intergenerational transmission of traditions. At the same time, globalization and assimilation into larger societies have created challenges, including declining population numbers, intermarriage concerns, and reduced religious participation among younger generations.

Despite these challenges, Zoroastrian communities remain resilient. They continue to adapt to modern life while preserving their ancient identity. Their contribution to world civilization is significant, especially in areas of ethics, religious philosophy, and cultural heritage. Today, Zoroastrianism stands as a living reminder of one of the earliest monotheistic traditions in human history, still surviving in a modern, globalized world.

TOPIC3: BUDDHISM

Aim of the Lesson

The main aim of this lesson is to help students gain a clear understanding of Buddhism as one of the major world religions and philosophical systems. Students will learn about its historical origin in ancient India, the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), and the core principles such as the Four Noble Truths, karma, rebirth, and the path to Nirvana.

The lesson also aims to:

- explain the key ideas and values of Buddhist teaching;
- identify the main branches of Buddhism (Theravāda, Mahayana, Vajrayana);
- understand the spread of Buddhism across Asia and beyond;
- develop students' ability to compare Buddhism with other world religions.

Importance of the Lesson

This topic is important because Buddhism has had a deep influence on world history, culture, philosophy, and ethics. Studying Buddhism helps students to:

- understand one of the oldest and most influential spiritual traditions in the world;
- recognize the diversity of religious and philosophical systems in human civilization;
- develop respect and tolerance toward different cultures and beliefs;
- understand universal moral values such as compassion, non-violence, and mindfulness;
- improve critical thinking about human life, suffering, and ethical behavior.

Buddhism is one of the oldest world religions and originated in the 6th–5th centuries BCE in ancient India. Over time, it spread widely across Asia and became one of the most influential spiritual, philosophical, and cultural traditions in the world. Today, Buddhism is practiced mainly in South, Southeast, and East Asia, including countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Singapore, and Malaysia. It is also present in parts of Europe, the Americas, and in regions of Russia such as Buryatia and Kalmykia. The global Buddhist population is estimated at around 850 million people, including approximately one million monastic practitioners.

The founder of Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama, who is known by many titles that reflect different aspects of his spiritual status:

Siddhartha – his personal name

Gautama – his clan name

Shakyamuni – “Sage of the Shakya clan”

Buddha – “The Enlightened One”

Tathagata – “Thus Gone / Thus Come One”

Jina – “Victorious One”

Bhagavan – “Blessed or Holy One”

Among these, the title “Buddha” became the most widely used, and the religion itself became known as Buddhism.

It is widely recognized that the emergence of every new religion can be interpreted from different perspectives. From a religious point of view, it is often explained as being rooted in divine will and supernatural causes, suggesting that new faiths appear through sacred revelation or the intervention of higher spiritual forces. In contrast, from a secular and scientific perspective, the formation of religions is analyzed through a combination of social, economic, political, and spiritual factors that influence human societies over time. In academic religious studies, it is essential to examine and clearly explain each of these causes in order to provide students with a balanced and critical understanding of religious development. Relevant and detailed information on this topic can be found in N.F. Nizomiddinov’s work *“Religious-Philosophical Teachings of Southeast Asia”* (2006, pp. 58–75), as well as in A.V. Norbekov’s textbook *“Fundamentals of Religious Studies”* (2008, pp. 90–102), both of which provide valuable scholarly interpretations of religious evolution.

Buddhism, derived from the Sanskrit word *buddha*, meaning “one who has awakened,” “one who has attained peace and ultimate truth,” or “enlightened by divine wisdom,” is regarded as one of the oldest world religions. It emerged in India in the 6th century BCE, a period when India was one of the major ancient centers of global civilization, characterized by complex cultural, philosophical, and social development. The rise of Buddhism was closely connected to a variety of historical and societal factors that shaped the intellectual climate of the time.

During the 6th century BCE, the Indian subcontinent was politically fragmented into numerous small kingdoms and tribal states. This fragmentation weakened traditional tribal relations and social cohesion, while at the same time encouraging movements toward political consolidation and centralized authority. In such a context, existing religious and social structures, particularly Brahmanism, played a dominant ideological role in society. However, Brahmanism also contributed to the rigid division of society into hereditary castes, creating a highly stratified and unequal social system.

The caste system, deeply embedded in Brahmanical teachings, divided society into fixed social groups based on birth. It reinforced strict social hierarchy and limited social mobility, thereby preventing significant social change. Brahmanism not only legitimized this system but also claimed that sacred knowledge and ultimate spiritual truth were accessible exclusively to the Brahmin priestly class. This ideological position reinforced inequality and created barriers for other social groups, particularly those in lower social strata, who were excluded from religious knowledge and social privileges.

As a result of these conditions, there emerged a growing need for a new ideological and spiritual system that could transcend rigid social divisions and offer a

more universal path toward spiritual liberation. Buddhism arose in response to these historical circumstances, presenting teachings that emphasized moral conduct, inner transformation, and spiritual equality, thereby appealing to a broader segment of society.

To better understand this context, it is important to examine the concept of castes in greater detail. The term “caste” generally refers to a closed social group characterized by hereditary membership, occupational specialization, and strict social boundaries. Individuals are born into a caste and remain within it throughout their lives. In the Indian tradition, castes are also associated with the concept of *varnas*, which classify society into major hierarchical groups.

Caste membership determines not only a person’s social identity but also their occupation, rights, duties, and social interactions. Marriage is traditionally arranged within the same caste, reinforcing social separation and maintaining the purity of each group according to traditional beliefs. This system is strictly hierarchical, based on inequality and the division of society into “higher” and “lower” groups. Those belonging to lower castes were often considered socially inferior and, in extreme cases, labeled as “untouchable,” facing exclusion from many aspects of public life.

Historically, the origin of the caste system is linked to the development of early ethnic interactions, the increasing complexity of the division of labor, and the gradual formation of class-based society. Over time, both Brahmanism and later Hinduism played a significant role in legitimizing and strengthening the caste system, embedding it deeply into religious doctrine and social practice. As a result, the caste structure became one of the most enduring and influential social institutions in Indian history, shaping religious, cultural, and political life for centuries.

During periods when efforts to centralize state power became more intense in ancient India, there also emerged a growing and widespread desire among different strata of society to engage more directly with religious teachings, questions of divine truth, and fundamental philosophical issues such as the meaning of life and death. This intellectual and spiritual curiosity reflects not only social change but also a relatively high level of spiritual and philosophical development within that historical era. It suggests that Indian civilization at the time had reached a mature cultural stage in which deep metaphysical questions became central to public consciousness.

In this context, Buddhism emerged as a progressive and humanistic teaching of its time. It opposed the rigid social structure of Brahmanism, which had become a major obstacle to the development of socio-economic relations, trade, and broader social mobility. One of the key features of Buddhism was its rejection of inherited social inequality and caste-based discrimination. According to Buddhist philosophy, a portion of the absolute spiritual essence exists within every human being, which implies that all individuals possess equal intrinsic value. From this perspective, all people are equal before the ultimate truth or divine reality. This principle of spiritual and moral equality played a crucial role in the rapid spread of Buddhism and contributed significantly to its transformation into a world religion.

Buddhism was founded by the historical figure Siddhartha Gautama, who belonged to the Kshatriya caste. He was born into a royal family as a prince of the Shakya republic in Northern India. Over time, various names and titles have been

attributed to him in historical and religious sources, each reflecting a different aspect of his life, status, and spiritual achievement. His personal name was Siddhartha, while Gautama refers to his clan or family lineage. After attaining enlightenment, he became known as Shakyamuni, meaning “the sage of the Shakya tribe.” He is also referred to as Buddha, meaning “the enlightened one,” Tathagata, meaning “one who has thus come or thus gone,” Jina, meaning “the victor,” and Bhagavan, meaning “the blessed or victorious one.”

When teaching students about the history and nature of religions, it is essential to emphasize that every new religious tradition is not created in isolation but rather develops on the foundation of earlier religious and philosophical systems. Buddhism, as a doctrinal system established by Siddhartha Gautama, was significantly influenced by the religious and philosophical environment of Brahmanism. It incorporated and reinterpreted several key concepts of earlier Indian religious thought, including the belief in the immortality of the soul and its continuous cycle of rebirth, known as samsara; the law of karma, which determines the moral consequences of actions and influences future rebirths; and dharma, understood as the ethical and cosmic order that guides an individual’s conduct and shapes their karmic outcomes.

Through this synthesis and transformation of earlier ideas, Buddhism developed a distinctive philosophical system that both continued and reinterpreted existing traditions, while simultaneously offering new interpretations centered on ethical conduct, liberation from suffering, and the attainment of enlightenment.

In Buddhist teachings, the philosophical understanding of existence and life is based on a system that emphasizes non-material and metaphysical principles. Central to this worldview are the concepts of dharma, understood as a continuous flow and combination of fundamental elements or phenomena that constitute reality; samsara, which refers to the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; and karma, the moral law of cause and effect that determines the conditions of an individual’s future existence based on their actions. Together, these principles form a coherent explanation of human existence, moral responsibility, and the process of spiritual development within Buddhist thought.

This philosophical system is most clearly expressed through the foundational doctrine known as the Four Noble Truths, which represent the core of Buddhist teaching and provide a systematic explanation of suffering and the path to liberation.

The Four Noble Truths

1. Sarvam Dukkham – The Truth of Suffering

According to this principle, all forms of existence are characterized by suffering (*dukkha*). This suffering is not limited only to physical pain but also includes dissatisfaction, impermanence, emotional instability, and the inherent incompleteness of worldly life. Thus, life in the cycle of samsara is fundamentally marked by suffering.

2. Samudaya Satyam – The Truth of the Origin of Suffering

The second truth explains the cause of suffering. It teaches that suffering arises from attachment, desire, craving, and passion (*tanha*). Human beings, driven by continuous

desires and emotional attachments, create the conditions that bind them to the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

3. Nirodha Satyam – The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

The third truth declares that the cessation of suffering is possible. This liberation is achieved through the complete elimination of desire and attachment. The state in which suffering ceases entirely is known as **Nirvana**, a Sanskrit term meaning “extinction,” “blowing out,” or “cessation,” referring to the extinguishing of ignorance, desire, and suffering.

4. Marga Satyam – The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering

The fourth truth outlines the method for overcoming suffering. It describes the **Noble Eightfold Path**, which provides ethical guidelines, mental discipline, and wisdom leading to liberation. By following this path, individuals can gradually overcome ignorance and attachment, ultimately attaining Nirvana.

1. **SAMSARA** – a philosophical reflection of the cyclical and continuous transition of processes such as birth and death, creation and destruction, where existence constantly changes from one state to another.
2. **KARMA** – the philosophical law of the consequences or effects of good and bad deeds in the material world, representing the nature and impact of one’s actions.
3. **DHARMA** – the philosophical theory of the universal order that governs and maintains the existence and stability of all objects and phenomena in the universe.

Buddha formulated the Eightfold Path as the practical means for eliminating suffering and attaining nirvana. In Buddhist teaching, the correct understanding of the Four Noble Truths is not merely theoretical; it must be realized and internalized through the systematic practice of the Eightfold Path. In this sense, the path functions as both a moral guide and a method of spiritual transformation.

A person who follows this path gradually progresses through its stages step by step. As they advance from one stage to another, they increasingly free themselves from the attachments and constraints of ordinary social life. This process is understood as a gradual purification of mind and consciousness, leading to spiritual liberation. Ultimately, the practitioner approaches the state of nirvana, which is interpreted as the final goal of Buddhist practice and, in some philosophical interpretations, as a form of unity with the absolute truth or ultimate reality.

In Buddhist doctrine, nirvana is described as a profound state of inner liberation in which all emotions, desires, habitual tendencies, and worldly attachments are completely extinguished. It is not simply a physical state but a transformation of consciousness in which the individual transcends ego, ignorance, and the causes of rebirth. As a result, the cycle of samsara—continuous birth and death—is brought to an end. Nirvana is therefore understood as a state of complete inner freedom, representing the highest possible spiritual attainment. In traditional Buddhist thought, it is even said to be so elevated that celestial beings or gods are depicted as regarding it with respect and admiration.

However, the path to nirvana is considered extremely difficult. Buddhist teachings emphasize that an individual cannot achieve this state solely through

personal effort without proper guidance. For this reason, spiritual progress is often supported by enlightened or semi-enlightened beings who assist others on their journey. These beings are known as bodhisattvas (from Sanskrit, meaning “an awakened being” or “one whose essence is enlightenment”). Bodhisattvas are individuals who have attained a high level of spiritual realization and are close to nirvana but voluntarily choose to remain within the cycle of existence in order to guide and help others achieve liberation. They serve as moral and spiritual teachers for those who are still on the path.

Unlike strict ascetic traditions that require complete withdrawal from society, Buddhism generally maintains a balanced approach toward worldly life. It does not universally demand that followers abandon all social responsibilities, pleasures, or family life in order to pursue enlightenment. While some practitioners choose monastic life, Buddhism as a whole does not insist on extreme renunciation as the only valid path.

Those who adopt a monastic lifestyle live within organized religious communities known as sanghas. These monastic communities serve as centers for spiritual practice, learning, and the dissemination of Buddhist teachings. Importantly, early Buddhist monastic organization did not develop into a rigid hierarchical clergy system; instead, it functioned as a relatively egalitarian community structure focused on discipline, meditation, and ethical conduct.

Within sanghas, monks are expected to observe strict rules of personal conduct, including maintaining cleanliness in both personal hygiene and living environments. Discipline and simplicity are considered essential aspects of spiritual practice. In addition to male monastic communities, female sanghas were also established, allowing women to participate in monastic life and spiritual practice. Although female sanghas were generally fewer in number and often located near populated settlements, they played an important role in the spread of Buddhism. In many cases, certain religious ceremonies and rituals within female monastic communities were conducted with the assistance or leadership of monks from nearby male sanghas.

It is important to emphasize to students that the central goal in Buddhism is the liberation from the continuous cycle of samsara and the attainment of nirvana. All Buddhist teachings, ethical principles, and meditative practices ultimately aim at freeing the individual from suffering and breaking the chain of rebirth caused by ignorance, desire, and karma.

Among the various scholarly interpretations of Buddhist nirvana, the definition provided by the English Buddhist scholar T.W. Rhys Davids is particularly significant. He describes nirvana as: *“a state in which the flow of causal dharmas within the limits of our knowledge ceases, and the individual becomes free from unwholesome and morally negative actions.”* This interpretation highlights nirvana not only as a metaphysical condition but also as a psychological and ethical transformation in which the causes of suffering are completely eliminated.

In Buddhist philosophy, nirvana is understood as a state of absolute peace and ultimate liberation in which an individual is freed from all worldly attachments, desires, and emotional disturbances. It represents the highest possible state of spiritual development, beyond ordinary human experience. In this condition, all

forms of craving, ignorance, and mental agitation cease to exist, and the individual attains complete inner tranquility.

A person who reaches nirvana is considered fully liberated from the bonds of samsara—the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This liberation is not merely a physical escape but a profound transformation of consciousness in which the causes of future rebirth are extinguished. As a result, the individual is no longer subject to the laws of karma in the ordinary sense, as the chain of causation that produces rebirth has been completely broken.

From this perspective, Buddhist teachings present nirvana as the ultimate goal of human existence, where suffering is entirely transcended and spiritual freedom is fully realized. It is often described as a state beyond conceptual understanding, since it cannot be fully expressed through ordinary language or empirical experience.

One of the most significant aspects of Buddhist teachings is the explanation of human suffering through the concepts of desire (craving, attachment) and ignorance. According to Buddhism, suffering does not originate from external forces or divine punishment, but rather from internal psychological and moral conditions within human beings themselves. In this view, all misfortunes and disturbances in the world are ultimately rooted in human actions, perceptions, and mental states.

This causal process is clearly illustrated in the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination. It is described that during the moment of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment, he realized the chain of causation underlying human suffering. According to this teaching, suffering begins with sensation. From sensation arises a thirst for existence; from thirst arises attachment; from attachment arises becoming or existence; from existence arises birth; from birth arises emotional disturbance and passion; from passion arises expectation and hope; from hope arises dissatisfaction and misery; from misery arises humiliation; from humiliation arises helplessness; and from helplessness arises suffering. This chain demonstrates that suffering is a continuous process rooted in craving and mental attachment, rather than an isolated event.

It is also important to emphasize to students that in early Buddhism, the primary focus of reverence was not directed toward gods or deities, but toward enlightened individuals—those who had “opened the eye of wisdom” and realized the true nature of existence. Early Buddhist practice emphasized respect for awakened human beings rather than worship of divine figures. However, beginning around the 1st century CE, significant transformations took place within Buddhist tradition. During this period, artistic and devotional practices developed in which the image of Buddha began to be represented in stone sculptures and iconography. Over time, these representations became objects of devotion, and Buddha himself came to be venerated in a more divine or transcendent manner in some branches of Buddhism.

Another important doctrinal issue in Buddhism concerns the concept of the soul (self). According to Buddha's teaching, the notion of a permanent, unchanging soul as understood in many other religious traditions does not exist. Instead, human existence is viewed as a continuous flow of changing physical and mental processes, without a fixed, eternal self. In this sense, Buddhism challenges the idea of an independent, permanent soul entity.

At this point, it is sometimes academically relevant to draw comparative references from other religious traditions. For example, in the Holy Qur'an it is stated: "And they ask you about the soul. Say: 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord, and you have not been given of knowledge except a little'" (Surah Al-Isra, 17:85). This verse highlights the idea that the essence of the soul is beyond full human comprehension, which can be compared in a broader academic discussion of metaphysical perspectives across religions.

In the monastic tradition of Buddhism, monks played an important intellectual and cultural role in addition to their spiritual duties. They were engaged not only in religious rituals and meditation practices but also in the study, preservation, copying, and transmission of sacred texts. Through their scholarly efforts, Buddhist teachings were systematically organized and expanded. By approximately the beginning of the 1st century CE, the canonical Buddhist scripture known as the Tripitaka (from Sanskrit, meaning "Three Baskets") had been compiled. This canon consists of three main collections of teachings: ethical discipline, doctrinal teachings, and philosophical analysis, and it became the foundational textual source for Buddhist tradition across many regions.

The Tripitaka, which forms the core canonical scripture of Buddhism, is traditionally divided into three main sections, or "baskets" (*pitakas*). Each of these sections plays a distinct role in preserving the teachings, discipline, and philosophical foundations of Buddhism, and together they form a comprehensive system of religious doctrine and practice.

1. Vinaya Pitaka (Basket of Discipline)

The **Vinaya Pitaka** consists of five major books and is primarily concerned with the rules and regulations governing the monastic community (*sangha*). It provides detailed guidelines for the organization and functioning of monastic life, including the procedures for admitting new members into the community, the ethical and behavioral standards expected of monks and nuns, and the rules regulating daily conduct.

In addition to internal discipline, the Vinaya also addresses the relationship between monastic members and lay followers, emphasizing proper conduct, mutual respect, and the maintenance of spiritual integrity within the broader Buddhist community. Its primary purpose is to ensure harmony, moral discipline, and stability within the monastic order.

2. Sutta Pitaka (Basket of Discourses)

The **Sutta Pitaka** is the largest section of the Tripitaka in terms of volume and content. It is primarily devoted to the doctrinal teachings of Buddhism and contains a wide range of religious and philosophical material attributed to the Buddha and his close disciples.

This collection includes sermons, dialogues, parables, ethical teachings, poetic verses, and explanatory commentaries. Through these varied literary forms, the Sutta Pitaka presents the core ideas of Buddhist philosophy in both systematic and narrative styles, making the teachings accessible to different audiences. It serves as the main source for understanding Buddhist ethics, meditation practices, and philosophical reflections on life, suffering, and liberation.

3. Abhidhamma Pitaka (Basket of Higher Doctrine)

The **Abhidhamma Pitaka** consists of seven books and represents a more advanced and analytical interpretation of Buddhist teachings. It focuses on the philosophical, psychological, and ethical dimensions of reality, offering a systematic analysis of mental states, phenomena, and the nature of existence.

Unlike the Sutta Pitaka, which often uses narrative and dialogue, the Abhidhamma presents teachings in a highly structured and theoretical form. Although it is traditionally regarded as containing the teachings of the Buddha, modern scholarship generally considers it to have been compiled at a later stage in the development of Buddhism.

Furthermore, in some Buddhist traditions, particularly certain early schools, the Abhidhamma Pitaka is not always regarded with the same level of authority as the Vinaya and Sutta Pitakas. Nevertheless, it remains a crucial component of Buddhist philosophical thought and has had a profound influence on the development of Buddhist psychology and metaphysics.

Buddhism originated in India and, after an initial period of rapid growth and successful expansion, spread widely across the subcontinent. It gained significant followers and influenced various regions of Indian society. However, in the long-term competition among religious and philosophical systems, Buddhism gradually became less dominant and was eventually overshadowed by Hinduism. Over time, it was progressively marginalized within India and largely displaced from its land of origin.

Several interrelated historical, social, and cultural factors contributed to this process.

One of the main reasons was Buddhism's rejection of the caste system. Traditional Indian society had long been structured around a rigid caste hierarchy, which not only organized people into fixed social groups but also shaped their cultural identity, occupation, religious duties, and worldview. Each caste developed its own traditions, values, and social norms, making the caste system deeply embedded in everyday life. In such a context, when Indian society had to choose between competing religious systems, many people tended to favor Hinduism, which sanctified and legitimized the caste structure as divinely ordained. This ideological compatibility made Hinduism more socially acceptable and stable within the existing social order.

Another factor was that Buddhist teachings, in certain interpretations, did not fully align with the dominant cultural mentality of the Indian population. Indian society was historically characterized by a rich emotional and devotional religious culture, often emphasizing ritual practices, divine worship, and active engagement with sacred traditions. Buddhism, by contrast, in its early form emphasized renunciation, detachment, and the cessation of desire as the path to liberation. Over time, this philosophical orientation was perceived by some segments of society as overly austere or less compatible with popular religious expression, which contributed to a gradual shift away from Buddhism in favor of more devotional traditions.

A further important principle of Buddhism is non-violence (ahimsa), which strictly prohibits harming or killing living beings. While this ethical ideal became

widely respected in later Indian religious thought, in practical terms it created certain tensions within an agrarian society. Agriculture, which formed the economic foundation of ancient India, relied heavily on the use of animals for labor. The strict interpretation of non-violence could be seen as conflicting with everyday agricultural practices, where the use of livestock sometimes resulted in harm or death to animals. This created social and economic challenges for communities whose livelihoods depended on such activities.

As a result of these and other complex factors—religious, social, economic, and cultural—Buddhism gradually lost its dominant position in India. Importantly, this transition did not occur through large-scale political conflict or prolonged military confrontation, but rather through a slow and largely peaceful process of cultural and religious transformation, during which Hinduism reasserted its influence.

However, Buddhism did not disappear; instead, it expanded beyond India's borders. From approximately the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, it began spreading toward the southern and southeastern regions of Asia. Later, from the 1st century CE onward, it further expanded into northern, northwestern, and northeastern regions, where it took root in diverse cultural environments and developed into various schools and traditions. As a result, Buddhism transformed from a regional Indian tradition into one of the major world religions.

The earliest major schools that emerged within Buddhism are traditionally identified as Hinayana and Mahayana. These two streams represent different interpretations of Buddhist doctrine, particularly regarding the nature of liberation, the role of the monastic community, and the possibility of salvation for ordinary lay followers.

In the earliest phase of Buddhist practice, religious duties and spiritual exercises were primarily performed on an individual basis. The focus was on personal discipline, meditation, and ethical conduct aimed at achieving liberation from suffering. Over time, however, the understanding of spiritual practice expanded. The effort to escape the suffering of the world began to be viewed not only as an individual pursuit but also as a collective process carried out within the sangha, or monastic community.

Within this evolving religious environment, Buddhist followers gradually became differentiated into two interpretative groups. One group was known as the Sthaviravadins (“Teaching of the Elders”), who emphasized strict discipline, self-control, and the overcoming of desire and ignorance through rigorous monastic practice. This tradition stressed individual responsibility in achieving liberation. The other group was associated with the idea of Mahasattvas (“great beings”), referring to spiritually advanced practitioners capable of deep contemplation and compassionate guidance of others.

Over time, these differing perspectives led to the crystallization of two distinct doctrinal schools: Hinayana (“Small Vehicle”) and Mahayana (“Great Vehicle”). The Hinayana tradition represented a more restrictive or individual-centered path to nirvana, primarily focused on monastic life and personal liberation. In contrast, Mahayana offered a more expansive and inclusive interpretation of Buddhism,

emphasizing that liberation could be accessible not only to monks but also to laypeople.

Thus, the first major schism in Buddhism was largely rooted in differing views regarding the accessibility of enlightenment and the appropriate method for spreading the teachings among the wider population. A central question was whether ordinary individuals, outside the monastic order, could also attain nirvana and liberation from the cycle of samsara.

By the time of the Fourth Buddhist Council, held in Kashmir in the 2nd century CE, these doctrinal differences had become more formalized and were recognized as distinct traditions. Followers of the earlier orthodox teachings became associated with Hinayana, while those who supported the broader, more universal interpretation of the doctrine came to be identified with Mahayana.

During the medieval period, as Buddhism spread beyond India into China and other parts of Southeast Asia, it underwent further transformation. New schools and traditions emerged, including Chan Buddhism (which later developed into Zen in Japan) and Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism), each adapting Buddhist philosophy to local cultural and spiritual contexts.

The Hinayana school (Sanskrit: *Hīnayāna* – “Small Vehicle”) emphasizes a narrow and disciplined path to liberation. In this tradition, a practitioner renounces worldly life and typically enters monastic life as a monk. Through strict ethical discipline, meditation, and insight, the individual follows a personal path toward nirvana. Those who successfully complete this path are known as arhats (Sanskrit: *arhat* – “worthy one” or “saint”), meaning individuals who have attained enlightenment and have broken free from the cycle of rebirth.

The Mahayana school (Sanskrit: *Mahāyāna* – “Great Vehicle”) presents a broader and more inclusive approach to salvation. It emphasizes that enlightenment is not limited to monks but can be attained by lay practitioners as well. A central figure in this tradition is the bodhisattva, an enlightened being who, out of compassion, postpones final entry into nirvana in order to help others achieve liberation. Mahayana Buddhism places strong emphasis on moral development, compassion, and spiritual purification as the foundation for enlightenment.

In order to support ethical discipline among followers, Mahayana Buddhism also upholds fundamental moral guidelines known as the *pañca-śīla* (Five Precepts), which include:

- Refraining from killing living beings
- Refraining from stealing
- Refraining from sexual misconduct
- Refraining from false speech
- Refraining from the use of intoxicating substances that cloud the mind

These principles serve as a moral foundation for both monastic and lay practitioners, guiding behavior and supporting spiritual development on the path toward liberation.

Chan Buddhism

Chan Buddhism developed in China as a distinct school of Buddhist thought and practice, reaching its peak between the 6th and 10th centuries CE. It emerged as a

result of the interaction between Indian Buddhist teachings and indigenous Chinese philosophical traditions, particularly Daoism (Taoism). This synthesis led to the formation of a uniquely Chinese interpretation of Buddhism that emphasized direct experience and inner realization.

The term “*Chan*” is derived from the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, meaning meditation or deep concentration. Accordingly, Chan Buddhism places primary emphasis on mental focus, meditative practice, and direct insight into reality rather than reliance on scriptures or ritualized doctrine.

The central teaching of Chan Buddhism holds that the ultimate goal of human life is the direct realization of enlightenment through meditation and inner awakening. This process involves the purification of the mind, detachment from conceptual thinking, and the cultivation of a state of inner stillness. Enlightenment is understood as a spontaneous realization of truth, in which the practitioner transcends ordinary distinctions and attains a profound unity with the nature of existence. In this sense, liberation is not achieved through external rituals but through direct meditative experience and intuitive understanding.

Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism)

Vajrayana Buddhism, also known as Tantrism, represents a later development within the Buddhist tradition. The term “*tantra*” (Latinized from Sanskrit) originally refers to sacred texts, esoteric teachings, or mystical systems of practice. Vajrayana is closely associated with ancient Indian religious traditions, including elements of the Vedic worldview, and incorporates complex ritual and symbolic systems.

At the core of Tantric Buddhism is the concept of the internal energy system of the human being. According to this view, the human body is not separate from the universe but is deeply interconnected with it. The cosmos and the human organism are understood as expressions of the same underlying energetic reality. In this framework, the human being is regarded as a microcosm, reflecting the structure and forces of the macrocosm (the universe). Various bodily and spiritual centers are believed to correspond to celestial forces and cosmic principles.

Tantric practice therefore focuses on activating and transforming this inner energy through advanced meditative techniques, visualization, ritual practices, and yogic discipline. The goal is to achieve enlightenment rapidly by directly transforming ordinary perception into awakened awareness. Vajrayana Buddhism had a particularly strong influence on the development of Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism).

Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism)

Lamaism, or Tibetan Buddhism, derives its name from the Tibetan word “*lama*”, meaning a spiritual teacher or monk. It developed in Tibet around the 14th century CE, where it evolved as a synthesis of several religious traditions. These include early indigenous beliefs such as the Bon-po tradition (an ancient form of shamanism), as well as elements of Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism.

As a result of this synthesis, Lamaism became a rich and complex religious system characterized by elaborate mythology, ritual practices, and philosophical teachings. It incorporates all fundamental principles of Buddhism while also integrating tantric ideas about the unity of the human being and the universe. Within

this worldview, spiritual practice often involves meditation, ritual visualization, mantra recitation, and yogic techniques aimed at awakening latent spiritual energy.

Lamaism includes a vast pantheon of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other supernatural beings. At the highest level of reverence stands Buddha Shakyamuni, while bodhisattvas and enlightened masters are also widely venerated. The religion emphasizes the guidance of spiritual teachers (*lamas*), who play a central role in both religious instruction and community life.

The highest religious authority in Tibetan Buddhism is the Dalai Lama (from Mongolian-Tibetan, meaning “Ocean of Wisdom” or “Ocean-like Great One”). Historically, monasteries have served as the main centers of religious practice, education, and even political authority. Thus, the monastery system forms the core structure of Tibetan religious and social life, integrating spiritual training with cultural and institutional governance.

In the historical development of the peoples of Central Asia, Buddhism occupied an important and influential position, particularly in the formation of cultural, ideological, and artistic traditions. The spread of Buddhism into Central Asia is generally traced back to the 2nd century BCE, a period marked by significant political and cultural transformations in the region. This process intensified during the rise and expansion of the Kushan Empire, which emerged following the decline of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom and became one of the most powerful states of its time.

At its height between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE, the Kushan Empire controlled vast territories that included parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Northern India. This vast geopolitical space created favorable conditions for cultural exchange and religious diffusion. Buddhism, which had originated in India, gradually spread northward and westward into Central Asia. From there, it continued its expansion eastward into China and further into the Far East, largely facilitated by the extensive trade networks of the Great Silk Road.

The Silk Road played a crucial role not only in the exchange of goods but also in the transmission of ideas, beliefs, and artistic traditions. As a result, Buddhism became one of the most important spiritual and cultural forces connecting India, Central Asia, and East Asia, shaping a shared civilizational space across these regions.

The widespread geographical distribution of Buddhism is also reflected in the writings of the great scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, who noted that the Buddhist faith extended as far south as the territory of Syria. He further recorded that, under the pressure of Mazdaism (Zoroastrianism), Buddhist communities migrated from Iran and Iraq toward regions south of Balkh. These historical accounts highlight both the geographical spread of Buddhism and the dynamic interactions between different religious traditions in antiquity.

It is important to emphasize to students that during the pre-Islamic period, Buddhism constituted one of the key ideological and cultural components of Central Asian society. The development of stable trade and economic relations between the peoples of Central Asia and India, particularly during the Kushan and later Hephthalite periods, facilitated the introduction and integration of Indian cultural and

religious elements into the region. Buddhism, as one of these cultural imports, became deeply rooted in certain areas and influenced local artistic and intellectual traditions.

As a result, Buddhism became established in regions of eastern Iran and Transoxiana, reaching major urban and cultural centers such as Balkh and Bukhara. Archaeological and historical evidence indicates that Buddhist temples and monasteries were constructed in several important cities along the Silk Road, including Yarkand, Khotan, Kashgar, Tashkent, Turpan, Kucha, and Qarashahr. These centers served not only as places of worship but also as hubs of learning, translation, and cultural exchange.

In the 3rd century CE, Chinese Buddhist pilgrims traveled extensively through Central Asia, visiting major religious centers in order to study Buddhist doctrine, collect sacred texts, and observe monastic practices. These journeys played a crucial role in the transmission of Buddhism from India and Central Asia into China, strengthening cultural and religious connections along the Silk Road. Through such pilgrimages, Central Asia became an important intellectual and spiritual bridge between South Asia and East Asia.

According to several scholars, Buddhism also had a notable influence on the development of other religious traditions in the region, particularly Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. As noted by the scholar Sayyid Nasafi, certain Buddhist ideas may have contributed to the formation and evolution of Zoroastrian religious traditions. However, many experts argue that Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest independent religions in the world, and therefore it is more accurate to speak of a process of mutual cultural and ideological interaction rather than one-sided influence. In this view, these ancient religions influenced each other through continuous contact, exchange, and adaptation.

A second group of scholars suggests that the teachings of Zoroaster and Mani may have played a role in shaping certain doctrinal developments within the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) tradition of Buddhism. According to another interpretation, the Manichaean concept of the eternal struggle between the forces of light and darkness—associated with Mani ibn Fatak—represents a continuation and synthesis of earlier religious ideas found in both Buddhist and Zoroastrian thought. This dualistic worldview reflects broader patterns of religious philosophy in Late Antiquity.

It is also evident in early Turkic literary and religious texts that Mani was well acquainted with Buddhist teachings and incorporated certain Buddhist concepts into Manichaean literature. This further demonstrates the degree of intellectual exchange among religious traditions across Central Asia and neighboring regions.

From an archaeological perspective, Buddhist monuments, temples, statues, and mural paintings discovered in Central Asia represent some of the most significant cultural heritage sites of the ancient world. Systematic excavations conducted in Uzbekistan since the 1930s at sites such as Karatepa, Dalvarzintepa, and Fayoztepa have provided strong evidence that Buddhism was firmly established in the Surkhandarya region during antiquity. These findings confirm both theoretically and

practically that southern Uzbekistan, particularly the region around ancient Termez, was one of the earliest centers of Buddhism in Central Asia.

Among these archaeological sites, the most prominent is the cave monastery complex of Karatepa, located in ancient Termez and dating back to the 1st–2nd centuries CE. This site contains underground monastic structures that reflect advanced architectural planning and religious organization. Inscriptions discovered at Karatepa are written in Sanskrit, Brahmi, and the Bactrian language, and include religious dedications and doctrinal references such as: “*The Buddha speaks about religious faith,*” and “*This vessel is a donation... the Buddha speaks about the great faith.*” These inscriptions provide valuable insight into the religious life, linguistic diversity, and devotional practices of early Buddhist communities in the region.

Buddhism, with its core principles such as the equality of all individuals before ultimate truth, the emphasis on an individual path to spiritual liberation, its tolerance toward other religious traditions, and its adaptability to different historical and cultural environments, was able to transcend political and geographical boundaries. These characteristics played a key role in its transformation into a world religion.

Historically, as a result of Hindu cultural and religious pressure in India, Buddhism began expanding beyond its place of origin. Between the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, it first spread into the southern and southeastern regions of Asia. Later, from the 1st century CE onward, it expanded further into northern, northwestern, and northeastern territories, where it adapted to local cultures and developed diverse schools and traditions.

Outside India, one of the earliest regions to adopt Buddhism as a state-supported religion was Sri Lanka (Ceylon). There, Buddhist monastic communities (*sanghas*) developed into well-organized religious institutions that played a central role in education, cultural life, and the preservation of sacred texts.

One of the major contemporary centers of Buddhism is the Indochina Peninsula, where the religion has maintained a strong cultural and spiritual presence for centuries. A significant proportion of the Buddhist population in Southeast Asia resides in this region, with estimates suggesting that nearly 95% of Buddhists in this area live in Indochina. In these countries, various forms of Buddhism are practiced, with Mahayana Buddhism being particularly widespread alongside other local traditions and interpretations.

Throughout history, Southeast Asia has played an essential role in preserving Buddhist teachings, monastic institutions, and ritual practices. The region’s cultural environment has allowed Buddhism to integrate deeply into social life, influencing ethics, education, art, and national identity.

In the mid-20th century, Buddhism began to gain increasing popularity in Western countries as well. This development was facilitated by globalization, academic interest in Eastern religions, migration, and the efforts of Buddhist teachers who introduced meditation and philosophical teachings to Western audiences. As a result, new Buddhist communities have emerged across Europe, North America, and other regions of the world, accompanied by the construction of new temples, meditation centers, and cultural institutions.

Today, Buddhists worldwide are organized into several international associations aimed at promoting cooperation, dialogue, and the preservation of Buddhist heritage. Among them are organizations such as the International Buddhist Brotherhood, headquartered in Bangkok, Thailand, and the Conference of Asian Buddhists for Peace, based in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. These institutions contribute to strengthening global communication among Buddhist communities and supporting initiatives related to peace, interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchange.

At present, the global Buddhist population is estimated to be approximately 700 million followers, with around one million monks and monastic practitioners engaged in religious life and spiritual training. These figures reflect Buddhism's status as one of the major world religions, with a widespread presence across Asia and growing influence in other parts of the world.

From an educational perspective, it is important for students to critically engage with both the historical development and doctrinal aspects of Buddhism. Encouraging discussions and debates on the more complex or controversial elements of Buddhist teachings helps deepen students' analytical understanding and fosters a more comprehensive view of religious studies.

In the concluding stage of a lesson, teachers may enhance student engagement by distributing prepared questions on the topic and organizing short individual presentations. In this format, each student is given the opportunity to speak briefly on a selected question, allowing for active participation, reinforcement of knowledge, and the development of critical thinking and communication skills.

ZOROASTRIANISM

ONE OF THE OLDEST WORLD RELIGIONS

ORIGIN

- Ancient Persia (Iran & Central Asia)
- c. 1500–1000 BCE
- Founded by Prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra)

CORE BELIEF

Monothemism + Dualism
The eternal struggle between

GOOD
(Truth, Light, Order)

VS

EVIL
(Lie, Darkness, Chaos)

MAIN GOD

Ahura Mazda
Lord of Wisdom, Goodness and Light

EVIL SPIRIT

Angra Mainyu
Spirit of Destruction, Darkness and Evil

SACRED BOOK

AVESTA
The holy scripture of Zoroastrianism.

- Gathas (hymns)
- Yasna (prayers)
- Visperad (laws)
- Vendidad (purification)

SYMBOLS

- Fire – purity & divine light
- Faravahar – soul & spiritual guidance
- Sun – truth & energy

FESTIVALS

NOWRUZ
New Year & Renewal

SADEH
Fire Festival

GAHAMBARS
Seasonal Festivals

LEGACY & INFLUENCE

Zoroastrian ideas influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
Emphasizes morality, justice and final judgment.

BUDDHISM

THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

ORIGIN

- India
- 6th–5th century BCE

FOUNDER

Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)
"The Enlightened One"

ENLIGHTENMENT

At the age of 35, Siddhartha achieved enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and became the Buddha.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

- Life is suffering (Dukkha)
- The cause of suffering is craving (desire)
- The end of suffering is possible
- There is a path that leads to the end of suffering

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Right Intention

Right Speech

Right Action

Right Livelihood

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

KEY CONCEPTS

- Karma (law of action and consequence)
- Rebirth (Samsara)
- Nirvana (liberation from suffering)

SANGHA

The community of monks, nuns and lay followers.

SPREAD

Buddhism spread through monks and trade routes (Silk Road) to Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia.

NATIONAL RELIGIONS

RELIGIONS CONNECTED TO ETHNIC & CULTURAL IDENTITY

DEFINITION

National religions are those that are closely linked to a specific nation, ethnic group or cultural tradition. They are usually not focused on universal conversion.

MAIN FEATURES

Based on tradition & ancestry

Strong cultural and historical roots

Limited conversion

Preserve rituals and customs

EXAMPLES

JUDAISM
Religion of the Jewish people

ZOROASTRIANISM
Ancient religion of the Persian people

SHINTO
Traditional religion of Japan

HINDU TRADITIONS
Deeply rooted in Indian culture

ROLE IN SOCIETY

Preserves identity

Strengthens unity

Maintains traditions

Connects people with their heritage

NATIONAL RELIGIONS VS WORLD RELIGIONS

NATIONAL RELIGIONS	WORLD RELIGIONS
Ethnic or cultural basis	Universal for all people
Limited geographical spread	Global spread
Focus on tradition & identity	Focus on mission & conversion
Often linked with nationality	Not limited by nationality

WORLD RELIGIONS EXAMPLES:

✝ Christianity ✪ Islam ☸ Buddhism ☯ Sikhism

HINDUISM

THE OLDEST LIVING RELIGION

OVERVIEW

- Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions.
- It originated in India over 4,000 years ago.
- It is a way of life that teaches us to live in harmony with nature and all beings.

MAIN BELIEFS

- Belief in one ultimate reality called **BRAHMAN**.
- Atman (soul) is a part of Brahman.
- Reincarnation: the soul is born again and again.
- Karma: our actions decide our future.
- Dharma: the right way of living.

MAJOR DEITIES

Brahma

Vishnu

Shiva

Lakshmi

Saraswati

Ganesh

SACRED TEXTS

- Vedas – the oldest scriptures
- Upanishads – philosophical teachings
- Bhagavad Gita – the song of the Lord
- Ramayana & Mahabharata – great epics
- Puranas – stories of gods and goddesses

KEY CONCEPTS

ATMAN (SOUL) → **KARMA (ACTIONS)** → **REBIRTH (SAMSARA)** → **MOKSHA (LIBERATION)**

The goal of life is **MOKSHA** – freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

WAYS OF WORSHIP

- **Bhakti Yoga** – the path of devotion and love
- **Karma Yoga** – selfless action
- **Jnana Yoga** – the path of knowledge
- **Raja Yoga** – the path of meditation

IMPORTANT PRACTICES

- **Puja** – worship and prayer
- **Meditation** – control of mind
- **Yoga** – union of body, mind and soul
- **Festivals** – Diwali, Holi, Navaratri, etc.
- **Pilgrimage** – visiting holy places like Varanasi, Rishikesh, etc.

FESTIVALS

Diwali
(Festival of Lights)

Holi
(Festival of Colors)

Navaratri
(9 Nights of Worship)

Mahashivratri
(Shiva Worship)

SIGNIFICANCE

- Teaches respect for all life
- Promotes peace, tolerance and harmony
- Encourages self-discipline, truth and compassion
- A rich culture, philosophy and spiritual tradition

“Truth is One, the wise call it by many names.”
– Rigveda

JUDAISM

— The Ancient Faith and Covenant of the Jewish People —

OVERVIEW

- Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions in the world.
- It is the traditional faith of the Jewish people.
- Judaism is the foundation of Christianity and Islam.
- Over 14 million Jews live around the world.

ORIGIN & HISTORY

- c. 2000 BCE – Patriarchs**
The story begins with Abraham, who made a covenant with God.
- c. 1300 BCE – Exodus from Egypt**
The Israelites were freed from slavery under the leadership of Moses.
- c. 1000 BCE – Kingdom of Israel**
King David and King Solomon united the tribes.
- 586 BCE – Babylonian Exile**
The First Temple was destroyed. The people were taken into exile.
- 70 CE – Destruction of Second Temple**
The Jewish people were scattered around the world (Diaspora).

CORE BELIEFS

- Belief in one God (Yahweh)**
God is one, eternal, and the creator of the universe.
- Covenant**
God made a special covenant with the Jewish people.
- Torah as Divine Guidance**
The Torah teaches how to live a righteous and holy life.
- Justice and Righteousness**
Judaism emphasizes ethical living, justice, and caring for others.
- Community and Tradition**
Jewish life is centered on family, community, and tradition.

SACRED TEXTS

- Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)**
The holy scripture of Judaism, consisting of three parts:
 - Torah (Law)
 - Nevi'im (Prophets)
 - Ketuvim (Writings)
- The Talmud**
A collection of teachings and discussions that explain Jewish law and tradition.

KEY PRACTICES

- Shabbat (Sabbath)**
A day of rest and worship from Friday evening to Saturday.
- Prayer (Tefillah)**
Three daily prayers and special prayers on holidays.
- Mitzvot (Commandments)**
613 commandments guide ethical and spiritual life.
- Kosher Laws**
Rules about permitted foods and ethical conduct.
- Study of Torah**
Learning Torah is a central religious duty.

MAJOR HOLIDAYS

- Rosh Hashanah**
Jewish New Year
- Yom Kippur**
Day of Atonement
- Sukkot**
Feast of Tabernacles
- Hanukkah**
Festival of Lights
- Purim**
Celebrates the deliverance of Jews in Persia
- Passover (Pesach)**
Celebrates the Exodus from Egypt

SYMBOLS

- Star of David**
A symbol of Jewish identity and unity.
- Menorah**
The ancient seven-branched lampstand, symbol of the Temple.
- Mezuzah**
A parchment with Scripture placed on doorposts.
- Chai (חי)**
Means "Life" in Hebrew, a symbol of life and blessings.

WHERE JEWS LIVE

Jewish communities exist in Israel and in countries all over the world.

SIGNIFICANCE

Judaism teaches the value of life, family, knowledge, and justice. It has greatly influenced the moral and spiritual traditions of the world. It continues to guide millions of people in their faith and daily lives.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One." – Deuteronomy 6:4

Judaism is not only a religion, but a way of life, a tradition, and a timeless bond between the Jewish people and God.


儒 CONFUCIANISM

The Philosophy of Harmony and Order

OVERVIEW

- Confucianism is an ancient Chinese philosophy and ethical system.
- Founded by Confucius (Kong Fuzi) around 551–479 BCE.
- It focuses on moral values, proper conduct, social harmony, and respect for tradition.
- It is not a religion, but a way of life and a guide for virtuous living.

FOUNDER



Confucius (Kong Fuzi)
551–479 BCE

CORE TEACHINGS

- Ren (Humaneness)**
Be kind, compassionate, and treat others as you wish to be treated.
- Li (Ritual Propriety)**
Follow proper behavior, respect traditions and customs, and show courtesy.
- Yi (Righteousness)**
Do what is right and just.
- Zhi (Wisdom)**
Seek knowledge and make wise decisions.
- Xin (Trustworthiness)**
Be honest and keep your promises.

“The superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.”
— Confucius

THE FIVE CONSTANT VIRTUES

- Ren (Benevolence)**
Kindness and care for others.
- Yi (Righteousness)**
Doing what is right and just.
- Li (Propriety)**
Respect for rules, traditions, and others.
- Zhi (Wisdom)**
Using knowledge and experience to make good decisions.
- Xin (Trustworthiness)**
Being honest, loyal, and reliable.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Family Harmony**
The basis of a well-ordered society.
- Social Harmony**
Everyone has a role and responsibility. Respect and cooperation bring peace.
- The Golden Rule**
Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you.
- The Junzi (Exemplary Person)**
A person of virtue who leads by example and acts with integrity.

THE FOUR BOOKS (CLASSICS)

- Analects (Lunyu)**
Sayings and teachings of Confucius.
- Mencius (Mengzi)**
Teachings of Mencius on human nature and goodness.
- Great Learning (Daxue)**
The path to personal and social development.
- Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)**
The balance between extremes and the harmony of life.

PRACTICES

- Learning**
Education is highly valued to cultivate character and wisdom.
- Respect**
Show respect to parents, teachers, elders, and rulers.
- Self-Cultivation**
Improve yourself through discipline, reflection, and continuous effort.
- Proper Conduct**
Follow rituals and behave appropriately in every situation.

INFLUENCE

- Shaped Chinese culture, politics, education, and family life for over 2,000 years.
- Influenced Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other East Asian countries.
- Still guides values, ethics, and social relationships today.

SYMBOLS

- Confucius Statues**
Respect for the teacher and wisdom.
- Books & Scrolls**
Knowledge, learning, and tradition.
- Bamboo**
Strength, flexibility, and integrity.
- Yin-Yang**
Balance and harmony in all things.

LEGACY

- Confucianism promotes peace, order, and good government.
- It teaches how to live a moral, meaningful, and responsible life.
- Its values remain relevant in the modern world.

“To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous.” – Confucius

SELF-CHECK QUESTIONS

1. Explain why Zoroastrianism is considered one of the earliest forms of monotheistic religion, and how its doctrine differs from earlier polytheistic beliefs.
2. Analyze the concept of dualism in Zoroastrianism and explain how the struggle between good and evil influences human moral responsibility.
3. Discuss the significance of the Avesta as a historical and religious source. Why is it not considered a single unified book?
4. Evaluate the ethical principle “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds” and explain its role in Zoroastrian moral philosophy.
5. How did Zoroastrianism influence later Abrahamic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
6. Explain the symbolic meaning of fire in Zoroastrian worship and why it is not considered idol worship.
7. Describe the historical spread of Zoroastrianism and analyze the reasons for its decline after the 7th century.
8. Explain the life of Siddhartha Gautama and analyze how his experiences led to the foundation of Buddhism.
9. Critically analyze the Four Noble Truths and explain how they form a logical structure of Buddhist philosophy.
10. Explain the concept of Nirvana and discuss why it is considered the ultimate goal in Buddhism.
11. Compare the role of meditation in Buddhism with moral discipline in Zoroastrianism.
12. Analyze the role of the Sangha in spreading Buddhist teachings across Asia.
13. Explain how Buddhism adapted to different cultures during its spread to Central Asia, China, and Japan.
14. Discuss how Buddhism challenges the idea of a permanent self (Anatta doctrine).
15. Evaluate the importance of the Tripitaka and explain its three main sections.
16. Define “national religions” and critically compare them with world religions in terms of spread, identity, and cultural influence.
17. Explain why religions such as Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism are studied together in Religious Studies.
18. Discuss the role of karma and rebirth in Buddhist philosophy and compare it with Zoroastrian ideas of judgment.
19. Analyze how geography and historical trade routes (like the Silk Road) influenced the spread of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.
20. Write a comparative analysis of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism in terms of ethics, salvation, and worldview.

TEST ASSIGNMENTS

- Which factor most strongly defines a national religion?
 - Scientific doctrine
 - Ethno-cultural identity
 - Universal missionary activity
 - Economic system
- National religions are most commonly associated with:
 - Industrialization
 - Specific ethnic groups
 - Global conversion campaigns
 - Political ideology only
- The spread of national religions is usually:
 - Unlimited and global
 - Restricted by cultural boundaries
 - Based on military expansion
 - Independent of tradition
- Which feature is least typical of national religions?
 - Strong cultural identity
 - Ritual continuity
 - Universal membership
 - Historical rootedness
- The relationship between religion and culture in national religions is best described as:
 - Completely separated
 - Interdependent
 - Random
 - Scientific
- Sacred traditions in national religions are mainly transmitted through:
 - Digital systems
 - Oral and cultural continuity
 - Industrial institutions
 - Scientific publications
- National religions primarily reinforce:
 - Global unity
 - Ethnic identity
 - Technological growth
 - Economic trade
- A key difference between national and world religions is:
 - Ritual complexity
 - Geographical spread
 - Age of origin
 - Use of scriptures
- National religions tend to be closely linked with:
 - Climate systems
 - Historical evolution of a people
 - Modern technology
 - Space exploration
- Religious identity in national religions is primarily shaped by:
 - Genetics
 - Cultural heritage
 - Mathematics
 - Geography only
- The central theological concept of Zoroastrianism is based on:
 - Trinity
 - Dualism
 - Polytheism
 - Pantheism
- Ahura Mazda is best understood as:
 - A prophet
 - Supreme creator deity
 - Human ancestor
 - Mythical hero
- Angra Mainyu represents:
 - Creation
 - Destruction and chaos
 - Wisdom
 - Light
- The Avesta is primarily a collection of:
 - Scientific theories
 - Religious texts

- C) Historical novels
D) Political laws
15. Gathas are considered:
A) Modern interpretations
B) Oldest sacred hymns
C) Legal documents
D) Temple buildings
16. Zoroastrian ethics emphasize:
A) Ritual sacrifice only
B) Moral triad of thought, word, deed
C) Isolation from society
D) Wealth accumulation
17. Fire in Zoroastrianism symbolizes:
A) Political power
B) Divine truth and purity
C) Military strength
D) Natural disaster
18. The Faravahar is associated with:
A) Economic growth
B) Human spiritual guidance
C) Agricultural cycles
D) Warfare
19. Zoroastrian worldview is best described as:
A) Cyclical only
B) Moral struggle-based
C) Materialistic
D) Scientific determinism
20. Nowruz primarily represents:
A) Death rituals
B) Seasonal renewal
C) War victory
D) Harvest failure
21. Sadeh festival is connected to:
A) Water purification
B) Fire celebration
C) Animal sacrifice
D) Ocean worship
22. Zoroastrian priests historically focused on:
A) Trade regulation
B) Ritual purity and worship
C) Military training
D) Agriculture
23. The decline of Zoroastrianism is most linked to:
A) Industrial revolution
B) Political-religious transformation in Persia
C) Scientific discovery
D) Roman philosophy
24. Zoroastrian doctrine strongly rejects:
A) Moral responsibility
B) Random existence
C) Ethical dualism
D) Divine justice
25. Zoroastrian salvation concept is mainly based on:
A) Faith only
B) Moral action and judgment
C) Wealth and status
D) Ritual sacrifice
26. Buddhism fundamentally addresses the problem of:
A) Political authority
B) Human suffering
C) Economic inequality
D) Language development
27. Enlightenment in Buddhism refers to:
A) Political power
B) Awakening to truth
C) Scientific discovery
D) Physical strength
28. The Four Noble Truths primarily explain:
A) Creation of universe
B) Nature and end of suffering
C) Social hierarchy
D) Language rules
29. The Second Noble Truth identifies:
A) End of suffering
B) Cause of suffering

- C) Path to power
D) Origin of gods
30. Nirvana is best described as:
A) Physical heaven
B) Liberation from desire and rebirth
C) Material wealth
D) Political freedom
31. The Eightfold Path is a system of:
A) Economic rules
B) Ethical and mental discipline
C) Military training
D) Legal codes
32. Buddhism denies the concept of:
A) Karma
B) Permanent self (Atman)
C) Meditation
D) Ethics
33. Karma in Buddhism refers to:
A) Divine punishment only
B) Cause and effect of actions
C) Ritual law
D) Social rank
34. The Sangha refers to:
A) Kingship system
B) Monastic community
C) Trade guild
D) Military order
35. Buddhist teachings spread mainly through:
A) Scientific research
B) Monastic missions and trade routes
C) Military conquest
D) Political treaties
36. Emperor Ashoka is known for:
A) Destroying Buddhism
B) Supporting Buddhist spread
C) Creating Hinduism
D) Writing Vedas
37. The Tripitaka is divided into:
A) One section
B) Three major divisions
C) Five books
D) Seven laws
38. Vinaya Pitaka mainly deals with:
A) Philosophy
B) Monastic discipline
C) Poetry
D) Astronomy
39. Buddhism originally emerged in:
A) China
B) India
C) Persia
D) Egypt
40. A key Buddhist concept is:
A) Eternal soul
B) Impermanence
C) Fixed identity
D) Divine rule
41. The Buddha's first sermon was delivered in:
A) Bodh Gaya B) Varanasi
C) Lhasa D) Kyoto
42. Meditation in Buddhism primarily aims at:
A) Wealth creation
B) Mental clarity and liberation
C) Military strength
D) Social control
43. Buddhism spread to Central Asia mainly through:
A) Silk Road B) Ocean voyages
C) Colonization D) Isolation
44. Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes:
A) Individual salvation only
B) Universal salvation ideal
C) No teachings
D) Political doctrine
45. A central Buddhist goal is:
A) Nirvana
B) Empire building
C) Wealth accumulation
D) Ritual sacrifice

INTERACTIVE TEACHING METHODS FOR THE TOPICS OF NATIONAL RELIGIONS, BUDDHISM, AND ZOROASTRIANISM

1. Brainstorming Method

◆ Purpose:

To identify students' prior knowledge and encourage free thinking about religions and beliefs.

◆ How to Apply:

- The teacher writes key words such as:
 - *Buddhism*
 - *Zoroastrianism*
 - *National Religions*
- Students express all ideas related to these terms.
- Answers are written on the board and grouped into categories.

◆ Result:

Develops critical thinking, communication skills, and active participation.

2. Cluster Method

◆ Purpose:

To organize information visually and identify relationships between concepts.

◆ How to Apply:

Students create a diagram around the central concept.

◆ Example:

ZOROASTRIANISM

- Ahura Mazda
- Avesta
- Fire Worship
- Nowruz
- Good vs Evil
- Zoroaster

◆ Result:

Improves memory and analytical thinking.

3. Venn Diagram Method

◆ Purpose:

To compare similarities and differences between religions.

◆ How to Apply:

Students compare:

- Buddhism and Zoroastrianism
- National and World Religions

◆ **Example Topics:**

Buddhism Similarities Zoroastrianism

Nirvana Moral teachings Ahura Mazda
Karma Ethical behavior Final judgment

◆ **Result:**

Develops comparison and evaluation skills.

4. Case Study Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To analyze religious situations and moral problems.

◆ **How to Apply:**

Teacher presents a historical or ethical situation.

◆ **Example:**

“How did Buddhism spread through the Silk Road?”

“Why did Zoroastrianism decline after the Islamic conquest?”

Students discuss causes and consequences.

◆ **Result:**

Encourages independent thinking and historical analysis.

5. Role Play Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To help students understand historical personalities and religious ideas.

◆ **How to Apply:**

Students act as:

- Buddha
- Zoroaster
- Confucius
- Buddhist monks
- Persian rulers

◆ **Example:**

A dialogue between Buddha and his disciples about the Four Noble Truths.

◆ **Result:**

Improves creativity, speaking skills, and empathy.

6. INSERT Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To improve reading comprehension and reflection.

◆ **Symbols:**

- ✓ = I knew this
-
- ○ = New information
- – = I thought differently
- ? = I want to know more

◆ **How to Apply:**

Students read a text about Buddhism or Zoroastrianism and mark information using the symbols.

◆ **Result:**

Develops active reading and self-analysis skills.

7. FSMU Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To teach students how to express and defend opinions logically.

◆ **Structure:**

- **F** – State your opinion
- **S** – Give reasons
- **M** – Provide evidence/examples
- **U** – Make a conclusion

◆ **Example:**

“Why is Buddhism considered a world religion?”

◆ **Result:**

Improves argumentative and academic speaking skills.

8. Debate Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To encourage critical discussion.

◆ **Example Topics:**

- “Did Buddhism reject caste discrimination?”
- “Was Zoroastrianism the first monotheistic religion?”

◆ **Result:**

Enhances public speaking and reasoning abilities.

9. Fishbone (Ishikawa) Method

◆ **Purpose:**

To analyze causes and effects.

◆ **Example:**

Topic: “Reasons for the Spread of Buddhism”

Main branches:

- Silk Road
- Missionaries
- Ashoka’s support
- Monasteries
- Moral teachings

◆ **Result:**

Strengthens analytical and organizational thinking.

10. Project-Based Learning

◆ Purpose:

To develop research and presentation skills.

◆ Activities:

Students prepare:

- Posters
- Infographics
- Presentations
- Comparative charts

◆ Example Projects:

- “Buddhism in Central Asia”
- “Symbols of Zoroastrianism”
- “National Religions of Asia”

◆ Result:

Encourages teamwork, creativity, and independent learning.



Glossary

1. **National Religion** – A religion closely connected with a specific ethnic group or nation, deeply tied to its culture and history.
2. **Polytheism** – Belief in the existence of many gods.
3. **Monotheism** – Belief in one supreme God.
4. **Dualism** – The idea that the world is governed by two opposing forces, usually good and evil.
5. **Zoroastrianism** – One of the oldest religions, founded by Zoroaster, based on the worship of Ahura Mazda and the struggle between good and evil.
6. **Ahura Mazda** – The supreme god in Zoroastrianism, representing truth, light, and goodness.
7. **Avesta** – The sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism containing hymns, prayers, and religious laws.
8. **Gathas** – The oldest part of the Avesta, believed to contain the teachings of Zoroaster.
9. **Faravahar** – A symbolic image in Zoroastrianism representing the human soul and moral guidance.
10. **Nowruz** – The Zoroastrian New Year festival marking renewal and the arrival of spring.
11. **Buddhism** – A religion founded by Siddhartha Gautama focusing on overcoming suffering and achieving enlightenment.
12. **Siddhartha Gautama** – The founder of Buddhism, known as the Buddha.
13. **Enlightenment (Bodhi)** – The state of complete understanding and awakening in Buddhism.
14. **Nirvana** – The ultimate goal in Buddhism, meaning liberation from suffering and rebirth.
15. **Four Noble Truths** – The core teachings of Buddhism explaining suffering and the path to its end.
16. **Eightfold Path** – A set of ethical and mental practices leading to liberation in Buddhism.
17. **Karma** – The law of moral cause and effect, where actions influence future outcomes.
18. **Sangha** – The community of Buddhist monks and followers.
19. **Tripitaka** – The main Buddhist scripture divided into three sections: rules, teachings, and philosophy.
20. **Meditation (Dhyana)** – A mental practice in Buddhism aimed at developing concentration and insight.

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