Sanatana Dharma, the Unbroken Thread of Hindu Religion: Its Journey Through the Ages - A Literature Review

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Anstract: This literature review traces the historical, philosophical, and cultural continuity of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal law that underlies the Hindu way of life. Beginning with the conceptual foundations of Dharma and the spiritual essence of the Vedas, the study explores how Aryan migrations shaped the early religious and social landscape of India. The transformation from an ideal system of division of labour (Varna Dharma) to a rigid caste hierarchy is examined through textual and historical perspectives. The review also delves into the evolution of temple culture, the sacred arts of sound and dance, and the role of warfare within the country. Subsequent sections analyze the profound disruptions caused by Islamic conquests, including temple desecrations, religious persecution, and the imposition of oppressive taxation systems. Yet, amid centuries of turmoil, Sanatana Dharma displayed remarkable resilience, as reflected in the Bhagavad Gita, which encapsulates its moral and metaphysical essence. The review further highlights the educational structure described in the Mahabharata, revealing how the Chaturvarna system once functioned as an inclusive framework of knowledge and duty before its later distortion. Finally, the discussion turns to Hinduism's enduring strength in diversity, its ethos of tolerance, and its adaptive engagement with other faiths through the centuries. Concluding with the invocation 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih,' symbolizing peace at the physical, mental, and spiritual levels, the study reaffirms that Sanatana Dharma remains not merely a religion but an unbroken civilizational continuum, rooted in timeless principles and capable of renewing itself through every historical challenge.

Keywords: Sanatana Dharma; Hinduism; Vedic tradition; Upanishads; Bhagavad Gita; Indian philosophy; Dharma; cultural continuity; Vedanta; spiritual evolution; Indus-Sarasvati civilization; religious tolerance; Hindu resilience; spiritual heritage of India.

Introduction: Sanatana Dharma, literally meaning 'the Eternal Law' or 'the Eternal Order,' forms the philosophical and spiritual core of what is known today as the Hindu religion. It is not a creed confined by time, geography, or a single founder, but a living continuum of moral, spiritual, and cultural values that have guided Indian civilization for millennia. Long before the term Hinduism entered historical discourse, the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent lived according to principles that emphasized cosmic order, dharma (righteousness), and satya (truth). These ideals deeply rooted in pre-Vedic and Vedic traditions, gradually evolved into a vast and inclusive system of thought encompassing ritual, philosophy, devotion, and self-realization. Unlike the Abrahamic faiths, which trace their origins to prophetic revelation, Sanatana Dharma developed organically through reflection, experience, and dialogue among sages and seers. Its evolution was dynamic rather than linear, accommodating a spectrum of philosophical schools: Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, and Mimamsa; all coexisting within a shared cultural framework. Over time, its expression was deepened by the Upaniṣads, which sought the unity of the individual self (atma) with the Supreme Reality (Brahma), and by the Bhagavad Gita, which harmonized knowledge (jnana), action (karma), and devotion (bhakti) as complementary paths to liberation. It traces the intellectual and spiritual journey of Sanatana Dharma; its endurance through epochs of cultural transformation and its trials under foreign domination, from the earliest symbolic expressions of the Indus–Sarasvatī civilization to its reinterpretations in modern India. Engaging with both classical and contemporary scholarship, the study aims to demonstrate how Sanātana Dharma has remained the unbroken thread of Hindu religion, adapting to historical change while preserving its essential vision of truth, harmony, and universality.

From Dharma to Vedas: Here lie the foundations of Hindu thought. Hinduism is not a single, monolithic faith but rather an umbrella term encompassing a wide spectrum of religious and spiritual traditions known as sampradayas. These traditions are unified by their adherence to dharma; the cosmic order maintained through ritual practice, moral

conduct, and righteous living, as expounded in the Vedas. According to the widely accepted migration theory, groups speaking an early Indo-European language, related to Sanskrit, migrated into northwestern India from Central Asia. These groups, known as the Indo-Aryans, eventually settled in India. The Vedas, composed around 1500–800 BCE, are regarded as the most ancient sacred texts of Hinduism and are written in early Aryan Sanskrit, a branch of the Indo-European language family. Linguistic evidence supports this theory, as Sanskrit shares deep structural similarities with Greek, Latin, and other Indo-European languages, indicating a common ancestral origin. However, many Indian scholars challenge the migration theory, contending that the Vedas did not originate outside India. They argue that the geography described in the Rigveda corresponds exclusively to regions within India, such as the Saraswati and Ganga rivers, and that the Indo-Aryans interacted with the remnants of the Indus Valley Civilization, which had already entered its phase of decline by around 1900 BCE. Meanwhile, he word 'Sanskrit' was not 'coined' at a specific historical moment by any one person. It evolved organically within the Vedic and post-Vedic period of ancient India. The language was existed long before the name was formalized.

The hymns and rituals of the early Indo-Aryan sages, known as the Rishis, gradually evolved into what became the Rigveda. First, it was composed orally in northwestern India. When Sanskrit acquired a written script, the Rigveda took its written form. Several centuries later, the remaining three Vedas, the Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda were composed. The Indo-Aryan migration was gradual and cultural rather than an invasion, and the resulting synthesis gave rise to the Vedic civilization, which became the foundation of Sanatana Dharma. Each Veda is divided into four sections: the Samhitas (hymns and prayers), the Brahmanas (ritualistic texts), the Aranyakas (meditative or forest treatises), and the Upanishads (philosophical discourses). The Upanishads form the concluding portions of the Vedas, collectively known as Vedanta, which emphasize philosophical inquiry and spiritual realization. Vedic scholars often describe the Upanishads as the essence or distilled wisdom of the Vedas, while the Bhagavad Gita is revered as the distilled essence of the Upanishads themselves. Regarding their number, opinions vary, but the traditionally accepted count is 108 Upanishads. Adi Shankaracharya interprets the term Upanishad as Atmavidya, meaning 'knowledge of the self,' whereas the German Indologist Max Müller translates it as 'secret doctrine.'

Vedavyasa, also known as Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, occupies a central and revered position in the history of Hindu scriptures. He is traditionally regarded as the compiler and arranger of the Vedas, hence the epithet Vedavyasa, 'the one who classified the Vedas.' Before his time, Vedic knowledge was transmitted orally and collectively preserved by sages. Recognizing the growing complexity of human life and the diminishing capacity for memorization in the later ages, Vyasa systematized this vast body of sacred knowledge into four distinct collections: the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. He entrusted each to one of his principal disciples; Paila, Vaisampayana, Jaimini, and Sumantu, thus ensuring their preservation and propagation through different lineages, shakhas. In addition to his work on the Vedas, Vedavyasa is credited with composing the Mahabharata, which includes the Bhagavad Gita, and authoring the Puranas to make spiritual truths accessible to all. His contributions mark a pivotal turning point in the consolidation of Vedic wisdom, transforming oral tradition into a structured and enduring literary legacy. For this reason, Veda Vyasa is revered as one of the greatest sages in Hindu tradition and is often regarded as a divine incarnation born to preserve Sanatana Dharma.

Thus, Hinduism is one of the world's major religions, originating in the Indian subcontinent and encompassing a diverse range of philosophies, beliefs, traditions, and rituals. The term 'Hindu' was not coined by a single individual but evolved from the Persian word for the Indus River, *Sindhu*. Initially, it was a geographical designation used by the ancient Persians and Greeks to refer to the land and people beyond the Sindhu River. Before the term 'Hindu' acquired a religious connotation, the people of the region referred to their beliefs using various names such as Sanatana Dharma, Vaidika Dharma, or Arya Dharma. Dr. Gavin D. Flood, a noted British scholar of comparative religion and Professor of Hindu Studies at the University of Oxford, makes a similar observation in his work An Introduction to Hinduism. Hinduism's extensive corpus of sacred texts, initially composed in Sanskrit and later translated into various vernacular languages, has served as the principal medium for preserving and transmitting its teachings across regions. Alongside these texts, rituals, and the visual and performing arts have played a crucial role in shaping and disseminating the tradition.

From around the 4th century CE, Hinduism established a strong presence in Southeast Asia, which endured for more than a millennium. Despite its global spread, Hinduism is best understood through its distinctive regional expressions and cultural variations. Many scholars and practitioners emphasize that Hinduism is not merely a religion but a

comprehensive way of life: an evolving tradition deeply interwoven with social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. The name 'India' was given by the ancient Greeks, who referred to the land beyond the Indus River as *Indos*, derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*. Here is an addition; India got the name Bharat from ancient Sanskrit texts and mythology, where it referred to a legendary king and the land he ruled. Here's a breakdown of its origins: Mythological Roots, the name Bharat comes from King Bharata, a legendary monarch mentioned in ancient Indian scriptures like the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita. Bharata was the son of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala, and is celebrated as a just and powerful ruler. His kingdom was called Bharatavarsha, meaning 'the land of Bharata.' Bharat is one of the two official names of the country, alongside India, as stated in Article 1 of the Indian Constitution: 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.' While India has Greek and Latin roots, derived from the Indus River, Bharat reflects indigenous cultural and historical identity.

Sanatana Dharma: Sanatana Dharma is a Sanskrit term referring to the eternal spiritual tradition of ancient Hinduism, which also influenced the philosophies and practices of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. It is often used synonymously with Hinduism, meaning 'eternal dharma' or 'eternal order.' It refers to an eternal set of duties and righteousness that forms the foundation of Hindu life-style and culture. It encompasses universal laws, practices like Satya (truth) and Ahimsa (non-violence), and the ultimate goal of Moksha (liberation). Rooted in the Vedic tradition, Sanatana Dharma emphasizes a holistic way of life rather than a strictly rule-based religion. Hinduism, often referred to as Sanatana Dharma; the eternal order, is a complex and dynamic tradition rooted in three fundamental principles cited above. The term Sanatana Dharma literally means 'eternal or universal law' and signifies the timeless principles and duties that guide life. It serves as the foundational philosophy and cultural heritage of Hinduism, encompassing concepts of cosmic order, right conduct, and selfless service. While frequently used as a synonym for Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma represents a broader framework of values, duties, and responsibilities aimed at universal well-being and spiritual emancipation. Rather than adhering to a rigid dogma or a single religious system, it emphasizes eternal truths and evolving practices that inspire continual inquiry and deeper understanding.

Sanatana Dharma is often translated as the 'Eternal Law or Eternal Order,' combines the concepts of Sanatana and Dharma, signifying timeless principles that govern both the cosmos and human life. It is not merely a religion in the conventional sense but a holistic way of life, a spiritual culture deeply rooted in the ancient scriptures known as the Vedas and the Upanishads. Rather than imposing rigid dogmas, it offers a flexible and inclusive framework that guides individuals toward harmony with the universal order. At the heart of Sanatana Dharma lies an emphasis on moral and ethical conduct, advocating values such as ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), and seva (selfless service). These virtues are considered essential for maintaining balance in personal life and fostering peaceful coexistence in society. The ultimate purpose of this path, however, extends beyond ethical living; it seeks moksha, or spiritual liberation, freedom from the endless cycle of birth and death, leading to union with the eternal reality.

Sanatana Dharma harmonizes Society and Self. Sanatana Dharma, often referred to as the eternal way, embodies a profound synthesis of collective harmony and personal liberation. Its ethical and social vision is deeply society-centric, emphasizing dharma as a guiding principle for maintaining order, justice, and compassion within the community. Through Varna - social roles, ashrama - life stages, and the pursuit of loka-sangraha - welfare of the world, individuals are encouraged to act not merely for personal gain but for the upliftment of society. The Bhagavad Gita, for instance, proclaims selfless action as a means to sustain cosmic balance and social well-being. Yet, at its spiritual core, Sanatana Dharma is radically individual-centric. It recognizes that the ultimate truth, Brahma, is to be realized within the depths of one's own consciousness. Paths such as jnana, bhakti, karma, and raja yoga are tailored to the unique temperament and evolution of each seeker. Liberation is not a collective achievement but a personal transcendence, where the soul awakens to its unity with the divine. Thus, Sanatana Dharma offers a rare philosophical elegance: it binds individuals to society through duty and compassion, while simultaneously liberating them through introspection and spiritual realization. In this way, it nurtures both the flourishing of civilization and the freedom of the soul.

Many adherents regard Sanatana Dharma as a universal foundation that transcends the boundaries of individual faiths, inspiring and encompassing a wide spectrum of religious and spiritual traditions. It is founded on the conviction that all genuine spiritual paths, despite their outward differences, ultimately lead to the same eternal truth and supreme reality. 'Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti,' -- Rigveda 1.164.46, 'Truth is one; the wise call it by many names.' However, this inclusive vision can only resonate fully when people of other faiths are willing to recognize and appreciate this underlying unity. This inclusive vision reflects the philosophical depth and adaptability of Sanatana Dharma, allowing it

to embrace diversity without losing its core essence. While its principles trace back to the earliest layers of Indian thought and culture, the expression 'Sanatana Dharma' gained renewed prominence during the 19th century, particularly in the colonial era. A key source for this statement is a key source for this information is Kim Knott's book, Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction. At that time, it served as a means to affirm Hinduism as an ancient, continuous, and unified tradition, one that is rooted in eternal truths and spiritual ideals rather than confined to transient rituals or sectarian boundaries. By presenting itself in this manner, Sanatana Dharma asserted its identity not merely as a historical religion, but as an enduring and universal way of life. It speaks to the spiritual aspirations of all humanity.

The term Hinduism came into common use as a designation for the religious ideas and practices distinctive to India with the publication of works such as Hinduism by Sir Monier Williams (1840), a renowned professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford. Originally, it was an outsider's term and the insiders played no role. It is rooted in centuries-old usage of the word Hindu. Early travelers to the Indus Valley, beginning with the Greeks and Persians, around 550 BCE, referred to its inhabitants as Hindu (Greek: Indoi). By the 16th century, the people of India themselves began, albeit gradually, to employ the term to distinguish themselves from the Turks. Over time, this distinction evolved from being primarily ethnic, geographic, or cultural to being largely religious. The word Hindu itself originated from the Persian adaptation of the Sanskrit term Sindhu, which refers to the Indus River. Thus it was first used by Persians and later by Muslims to refer to the people living beyond the Indus Valley.

Since the late 19th century, Hindus have responded to the term Hinduism in various ways, reflecting diverse perspectives on identity and tradition. Some have rejected the term altogether, preferring instead to describe their faith through indigenous formulations that more accurately convey its spiritual depth and cultural continuity. They were reluctant to accept a label coined by foreigners; one that, in their view, failed to express the authentic essence of their ancient and living tradition. Others, however, have embraced the expression Vedic religion, using the term Vedic not only to refer to the sacred texts known as the Vedas but also to a dynamic and evolving body of scriptures composed in multiple languages over millennia. This interpretation emphasizes orthopraxy; a way of life grounded in ritual correctness, moral discipline, and adherence to dharma, which has traditionally defined Hindu religious practice more than rigid dogma or centralized authority. Still others have chosen to call the religion Sanatana Dharma, highlighting the timeless elements of the tradition that are believed to transcend local variations in interpretation and practice. Finally, many, perhaps the majority, have simply accepted the term Hinduism or its equivalents, such as Hindu Dharma, in various Indic languages.

Since the early 20th century, textbooks on Hinduism have increasingly been authored by Hindus themselves, often under the rubric of Sanatana Dharma. Indeed, one of the earliest such texts is Sanatana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics; a work compiled by Hindu scholars for the instruction of Hindu students. After that, there appeared many and these writings represent a significant effort at self-definition and interpretation, adding a modern layer to an already elaborate tradition of explaining religious practices and doctrines, a tradition that dates back to the 1st millennium BCE. The textual roots of Hinduism extend even further, to the Vedic hymns and epic literature of the 2nd millennium BCE, which preserve schools of commentary, debate, and philosophical speculation. During this era, the Indian subcontinent witnessed the rise and fall of prominent kingdoms and cultural centers. While the Middle Kingdom of Egypt and the Babylonian Empire dominated the first half of the millennium in their respective regions, in India, the Kuru and Panchala kingdoms held prominence. Artistic evidence from this period, such as depictions of yakshas (nature spirits) and nagas (serpent deities) attests to the diverse religious expressions that had emerged by around 400 BCE.

The Arrival of the Aryans: The arrival of the Aryans between 2000 BCE and 1500 BCE marked a pivotal cultural and linguistic shift, introducing Sanskrit and inaugurating the Vedic period. Like, Angles, Saxons and Jutes who came into England in 4th CE, Aryans came into India to settle. Yet, the roots of Hindu religious tradition are sometimes traced even earlier, to the Indus Valley Civilization. Archaeological discoveries of female terra-cotta figurines: often interpreted as goddesses, highlight the presence of fertility cults and proto-religious practices that may have influenced later developments in Hindu thought and worship. It is true that, according to Rahul Samskrityayan, the Aryans came from the Volga River to the Ganga and brought Sanskrit with them, as an Indo-European language, but the Vedas were primarily composed in the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent, specifically the Punjab region, during the Vedic period. This area is also known as the Sapta Sindhu region, referring to the land of seven rivers according to Wikipedia. While the exact dates are debated, the core of the Rigveda is generally believed to have been composed

between 1500 and 1200 BCE. The Vedas were initially transmitted orally for generations before being written down. The Vedas do not have a single known author, as they are considered 'heard' knowledge (Shruti) rather than written by humans.

According to Hindu tradition, ancient sages, known as Rishis, cognized these eternal mantras during their deep meditation, with Veda Vyasa later compiled and arranged them into the four Vedas for easier understanding. When the Indo-Aryans entered the Indian subcontinent during the second millennium BCE, the region was already inhabited by indigenous populations who spoke native languages, most notably from the Harappan and Dravidian family. While the incoming Indo-Aryans brought Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages like Prakrits, Pali, Pashto, etc. These were markedly different from the tongues spoken by the original inhabitants. The interaction between these linguistic communities gave rise to significant cultural exchange and borrowing, ultimately contributing to the rich and diverse linguistic landscape of modern India. The Indus script, the undeciphered writing system of the Indus Valley Civilization, is widely believed to represent a Dravidian language, suggesting that the Harappan people possessed a well-developed tradition of writing. As Indo-Aryan speakers settled and Sanskrit gained prominence, lexical borrowing occurred extensively across languages, creating a dynamic process of linguistic assimilation that shaped the evolution of Indian languages over millennia.

The Indo-Aryans contributed significantly to the development of key philosophical concepts that lie at the core of Sanatana Dharma. A prime example is the Upanishads, which form an integral part of the Vedic corpus. These texts represent a profound shift from the ritualistic orientation of the early Vedas to a more philosophical and metaphysical outlook. Within their discourse emerged foundational ideas such as Brahma (the ultimate reality), Atma (the individual self or soul), Karma (the law of cause and effect), and Moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth). These concepts continue to constitute the intellectual and spiritual backbone of Hindu philosophy. Here is a very brief explanation of the essence of each of the four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda each in a substantial paragraph that captures their spirit, philosophy, and purpose. Here lies the essence of the four Vedas in a nutshell.

Rigveda, the Hymn of Cosmic Order: It is the oldest and most revered of the other Vedas, is fundamentally a collection of over a thousand hymns dedicated to various deities representing the forces of nature and aspects of cosmic order. It celebrates the grandeur of the universe, the rhythm of nature, and the relationship between the divine and human consciousness. The hymns invoke deities such as Agni, Indra, Varuna, and Soma, symbolizing not merely external powers but inner spiritual realities. The Rig Veda teaches the principle of the cosmic order that governs both the universe and moral life. Through the principle, the Vedic seers perceived harmony between the human, natural, and divine realms. The essence of the Rig Veda lies in its quest for truth through mantras and shraddha (faith). It portrays humanity's earliest spiritual awakening; awe before creation, a search for meaning, and an understanding that the divine manifests in multiple forms but is, in essence, truth is one, though the wise call it by many names.

Yajurveda, the Science of Sacred Action: The Yajur Veda focuses on karma, sacred action, sacrifice, and the performance of rituals. While the Rig Veda provides the hymns, the Yajur Veda offers the procedural framework and philosophical reasoning behind the rituals. It is a practical guide for the yajña (sacrifice), where every act, gesture, and utterance is infused with symbolic meaning. The essence of the Yajur Veda lies in the idea that righteous action, performed in the spirit of devotion and selflessness, sustains cosmic harmony and inner balance. Through precise ritual, the Yajur Veda elevates physical acts into spiritual expressions, teaching that the outer sacrifice mirrors the inner offering of the ego and desires to the divine. It emphasizes dharma (righteous duty) and nishkama karma (action without attachment to results), laying the foundation for later philosophical developments in the Bhagavad Gita. Thus, the Yajur Veda transforms ritual into meditation in motion, an art of aligning one's life with the cosmic rhythm through conscious, disciplined, and devoted action.

Samaveda, the Music of Spiritual Elevation: The Sama Veda is often described as the 'Veda of melodies,' for it transforms the hymns of the Rig Veda into chants and songs. Its essence lies in the spiritual power of sound, rhythm, and harmony. It demonstrates that divine realization can be approached not only through ritual or knowledge but through the ecstatic vibration of sacred music. The Sama Veda emphasizes the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of worship, revealing that beauty, when spiritualized, becomes a path to the divine. It trains the mind to attune itself to higher vibrations, creating an atmosphere of serenity and joy that uplifts both chanter and listener. The chanting of Sama is said to purify the heart, awaken intuition, and dissolve the ego in the experience of unity. Thus, the Sama Veda represents the mystic ascent of the soul through sound, showing that music and devotion together can lead to

transcendence. It beautifully bridges the external ritualism of the Yajur Veda with the inner contemplation of the Rig Veda, embodying the truth that the universe itself is a grand symphony of divine sound.
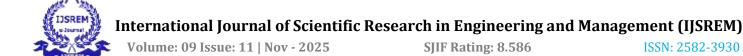
Atharvaveda, the Wisdom of Everyday Life and Inner Power: The Atharva Veda stands apart in tone and content, for it extends Vedic wisdom into the realms of practical life; health, healing, protection, harmony, and inner strength. It contains hymns, prayers, charms, and philosophical reflections addressing both material well-being and spiritual awakening. The essence of the Atharva Veda lies in its holistic vision: that spirituality is not confined to ritual or meditation but spreads every aspect of life. It teaches that divine power manifests in the elements, in the mind, and in the subtle energies within and around people. Many of its hymns aim to promote peace, avert disease, and ensure prosperity, showing an early understanding of psychoneurotic harmony. Yet, beyond these practical aspects, the Atharva Veda also explores profound metaphysical ideas about the soul, creation, and the unity of existence. It is often seen as the bridge between the ritualistic Vedas and the philosophical Upanishads, emphasizing both inner realization and outer harmony. In essence, the Atharva Veda teaches that true knowledge is not abstract but living; rooted in compassion, mindfulness, and the dynamic balance between the material and the spiritual.

Together, the four Vedas form a complete and harmonious vision of human and cosmic life, each complementing the others like the four limbs of a single body of wisdom. The Rig Veda provides the foundation of divine knowledge through inspired hymns that awaken spiritual awareness and reverence for the cosmic order. The Yajur Veda translates that vision into action, teaching that sacred duty and disciplined conduct sustain both the individual and the universe. The Sama Veda adds the dimension of beauty and emotion, transforming worship into music and showing that the path to the divine can also be one of joy, harmony, and inner rhythm. Finally, the Atharva Veda brings spirituality into the sphere of daily living, blending the sacred with the practical, and emphasizing holistic well-being; physical, mental, and spiritual. Collectively, they embody a journey from knowledge to action; from action to devotion; from devotion to realization, illustrating that Sanatana Dharma perceives life itself as sacred; a continuous offering to the divine presence that pervades all.

From an Ideal Division of Labour to a Rigid Caste System: The Vedic concept of Varna (meaning color, class, or kind) established four broad functional divisions in society based on occupation and aptitude. Unlike the later, rigid, and hereditary Jati system (commonly referred to as 'caste'), Varna in the early Vedic period was understood as a flexible, occupational classification that permitted a degree of social mobility. The depiction of the four Varnas originating from different parts of the Cosmic Man (Purusha) is primarily metaphorical, emphasizing interdependence: just as the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet form parts of a single body, so too do these groups collaborate for the harmonious functioning of society. The Purusha Sukta (Rigveda 10.90.12) describes the origin of the four Varnas: 'brahmaṇo 'sya mukham āsīd, bāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ; ūrū tad asya yad vaiśyaḥ, padbhyāṁ śūdro ajāyata.' Its meaning is: The Brahmin was His mouth; both His arms were made the Kshatriya, his thighs became the Vaishya, and from His feet the Shudra was produced. This imagery, from top to bottom of the body, suggests a functional hierarchy, yet also a mutual dependence among all parts. The verse highlights the early Vedic ideal of social roles as interlinked and necessary rather than inherently unequal. It is important to note that the Purusha Sukta itself is a product of the Vedic tradition; thus, it does not provide evidence for the existence of the four Varnas prior to the Vedas. Instead, it reflects the evolving social concepts within Vedic literature.

Furthermore, the Bhagavad Gita underscores the divine foundation of social order in Chapter 4, Verse 13: 'chātur-varṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśhaḥ' Means, the four categories of occupations were created by Me, [Sri Krishna] according to people's inherent qualities and actions." This verse suggests that the original conception of Varna was based on an individual's guna (inner nature) and karma (actions), reinforcing its ideological basis in a divinely ordained and merit-based order rather than social inequality. However, the evolution from this ideal, flexible Varna system to a rigid, birth-based caste hierarchy was a gradual and complex historical process. The transition from the early Vedic period's four-fold occupational classification to the later Jati system, a highly stratified, hereditary, and numerous sub-caste structures, solidified mainly during the Later Vedic period. Several key factors contributed to this transformation, shaped by significant socio-political and economic changes. One of the most critical developments was the rise of the hereditary principle. Over time, social status shifted from being determined by one's aptitudes and actions to being fixed at birth. As professions became increasingly specialized, and vocational skills were commonly passed down within families, membership in a Varna or caste gradually turned into an inherited identity. This transition entrenched social boundaries and laid the groundwork for the caste system as it is commonly understood today.

Romila Thapar (2013), a renowned Indian historian, observes that the increasing specialization of labor contributed significantly to the emergence of Jatis or castes. As society expanded and became more complex, the broad four-fold Varna classification proved inadequate in accommodating the growing diversity of specialized crafts, guilds, and professional groups, such as goldsmiths, weavers, potters, stone breakers, masons, blacksmiths, carpenters, butchers and many more. These groups gradually evolved into thousands of endogamous communities, each constituting a Jati with its own internal customs, occupations, and social rules. A noteworthy illustration of the philosophical critique of caste distinctions can be found in the Manisha Panchakam, a set of five verses composed by Adi Shankara after a transformative encounter with a Chandala, someone deemed 'untouchable' by traditional caste norms. According to traditional accounts, the encounter took place sometime between 788–820 CE on the banks of the Ganga in Kashi (Varanasi), where Shankara, adhering to prevailing social customs, asked the Chandala, who was accompanied by four dogs, to step aside. In response, the Chandala posed a penetrating question: 'Who are you asking to move, the body or the soul?' This profound inquiry compelled Shankara to recognize the illusory nature of caste-based distinctions when viewed through the lens of Advaita Vedanta, which asserts the oneness of the soul (Atma) in all beings. In a remarkable gesture of humility and spiritual insight, Shankara acknowledged the Chandala as his guru, affirming that true wisdom transcends all social barriers.

The five verses, Manisha Panchakam, are Shankara's (788–820 CE) poetic response, affirming the core Advaitic principle that the same divine consciousness pervades all beings, irrespective of caste or social status. In these verses, he declares that anyone who has realized the truth of the Self as pure, undivided consciousness is his guru, whether a Brahmin or a Chandala. The composition thus serves as a spiritual declaration that wisdom and self-realization alone determine a person's worth, not birth or caste. Shankara's Manisha, or conviction, as expressed in these verses, underscores the oneness of all existence and affirms his unwavering commitment to truth over tradition-bound social distinctions. It reveals a core principle of Sanatana Dharma: those seekers of wisdom should learn from anyone who possesses it, irrespective of their social status or identity. This spirit of inclusion is a defining feature of Sanatana Dharma. In the Bhagad Gita C 5. S 18, proclaims the qualities of a true scholar, 'vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini, śuni caiva śva-pāke ca paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ.' The sloka calls out that the wise ones (panditah), endowed with true knowledge, see with equal vision (sama-darsinaḥ) a learned and humble brahmaṇa, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even a dog-eater (outcaste).

This verse reflects the non-dualistic vision (sama-darsana) espoused in the Bhagavad Gita, affirming that the truly wise discern the same atman (self) in all beings, regardless of external distinctions such as caste, species, or social status. This philosophical insight aligns profoundly with Adi Śankara's encounter with the Chandala at Kashi, where Sankara realizes and proclaims that the same divine essence pervades all beings, transcending superficial differences. Society, much like a flowing river, is in constant flux, and social changes are inevitable. This dynamic nature of Indian society was emphasized by the eminent sociologist M.N. Srinivas, who challenged the traditional 'book view' of Indian society, one that depicted it as static, rigid, and bound by an unchanging caste hierarchy. In contrast, Srinivas introduced a 'field view' based on empirical observation, which revealed a more fluid and adaptive social structure characterized by continuous change, negotiation, and mobility at the local level. His influential concepts of Sanskritisation and the dominant caste effectively illustrate how caste, far from being a frozen institution, continually reconfigures itself through processes of cultural imitation, social aspiration, and power dynamics.

Gradually, the concept of ritual purity gained prominence in the later period, especially within the Dharmashastras, such as the Manusmriti. As Rousseau ((1762)), a French Philosopher, insightfully noted, 'Though man was born free, he is in chains,' this era was marked by growing social stratification. The upper Varnas in the caste hierarchy, particularly the Brahmins, sought to maintain their ritual purity by imposing strict barriers: prohibiting contact, inter-dining, and intermarriage with lower-caste communities. They adopted dietary restrictions, including vegetarianism, and further contributed to the proliferation of new castes, thereby tightening social boundaries. This phase signified a period of significant socio-political reinforcement. The influence of foundational religious and legal texts, notably the Dharmashastras, expanded considerably, codifying and formalizing the four-tiered Varna hierarchy while clearly articulating the duties (dharma) associated with each group. Simultaneously, this period witnessed the consolidation of a distinct, unranked fifth category of outcastes, such as the Chandalas, who were socially segregated as 'untouchables' and placed entirely outside the Varna system.

Over time, rulers also found the Varna system advantageous for maintaining social order and political stability, often bestowing power and patronage upon the highest-ranked groups. Another significant factor was the assimilation of tribal communities: as Vedic culture expanded into the Gangetic plains, it encountered and absorbed numerous indigenous groups. These communities were typically incorporated into the existing social hierarchy as new, low-ranking castes or were relegated entirely outside the Varna structure. Thus, the caste system gradually emerged as the primary mechanism governing social life, regulating occupation, marriage, social interaction, and access to resources. What began as a functional and flexible Varna model was transformed into a rigid, hereditary system of stratification. This shift reflects a broader aspect of human social behavior: when groups coexist over extended periods, competition naturally arises, driven by impulses of superiority and inferiority. Echoing Darwin's principle of "survival of the fittest," those endowed with greater strength, wealth, or influence gradually ascended to the higher rungs of the social hierarchy, while others remained in the intermediate levels. The weakest were pushed to the lowest rungs. As disparities deepened over generations, some individuals or groups fell even further, eventually becoming socially ostracized as Chandalas, or untouchables, completely outside the traditional Varna framework.

This evolution of social stratification stands in stark contrast to the foundational ideal of Sanātana Dharma, which is rooted in inclusivity and the recognition of the divinity inherent in all beings. In summary, the transformation from a functional Varṇa system, originally based on duties (dharma) and individual qualities (guṇa), to a rigid, hereditary caste structure was neither swift nor simplistic. It evolved through a complex interplay of religious, political, economic, and social forces. Early religious doctrines, as reflected in the Vedic texts, were initially fluid, permitting both occupational and spiritual mobility. However, over time, interpretations hardened, and religious authority became increasingly intertwined with social hierarchies. Concurrently, political leaders and ruling elites found the caste framework useful for maintaining control, ensuring loyalty, and structuring labor. Economic imperatives further solidified this stratification: land ownership, access to resources, and participation in trade were gradually tied to caste identity. Additionally, as new populations and tribal groups were incorporated into the expanding Hindu social fold, the need to classify, integrate, and assign them a place within the hierarchy led to increased rigidity. Thus, a system that began as a dynamic, merit-based model rooted in the inclusive philosophy of Sanātana Dharma gradually ossified into a hereditary structure of privilege and exclusion, marking a departure from its original spiritual intent.

The Development of Temple Cults: From this standpoint, the Guptas, 320 CE to 550 CE, rule is remarkable period in India. It is called the 'Golden Age' of India, this era saw unprecedented advancements in science, mathematics, astronomy, art, literature, architecture, and philosophy. The period was marked by the rapid development of temple architecture. Earlier temples were made of wood, but freestanding stone and brick temples soon appeared in many parts of India and they are archaeological marvels. As the legacy continued, by the 7th century, stone temples, some of considerable dimensions, were found in many parts of the country. Almost all the surviving Gupta temples are small comparatively; they consist of a small cellar (central chamber), it was constructed of thick and solid masonry, with a veranda either at the entrance or on all sides of the structure. The oldest Gupta temples, such as the Buddhist temples at Sanchi, have flat roofs. But, the sikhara (spire), typical of the north Indian temple, was developed in this period and with time was steadily made taller. Tamil literature mentions several temples. The epic Silappatikaram, for instance, refers to the temples of Srirangam, near Tiruchchirappalli, and of Tirumala-Tirupati.

The Buddhists and Jains were the first to utilize artificial caves for religious purposes, a practice later adopted by the Hindus. However, Hindu cave temples are comparatively rare, and none have been discovered dating earlier than the Gupta period. The Udayagiri complex contains a series of cave shrines, but some of the finest examples are found at Badami, which served as the capital of the Chalukya dynasty in the sixth century. The Badami caves are adorned with intricate carvings depicting Vishnu, Shiva, and Harihara, an artistic synthesis of Vaishnavism and Shaivism, as well as narrative reliefs illustrating episodes from the life of Krishna, one of Vishnu's incarnations. In the vicinity of Badami lie the sites of Aihole and Pattadakal, both located in present-day Karnataka. These places contain some of the earliest surviving temples in southern India and are often described as the 'laboratories' of Hindu temple architecture. Pattadakal, which also functioned as a capital of the Chalukya Empire, became a prominent center of temple construction during the seventh and eighth centuries. The temples built here integrated architectural elements that later evolved into the distinctive features of both North and South Indian styles.

At the Pallava site of Mahabalipuram, located south of Chennai, several small temples were carved out of rock formations in the 7th century. These monuments stand among the finest examples of religious architecture in Tamil

Nadu. During the Pallava Empire (4th–9th centuries), Kanchipuram and Chennai were major urban centers. Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, is often referred to as the 'City of a Thousand Temples.' Some of its shrines date back to the 5th century and exhibit remarkable architectural splendor. The temples, dedicated to various local manifestations of Shiva, Vishnu, and the Great Goddess, were supported not only by kings and nobles but also by the general populace through donations and endowments. Evidence of contact between the Pallava Empire and Southeast Asia is found in the earliest inscriptions of the Khmer Empire, a powerful civilization that flourished from the 9th to the 15th centuries in present-day Cambodia, written in characters known as the 'Pallava script.'Hinduism and Buddhism profoundly influenced the civilizations of Southeast Asia, shaping their spiritual and cultural traditions and contributing to the growth of written literature. Around the beginning of the Common Era, Indian merchants are believed to have settled in these regions, accompanied by Brahmins and Buddhist monks. These religious figures received patronage from local rulers, many of whom embraced Hinduism or Buddhism, further strengthening the cultural ties between India and Southeast Asia.

Buddhism and Jainism, though reformist in nature, contributed significantly to the evolution of Hinduism, even though they initially arose as movements challenging certain Vedic and ritualistic practices. Over time, a rich exchange of ideas took place, resulting in profound mutual influence. Both Buddhism and Jainism emerged in India during the 6th century BCE, drawing from the same cultural and philosophical milieu as late Vedic thought. They questioned the dominance of ritualism and brahmanical orthodoxy, emphasizing ethical conduct, inner purity, and liberation, ideas that later became central to Hindu philosophy. Ahimsa, a cornerstone of Jainism and a key value in Buddhism, was later deeply absorbed into Hindu ethics and practice. The stress on compassion, detachment, and self-discipline also shaped later Hindu spiritual traditions, including the Bhagavad Gita's message of nishkama karma, selfless action. The monastic ideal, the renunciation of worldly life to pursue liberation, was systematized by Buddhism and Jainism. This profoundly influenced Hindu ascetic orders and the Yoga systems, which incorporated meditation and mindfulness as essential disciplines. By challenging caste-based rigidity and ritual excesses, Buddhism and Jainism encouraged spiritual democratization, the idea that liberation is open to all, not restricted by birth or priestly authority. This broadened the scope of Hinduism, particularly during the later Bhakti and Vedanta periods.

Originally, both Buddhism and Jainism began as non-theistic reform movements that rejected the ritualism and excessive idol worship found in Vedic religion. However, over time, idol worship developed in different forms within both traditions. Sikhism emerged in fifteenth-century Punjab, during a period of intense interaction between Hindu and Islamic traditions. Its founder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who was born into a Hindu family, sought to transcend the divisions and ritualism of both religions by emphasizing direct devotion to one formless, eternal God (Ik Onkar), moral living, and equality among all people. Though Sikhism arose within the broader cultural and spiritual context of Hinduism, it gradually developed into an independent faith. It shares with Hinduism certain philosophical concepts such as karma, rebirth, and liberation, yet it firmly rejects caste distinctions, idol worship, and the multiplicity of deities. The later Gurus institutionalized Sikh practices and gave the community a distinct identity, culminating in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa, marking a clear separation from both Hindu and Muslim frameworks. Thus, while Sikhism has roots in the Indian spiritual tradition, it evolved as a distinct, monotheistic, and egalitarian religion devoted to truthful living, selfless service, and unity with the Divine.

The Roots of Sacred Sound and Dance: Sound holds a sacred and creative power in Hindu thought. The universe itself is believed to have originated from Sabda Brahma, the Divine conceived as sound. The primordial syllable 'Om,' revered as the vibration from which all existence emerged, symbolizes the unity of the physical, mental, and spiritual realms. The Vedas, regarded as Sruti or 'that, which is heard,' embody this concept, having been transmitted orally through precise recitation, rhythm, and intonation for millennia. This oral tradition was preserved through the guru–sisya parampara (teacher–disciple lineage), where the exactitude of pronunciation and pitch was considered an act of devotion and a means of preserving divine truth. In this context, mantras; sacred utterances believed to possess transformative and spiritual potency, play a central role. Each mantra carries vibrational energy that aligns the human mind with the cosmic rhythm. Thus, the chanting of these mantras, whether in Vedic rituals, temple worship, or meditation, is not merely vocal expression but a spiritual discipline that purifies thought and awakens higher consciousness. Thus, in Hinduism, sound transcends its linguistic function to become a bridge between the human and the divine, reflecting the eternal resonance of creation itself.

The medieval period witnessed the emergence of new devotional movements centered around poet-saints who composed and sang hymns in the vernacular languages of their regions. These movements likely began in Tamil Nadu with the rise of two groups of poet-devotees, the Nayanars, worshippers of Shiva, and the Alvars, devotees of Vishnu. The earliest of their hymns date from the 7th century, although passages reflecting a spirit of devotion can be traced in even earlier Tamil literature. In later centuries, figures such as Kabir, Mirabai, Surdas, Tulsidas, Namdev, and Tukaram further enriched the Bhakti tradition. Through their compositions in the languages of the common people, they expressed profound spiritual insights and made divine experience accessible to all. In ancient and medieval India, music and dance were not regarded merely as forms of entertainment but as sacred offerings and vital means of attaining spiritual realization and divine ecstasy. Their role in religious expression evolved from the chanting of Vedic hymns to the elaborate rituals of temple worship and finally to the flourishing Bhakti movements. The roots of devotional music can be traced to the Vedas, especially the Sama Veda, which laid the earliest foundations for this enduring spiritual art.

The slokas of the Sama Veda were composed in specific melodies and rhythmic patterns to be sung during Vedic fire sacrifices and rituals and this established chanting as the earliest form of worship, where precision in pitch and rhythm was considered essential for cosmic harmony and effective communication with the deities. This concept, meaning 'Sound is God,' became the foundational theological principle, suggesting that the ultimate reality can be experienced through sacred sound. The primal sound 'Om' is considered the essence of all Vedic chanting. The early musical instruments like the Vina was already associated with Saraswati the goddess of knowledge and music. Around 200 BCE to 200 CE, the integration of music and dance into temple worship formalized significantly, largely guided by the ancient treatise on performing arts, the Natya Sastra. Dance was also considered as a divine offering. This was also regarded as Natya Veda, a form of instruction and spiritual liberation accessible to all castes. The Bhartiya Natya Sastra is attributed to Bharata Muni (whose time period was between 2nd BCE and 2nd CE). He emphasized that there sould be integral harmony among body, mind and emotion in performance. In one of most celebrated phorisms he declared, 'Yato hastah tato drushti, yato drushti tato manah, yato manah tato bhavah; yato bhavah, tato rasah.' (=where the hand moves, there follow the eyes; where the eyes go, the mind follows; where the mind goes, emotion arises; and where emotion manifests, there blossoms aesthetic delight.)

The concept of Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance, was epitomized this devotional function. His Tandava dance represents the universe's cycle of creation, preservation and destruction. The primary goal of performance, according to the Natya Sastra, was not just entertainment but to evoke aesthetic experience in the audienc, transporting them into a transcendal state of being. The artist's use of emotional states and hand gestures were a direct language for conveying mythological and devotional stories. The importanc of dance is immortalized in temple architecture, such as in the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple, Tamil Nadu, where there are 108 units of dance movements were described in the Natyas were sculpted on the walls and gopurams. In South and East India, women used to dedicate to the service of the temple deity and they were responsible for the daily performace of music and dance. These performances were sacred daily rituals offered to please and honour the God.

Warfare in India: On the other hand, the medieval period witnessed several crusades in the Christian world; religious wars fought primarily between Christian and Muslim forces in Europe and the Middle East, resulting in the loss of countless lives. However, such large-scale religious crusades never occurred in India. Despite being home to multiple faiths, philosophies, and sects, India largely fostered a spirit of coexistence and dialogue rather than violent confrontation. Religious debates, reforms, and philosophical discussions took place through intellectual exchange rather than organized warfare. The Indian subcontinent thus evolved as a land where diversity was accommodated within a broader spiritual framework that emphasized tolerance and the pursuit of truth through various paths. Indian kings often engaged in wars among themselves for political dominance or the consolidation of territory, yet they seldom waged campaigns beyond the subcontinent.

It is not like in many parts of the world, where military expansion was often driven by religious zeal or imperial ambition. There were a series of religious wars initiated by the Latin Church in medieval Europe, primarily aimed at reclaiming Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim control. The Crusades were explicitly sanctioned by the Pope and framed as acts of faith and penance. They exemplify how religion and military expansion were intertwined, leading to massive loss of life and deep cultural hostility between Christian and Islamic worlds, according to to Jonathan Smith. Indian rulers generally viewed warfare as a matter of rajdharma, a duty bound by moral and ethical limits. Their battles were largely regional, aimed at protecting sovereignty, restoring order, or defending dharma, rather than conquering

foreign lands or imposing their faith upon others. Hinduism, by its very nature, does not promote conversion; it emphasizes individual spiritual growth and the freedom to pursue truth through diverse paths. Consequently, India's historical conflicts were seldom motivated by the desire to convert others, but rather to preserve balance, justice, and cultural autonomy within the subcontinent. As Kaushik Roy observes in his book, Warfare in India, 1450–1850, Indian warfare was primarily characterized by internal rivalries and a marked absence of expansionist or religiously driven campaigns beyond the subcontinent.

Throughout Indian history, numerous wars were fought within the subcontinent, reflecting political rivalries rather than religious aggression or imperial expansion. From the early Magadha wars among the Mahajanapadas and the famed Kalinga War of Emperor Ashoka to the Tripartite Struggle among the Palas, Rashtrakutas, and Gurjara-Pratiharas, most conflicts arose from territorial ambitions and dynastic competition. Even during the medieval and early modern periods, major battles, such as those of Tarain, Talikota, and the Maratha wars were largely internal, focused on control and governance rather than the spread of religion. This enduring pattern underscores the Indian subcontinent's historical inclination toward regional assertion and cultural preservation rather than external conquest. Throughout Indian history, wars were largely confined within the within the boundaries of the subcontinent, fought among local rulers for political dominance or territorial control.

Consequently, the primary sufferers of these conflicts were the people of India themselves, particularly the native Hindu population rather than foreign powers or outsiders. Unlike the crusades and religious wars waged under the banner of the Abrahamic faiths, where conquest and conversion were often intertwined, India's internal wars seldom carried a religious motive. They were predominantly political, dynastic, or regional in nature, and their impact, though devastating, remained contained within the cultural and geographical boundaries of the land. This historical reality deserves recognition, for it reveals a striking contrast between India's indigenous tradition of warfare, bound by moral and spiritual restraints, and the expansionist zeal that characterized many conflicts elsewhere in the world. As Kaushik Roy observes in 'Hinduism and the Ethics of Warfare in South Asia, from Antiquity to the Present, Hindu philosophy made a clear ethical distinction between dharma yuddha and kutayuddha (unjust war), emphasizing the need to uphold righteousness even in times of conflict. The Mahabharata itself articulates these moral principles, outlining the duties of warriors and the ethical limits of combat, such as prohibitions against striking an unarmed opponent or attacking after sunset, thus underscoring the civilizational emphasis on justice and restraint in warfare.

According to americanhindu.org, Hinduism is at least 5,000 years old. Hinduism's unique qualities include being a non-prophetic tradition with no single founder or central authority, like Jesus or Mohammad, its diverse array of deities seen as manifestations of a single supreme being, Brahma and its core concepts of dharma, karma, samsara, and moksha. It also emphasizes the eternal soul, atma, and a pluralistic view, seeing different religions as paths to the same truth. Hinduism also referred to as Sanatana Dharma, eternal law or eternal order, has several unique qualities that distinguish it from many other major world religions. It is to reiterate that Hinduism has no single founder. It's an accumulation of diverse traditions, philosophies, and practices that evolved over thousands of years. There is no single governing body or creed that all Hindus must accept. This lack of a single, required set of beliefs allows for immense diversity and individual freedom of worship and philosophical thought.

Hinduism is distinguished by its non-exclusive nature, often asserting that all genuine religious paths are diverse expressions of the same universal truth. A Santi Mantra from the Upaniṣads states: 'Om sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayaḥ, sarve bhadraṇi pasyantu, ma kascid duḥkhabhag bhavet,' meaning, May all be happy, may all be free from illness, may all see what is auspicious, and may none suffer.' This verse reflects a vision of universal welfare, extending concern for the well-being of all people rather than limiting it to Hindus alone. While Islam and Christianity also contain teachings of compassion and universal care: rahmah (mercy) in Islam and agape (selfless love) in Christianity, preachers in practice often emphasize differences, sometimes fostering division rather than harmony. Such selective focus on conflict has, in certain regions, led to violence between communities in India. By contrast, Hinduism's inclusive outlook emphasizes shared humanity, highlighting common values rather than points of contention. Yet, it is true that Hinduism is adaptable on the surface yet internally constrained by social hierarchies. While it presents an image of unity from without, within it unfolds into a complex web of countless castes and sub-castes. Despite its internal rigidity, it remains harmless to other religions and even to the castes inside.

Hinduism is simultaneously monistic, monotheistic, polytheistic, henotheistic, and even agnostic or atheistic, depending on the school of thought or individual belief. Most Hindus believe in Brahma, the one ultimate, impersonal reality,

which can be manifested and worshipped through a multitude of deities are seen as various aspects or forms of the one Supreme God. It beautifully captures the faith's ability to embrace seeming paradoxes. The core idea is that of Brahma, the one ultimate, impersonal reality, which can be understood and worshipped in countless ways. Here's a quick breakdown of the terms people mention in that context. Monistic: The belief that all of reality is ultimately one, Brahma. Monotheistic: The belief in one Supreme God, often personalized as Ishvara, a concept that encompasses the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Polytheistic: the worship of a multitude of deities, like Vishnu, Shiva, Lakshmi, Kali, etc who are seen as aspects of the one Brahma or Ishvara. Henotheistic: the worship of one specific God without denying the existence of others. A Hindu may choose Vishnu or another deity, as their primary form of the Divine. Agnostic/Atheistic: Some philosophical schools, like certain interpretations of Samkhya or Mimamsa, do not rely on or posit a personal God. The tradition recognizes different paths, or yogas, to achieve liberation, moksha, according to Bhagavad Gita. They are shown under.

Karma Yoga: It often referred to as the Yoga, the path of Selfless Action, is one of the primary paths to spiritual liberation in Hinduism. Unlike other spiritual practices that emphasize withdrawal from the world, Karma Yoga teaches that enlightenment can be attained through active participation in life, provided one acts with the right mindset. Its central tenet, Nishkama Karma, is prominently articulated in the Bhagavad Gita. This concept emphasizes performing one's duties, Dharma, with diligence, sincerity, and skill, while completely renouncing attachment to the outcomes or rewards of these actions. A practitioner of Karma Yoga, known as a Karma Yogi, views all work, whether professional, domestic, or humanitarian, as an opportunity for spiritual growth. By offering the results of their efforts to the divine or a higher purpose, they transform ordinary tasks into acts of devotion.

Swami Vivekananda (1953) explains it in his 'The Secret of Work.' Swami Vivekananda taught that true detachment in work does not mean indifference or laziness, but performing one's duty with full energy while remaining unattached to the results. He emphasized that work should be done as an act of service to humanity and as worship of the Divine, without any selfish motive. According to him, attachment binds the soul, whereas detached action purifies the mind and leads to spiritual freedom. He believed that when work is performed selflessly, with no desire for personal gain, it becomes a path to realizing one's higher self and attaining inner peace. This approach not only cultivates discipline and ethical living but also gradually purifies the mind, reducing selfish desires and ego-driven impulses. Over time, such dedicated selfless action helps the practitioner transcend the binding effects of karma, ultimately leading to freedom from the cycle of action and reaction, Samsara, and guiding them toward spiritual liberation, Moksha. In essence, Karma Yoga affirms that the path to enlightenment lies not in renunciation of life but in the conscious, selfless engagement with it, where every action becomes a step toward inner freedom and divine union. Some of the noted people who followed Karma Yoga are: Baba Amte, Dr. Abdul Kalam, Swami Chinmayananda, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, Swami Vivekananda, etc.

Bhakti Yoga: Bhakti Yoga, often called the Yoga of Devotion, is one of the most accessible and deeply cherished spiritual paths in Hinduism. Rooted in love, surrender, and unwavering faith in the Divine, it emphasizes cultivating a personal and emotional relationship with God. Unlike other yogic paths that focus primarily on knowledge or disciplined action, Bhakti Yoga transforms the heart itself into the instrument of liberation. The Bhagavad Gita extols Bhakti as the highest and simplest path, open to all regardless of caste, gender, or intellectual ability. Its central principle is selfless love and surrender to the Divine, seeing God not as a distant abstraction, but as a living presence in one's daily life. The practitioner, or Bhakta, expresses this devotion through prayer, chanting, singing hymns, bhajans and kirtans, ritual worship, puja, or simply remembering God with every breath.

Bhakti Yoga is not confined to ritual; it is a way of life. The Bhakta learns to see the Divine in all beings and all actions, thereby dissolving the boundaries between the sacred and the ordinary. Through surrender, humility, and unconditional love, the ego gradually dissolves, allowing the practitioner to experience union with the Divine. There are also different modes of devotion, ranging from reverence and friendship to parental affection and even romantic love for the Divine. Saints like Mirabai, Tulsidas, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu exemplify Bhakti in their lives and poetry, demonstrating that devotion can be both deeply personal and universally transformative. Ultimately, Bhakti Yoga teaches that liberation, Moksha, is not merely a matter of intellectual realization or ritual precision, but the natural fruit of a heart overflowing with love for God. It affirms that in the surrender of the self lies the highest freedom. Some noted people who followed Bhakti Yoga are: The Alvars, The Nayanmars, Meera Bai, Tulsidas, Namdev, Tukaram, Suradas, Ramanujacharya, etc.

Jnana Yoga: Jnana Yoga is known as the yoga of knowledge or wisdom is considered the most intellectually demanding of the spiritual paths in Hinduism. Rooted in deep inquiry and self-realization, it emphasizes the pursuit of truth through knowledge, reflection, and meditation. Its goal is to discern the eternal from the transient, the real, Sat, from the unreal, Asat, and ultimately realize the identity of the individual self, Atma, with the universal reality, Brahma. The Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads describe Jnana Yoga as the 'direct path' to liberation, though it requires maturity of mind, discipline, and detachment. A practitioner, or jnani, engages in systematic self-inquiry, often beginning with Sravaṇa, listening to the teachings of the scriptures and spiritual masters, followed by manana, deep contemplation and reasoning to remove doubts, and culminating in nididhyasana, meditative absorption on the truth. The central practice of Jnana Yoga is viveka, discrimination between the real and the unreal, and vairagya, detachment from worldly desires and attachments.

By constantly examining the nature of the self, asking 'Who am I?' the practitioner gradually peels away layers of identification with the body, mind, and ego, realizing the self as pure consciousness. Unlike Bhakti Yoga, which emphasizes devotion, or Karma Yoga, which emphasizes selfless action, Jnana Yoga stresses knowledge born of direct experience. However, it does not reject the other paths; rather, it often integrates them, for a heart purified by devotion and a life disciplined by selfless action creates the fertile ground for wisdom to blossom. In its highest realization, Jnana Yoga culminates in the experiential knowledge that Atma is Brahma that the individual soul is not separate from the absolute. This realization dissolves ignorance, which is seen as the root of bondage, and leads to liberation, the state of abiding in one's true nature as infinite, eternal consciousness. The famous persons who followed Jnana Yoga are: Adi Shankaracharya, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Kabir, Vemana, etc.

Raja Yoga: It is the path of meditation/physical and mental discipline. Raja Yoga, often called the Royal Path or the Yoga of Meditation, is regarded as the path of self-discipline, concentration, and direct inner experience. It is rooted in the teachings of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras; it emphasizes mastery over the mind as the gateway to spiritual liberation. While Karma Yoga focuses on action, Bhakti Yoga on devotion, and Jnana Yoga on knowledge, Raja Yoga provides a systematic method of inner practice, often described as the 'science of the mind.' The goal is to reach Samadhi, a state of profound inner silence and union, where the distinction between subject and object dissolves, revealing the pure consciousness that is the true Self.

Unlike other paths that emphasize external devotion, ritual, or intellectual study, Raja Yoga provides a direct and experiential path. It is often described as a 'royal road' because it systematically integrates the body, breath, senses, and mind into a single disciplined practice. By achieving mastery over these, the Raja Yogi transcends ego and illusion, realizing liberation. In essence, Raja Yoga affirms that the kingdom of God or the highest truth is within, and through meditation, self-discipline, and inner stillness, one can directly experience this ultimate reality. The famous people who have chosen Raja Yoga are: Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Krishnananda, Patanjali, Annie Besant, B.K.S. Iyengar, etc.

The Gita, the Essence of Sanatana Dharma: The Bhagavad Gita is often called the 'Song of the Lord' and is arguably the most accessible and widely read text that summarizes the essence of Sanatana Dharma's philosophical, theological, and practical teachings. The Gita, often revered as the crown jewel of Indian philosophy, encapsulates the timeless wisdom of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal way of life. Emerging from the Mahabharata, the Gita transforms a battlefield into a profound arena of moral, spiritual, and philosophical inquiry. It synthesizes diverse strands of Indian thought, Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga, and Bhakti, into a harmonious vision of righteous living. Through the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, the Gita defines the essence of dharma as the performance of one's duty without attachment to the fruits of action. It teaches that the path to liberation (moksha) lies not in renunciation alone but in selfless action performed with clarity, devotion, and inner discipline. In the Mahabharata, there are two wars: the outer and the inner. The outer war takes place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where armies clash for power and justice. The inner war, however, unfolds within Arjuna's mind, where doubt, duty, and moral confusion wage a deeper conflict.

It is this inner turmoil that gives rise to the Bhagavad Gita, transforming the epic from a tale of kings and kingdoms into a timeless dialogue on ethics, self-mastery, and the nature of the soul. Thus, the Mahabharata becomes not only a record of external struggle but also a profound reflection of the human condition. The Gita thus stands as a mirror reflecting the comprehensive worldview of Sanatana Dharma, where action, knowledge, and devotion converge into a single spiritual pursuit. Its universality transcends the bounds of time, sect, and culture, offering moral direction to all seekers of truth. Unlike dogmatic scriptures that prescribe rigid beliefs and dos and don'ts, the Gita encourages introspection, self-

realization, and harmony between the temporal and the transcendental. It reaffirms the fundamental Hindu vision of unity in diversity, the idea that multiple paths can lead to the same divine goal. For this reason, the Bhagavad Gita continues to be regarded not merely as a religious text, but as the living heart and philosophical essence of Sanatana Dharma. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1948) observes that The Gita is a synthesis of spiritual experience and moral action while representing the eternal ideals of Hindu thought.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (2014), Indian nationalist, teacher, freedom fighter and thinker, in his monumental work Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya, which was written in Mandalay Jail, Burma, offered a revolutionary interpretation that emphasized the Gita's call to active engagement with the world rather than withdrawal from it. For Tilak, Karma Yoga; the discipline of selfless action, stood as the central doctrine of the Gita and, by extension, of Sanatana Dharma itself. He argued that true spirituality is not escapism but the performance of one's duty with steadfast devotion and detachment from personal gain. This dynamic view of dharma aligns with the broader Hindu ethos that upholds balance between worldly responsibility and spiritual realization. Together, the interpretations of thinkers like Radhakrishnan and Tilak reaffirm the Gita's enduring position as the ethical and metaphysical core of Sanatana Dharma.

In the modern world, marked by moral confusion, material excess and inner unrest, the message of the Bhagavad Gita outshines with renewed relevance. It reminds humanity that the true freedom lies in self-mastery, and true success in aligning one's actions with a higher moral order. By urging individuals to act with purpose, compassion, and detachment, the Gita offers not only a path to personal enlightenment but also a universal code for harmonious living. It reminds people of Vivekananda's The Secret of Work. The Gita's eternal teachings continue to inspire thinkers, leaders, and seekers across the globe, affirming that Sanatana Dharma is not merely an ancient faith, but a living philosophy of balance, duty, and spiritual wisdom.

Education and the Chaturvarna System in the Mahabharata: The authors of this review have deemed it essential to shed light, even if briefly, on the nature of education available to the four segments of society during the time of the Mahabharata. This exploration carries particular significance, as the epic is traditionally attributed to Veda Vyasa, an eminent sage renowned not only for composing the Mahabharata but also for systematizing the Vedas into four distinct compilations. As one of the foundational text of Sanatana Dharma, the Mahabharata offers profound literary and philosophical insights into the socio-educational structures of ancient India. In the period following the composition of the Mahabharata, a discernible shift emerged in the conceptualization and practice of social organization within the framework of Sanatana Dharma. Earlier interpretations of the Varna system, flexible in nature and not determined by birth, emphasized a functional division of labour based on an individual's intrinsic qualities (guna) and activities (karma).

The following section delineates the educational framework and duty allocation attributed to Veda Vyasa in the Mahabharata, as it pertains to the fourfold Varna system within Sanatana Dharma. Vyasa is traditionally credited not only with composing the epic but also with codifying the roles, responsibilities, and educational pathways designed for each stratum of society. It is important to note, however, that the practical execution and lived experiences of these Varna-based prescriptions varied significantly across historical periods, a complexity warranting further discussion elsewhere. The present focus lies in elucidating Vyasa's normative vision of Varna-dharma: a socially harmonized order wherein education and occupational duties were aligned with an individual's predisposed nature (guna) and vocational function (karma), rather than solely by birth. Through this lens, the Mahabharata offers both a prescriptive framework and an interpretive window into the socio-cultural ethos of ancient India.

1. Brahmanas, the Priestly and Scholarly Class: The Brahmanas held a preeminent position in the educational structure of Vedic and epic society, serving as guardians of sacred knowledge and its transmitters of the Vedic corpus. Their curriculum encompassed the study of the Vedas, Vedangas (limb disciplines like phonetics, grammar, astronomy), and philosophical systems such as Mimamsa and Vedānta (interpretation and the Upanishads). This focus is reflected in the Mahabharata, where sages like Vyasa and Suka embody the ideal of spiritual and intellectual attainment rooted in scriptural mastery (Mahabharata, Santi Parva 300.6–9). Scholars like Sharma RS (2000) emphasize that Brahmanical education was an integrated pursuit combining metaphysical inquiry with ethical self-discipline, positioning Brahmanas as the moral and intellectual stewards of society. Brahmana = one who is devoted to the pursuit of Brahma, the ultimate reality or universal consciousness.

2. Kshatriyas, the Warrior and Ruling Class: Education for the Kshatriyas was designed to prepare them for leadership, governance, and protection of the region and its people. As depicted in the Mahabharata, princes like Arjuna

and Yudhisthira receive instruction in martial arts, diplomacy, archery and ethical governance under the tutelage of preceptors such as Drona and Bhisma (Mahabharata, Adi Parva 132.1–10). Their training integrated practical skills in knife fight and warfare with lessons in political duty (rajadharma) and justice. Basham (1954) observes that while Kshatriyas were granted access to spiritual teachings, their education pragmatically oriented them toward maintaining social order and upholding righteousness through virtuous kingship. Kshatriya = holders of kshatra, or authority.

3. Vaishyas, the Merchant and Agricultural Class: The Vaishyas formed the productive and commercial class, and their education reflected the practical demands of economic life. Textual references in the Mahabharata suggest that Vaishyas were instructed in agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce, and the ethics of wealth management (Mahabharata, Santi Parva 60.7–10). According to an Indian Historian and archaeologist, Altekar (1965), the Vaishya's role combined entrepreneurial initiative with social responsibility, as their prosperity was tied to the support of both the state and religious institutions. While often excluded from formal Vedic study, Vaishyas were encouraged to embody dharma through generosity, hospitality, and ethical trade, serving as custodians of societal well-being through economic contribution.

4. Shudras, Service and Artisan Class: The Shudras, traditionally associated with labor and craft, had limited access to formal education and were largely trained through apprenticeship and oral transmission of trade skills. Although generally excluded from Vedic learning (as noted in Manusmṛti 10.4), the Mahabharata contains passages that recognize exceptional Shudras for their wisdom and virtue, highlighting an undercurrent of inclusivity within the epic tradition (Mahabharata, Santi Parva 188.8–9). P.V. Kane, in his monumental work History of Dharmasastra (1962), observes that while the hierarchical system restricted Shudra access to sacred texts, it did not entirely negate their capacity for spiritual merit or practical knowledge. This points out a more dynamic and context-dependent application of Varna-based norms in early Hindu society.

However, following the Mahabharata era, Indian society underwent a profound transformation marked by the deepening entrenchment of birth-based caste identification. What had once been a fluid and functional social framework gradually ossified into a rigid and exclusionary hierarchy. This shift was not merely administrative; it reshaped the lived realities of millions, particularly those relegated to the lower rungs of the social order. Access to education, religious rites, and avenues for upward mobility became increasingly restricted, reinforcing systemic inequities that would persist for centuries. The Sudras, originally recognized as the fourth division within the chaturvarna system and entrusted with essential societal functions, found them fragmented into a labyrinth of sub-castes. Over time, this splintering diluted their collective identity and further entrenched their marginalization. Among these emergent groups were the Chandalas, positioned not just at the bottom, but entirely outside the Varna framework. They came to be regarded as untouchables, a designation that carried profound social and spiritual stigma.

Traditional accounts and later dharma texts paint a stark picture of exclusion. The Chandalas were systematically barred from participating in the sacred rhythms of Vedic life. They were denied access to Sanskrit education, the very language in which spiritual and philosophical knowledge was encoded. Even the act of hearing or reciting the Vedas was forbidden to them, as if the divine syllables themselves were deemed too pure to be stained by their presence. This exclusion was not just theological; it was a mechanism of control, reinforcing the boundaries of purity and pollution that defined caste orthodoxy. The Chandalas were also compelled to live in segregated settlements, away from the mainstream populace, commented Olivelle Patric, a famous Indologist, in his Manu's Code of Law. According to the Manusmrti (often cited as verses 10.51–57), the Chandalas, occupying a status outside the traditional Varna divisions, were required to live in settlements beyond the village, labeled apapatra (untouchable places), and their possessions were limited to dogs and donkeys. To reaffirm the account, there is evidence that Adi Sankara described an encounter with a Chandala accompanied by his dogs in 8th century. This historical evolution, from a functional and fluid Varna model to a rigid, birth-based, and exclusionary caste order, highlights a significant departure from the more meritocratic ideals associated with Sanskrit, Vedic and epic traditions.

The Indian Historian, Romila Thapar (2018) observes that the Varna framework was initially 'an idealized stratification rather than a lived social reality.' Over time, however, caste identity became hereditary and hierarchically ordered, governed by rules of endogamy and exogamy, inheritance of property, and distinctive customs and food restrictions. She emphasizes that this transition reflected a growing concern with ritual purity and birth-based entitlement, particularly among the upper Varnas, Brahmins and Kshatriyas, who sought to preserve their social authority through religious and customary sanctions. Similarly, sociologist G. S. Ghurye (1950) identifies this process as one in which Varna duties

hardened into birth-ascribed castes. He defines caste as 'a system characterized by endogamy, membership by birth, hierarchy, restriction of occupation, and notions of purity and pollution.' Ghurye attributes the consolidation of caste to the Brahmanical insistence on ritual superiority and the Ksatriya pursuit of political stability, together fostering an order that prioritized social control over spiritual equality.

This shift from a Varna-based order to a caste system led to the emergence of marginalized and untouchable groups, excluded from education, ritual participation, and temple access. Such exclusion represented a deviation from the inclusive vision of Sanatana Dharma, which recognized the divine essence (atma) in all beings. Hence, the degeneration of the original model was not caused by a single Varna alone but by the mutual reinforcement of priestly and political interests that institutionalized hierarchy for convenience and power. The rigidification of social categories ultimately resulted in a moral and spiritual detriment to Hindu society, contradicting the fundamental tenets of unity, equity, and the pursuit of truth that underlie Sanatana Dharma. Yet, despite these distortions, the enduring spirit of Hindu thought, its adaptability, tolerance, and quest for self-realization, has continued as an unbroken thread through the ages.

The Islamic Conquests and Muslim Rule: Following the death of Prophet Muhammad, the Rashidun and Umayyad Caliphates rapidly expanded Islam's political and territorial reach from Arabia to Persia, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. These campaigns were often justified as *jihad*, blending both religious motivation and imperial ambition. Hugh Kennedy (2007), elucidated how the spread of Islam chaged the world, in his book The Great Arab Conquests. There is a war, 'The Thirty Years War.' It was a devastating conflict in Central Europe, initially sparked by tensions between Protestant and Catholic states within the Holy Roman Empire. Although political rivalries played a role, the war was deeply rooted in religious divisions that shaped alliances and justified violence, resulting in one of the deadliest wars in European history. Peter H. Wilson (2009) threw light on it in his book 'A History of the Thirty Years War.' Unlike in many parts of the world, where military expansion was often driven by religious zeal or imperial ambition, as seen in the Christian Crusades, the early Islamic conquests, and the Thirty Years' War, Indian warfare was largely confined within the subcontinent and seldom motivated by religion or proselytism.

In the early medieval period, India stood at the threshold of profound transformations in politics, economy, society, and culture. The temple-centered devotional movements led by the Alvars and Nayanars in Tamil Nadu were reshaping social ethos within the stratified Indian order, while art and architecture reflected new cultural traits. Politically, the subcontinent was divided among several powerful Hindu kingdoms, frequently engaged in warfare for prestige and territorial expansion. Amidst this fragmentation, foreign incursions began. The first significant Arab invasion occurred in 712 CE when Muhammad bin Qasim, a general of the Umayyad Caliphate, conquered Sindh. This marked the establishment of a Muslim foothold in the Indian subcontinent and integrated Sindh into the Islamic empire. The invasions, fueled by an unrelenting zeal to propagate Islam, molesting women, an insatiable desire for wealth, and demolishing temples, capitalized on the deep-seated political disunity of the region. Fragmented kingdoms, weakened by internal rivalries and a lack of collective defence, offered little resistance to the invaders who well-organized and driven by religious fanaticism. The book 'Arab and Turkish Invasions of India: Causes of Foreign Invasions' has thrown enough light on the attacks.

Islam, founded by Prophet Muhammad in Arabia (570–632 CE), is a strictly monotheistic faith rooted in the teachings of the Quran, which prescribes a comprehensive code of conduct for every aspect of life. Within just a century of its emergence, Islam had unified the fragmented Arab tribes under a powerful religious and political identity, emboldened by a fervent zeal for both spiritual and territorial expansion. This drive led to the establishment of a vast Caliphate, whose ambitions eventually extended into the Indian subcontinent. The first significant wave of Islamic influence in India began with the incursions of rulers like Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century and Muhammad Ghori in the late 12th century, paving the way for the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate under rulers such as Qutb-ud-din Aibak and Alauddin Khilji. This was later followed by the rise of the Mughal Empire, founded by Babur in 1526. Under rulers like Akbar, the Mughals experimented with policies of inclusion, while others, notably Aurangzeb, adopted more rigid and coercive approaches towards the majority Hindu population, leading to religious and cultural strains.

At certain points of time in Indian history, the Islamic empires enjoyed immense wealth and faced little external rivalry, yet many of these empires eventually crumbled. This decline suggests that theocratic governance based solely on rigid religious principles encountered significant challenges in maintaining long-lasting stability. Some Islamic rulers exhibited intolerance toward followers of other faiths, whom they categorized as 'infidels,' leading to heightened religious tensions. Across many regions historically governed by Islamic dynasties, social unrest often emerged due to

policies that prioritized religious conformity over human welfare. Governance rooted primarily in religious authority, rather than shared human values, struggled to foster lasting peace and inclusivity. After all, what is divinity without humanity? The Mughal Empire, once a formidable force, began to crumble in the early 18th century, weakened by ineffective successors, internal rebellion, and economic decline. The era ultimately concluded with the deposition of Bahadur Shah II after the Revolt of 1857, marking the end of Mughal rule and the beginning of direct British governance in India.

The origins of Islamic political domination in India can be traced back to the Umayyad invasion of 711 CE. Led by Muhammad bin Qasim, the Umayyad Caliphate launched its campaign into Sindh, justifying the incursion on the alleged plundering of Arab merchant ships near the port of Debal, an act attributed to forces under the local ruler, Raja Dahir. Seizing this as a pretext, Qasim marched in with a well-organized and battle-hardened army, swiftly capturing Debal before advancing eastward. Key urban centers such as Nirun, Alor, Brahmanabad, and Multan fell in quick succession. Raja Dahir was eventually defeated and killed in battle, and with his demise, Sindh was absorbed as the easternmost province of the Umayyad Caliphate. This conquest not only marked the dawn of Islamic rule on Indian soil but also set the precedent for centuries of subsequent invasions and dynastic regimes that would profoundly shape the socio-political landscape of the subcontinent.

Taxation and Oppression under Islamic Rule: Culturally and socially, the Arab invasions introduced foreign systems of administration, law, and religion into India. Although many locals, the weakhearted people, converted to Islam or adapted through interaction, the majority firmly adhered to their ancestral Sanatana Dharma. Economically, Sindh's incorporation into the expanding Islamic world fostered new trade links with the Middle East. However, the campaign led by Muhammad bin Qasim in 711 CE was more than the first successful Islamic incursion into India; it marked the beginning of a prolonged and systematic assault that would threaten to uproot Sanatana Dharma from its own sacred soil. Among the most oppressive measures was the imposition of the Jizya tax, sanctioned in the Quran (Surah 9:29), which every subsequent Islamic ruler, from the Ghaznavids to the Mughals, considered a religious obligation. This humiliating levy relegated Hindus to the status of second-class citizens, subject to political subjugation and social degradation in their own homeland. Despite being the overwhelming majority, Hindus were compelled to pay a tax to foreign rulers simply to live and practice their religion on their own ancestral land.

Jizya was not merely a financial burden; it was a symbol of utter humiliation, a constant reminder of Hindu subjugation under Islamic rule. Even a transient marauder like Nadir Shah of Iran, who plundered India (in 1738) for only fifty-seven days, saw it fit to impose this barbaric tax. If a passing looter could extract Jizya, what more can be said of those who occupied the throne of Delhi for decades and centuries? After the death of Aurangzeb, the resurgence of Sanatana Dharma found expression in the rise of the Marathas, Rajputs, Sikhs, and Jats. Yet the Mughal Empire, long hollowed by its own tyranny, invited its own downfall. Nadir Shah repeatedly warned the weakened Mughal court of the growing power of Hindu resurgence. Meanwhile, the arrogance of the Nizams in the Deccan and the religious zeal of rulers like Tipu Sultan, who even sought the help of Afghan Pathans to invade India, further revealed the entrenched pattern of Islamic rule: intolerance, aggression, and relentless warfare against non-Muslims. From Muhammad bin Qasim to Mahmud of Ghazni, from Muhammad Ghori to Qutbuddin Aibak, Iltutmish, Balban, Alauddin Khilji, and the Tughluqs; from the Lodis to the Mughals: Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb; from the Bahmanis and Adil Shahis to the Nawabs of South India and Tipu Sultan, the story was one of persistent domination, coercion, and a systematic assault on the spiritual and cultural foundations of Sanatana Dharma.

Throughout medieval and early modern Indian history, several foreign powers sought to consolidate political and religious authority over the Indian subcontinent. Many Islamic rulers, in particular, aimed to integrate India within the framework of Dar-ul-Islam (the realm of Islam) (Eaton, 2000). Their campaigns, often marked by military aggression and the destruction or appropriation of temples, were accompanied by various forms of taxation, including Jizya and the Tirthayatra tax, which affected Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist pilgrims (Lal, 1999). From Mahmud of Ghazni to the British Raj, the extraction of India's wealth took multiple forms, military raids, temple plundering, tribute collection, and economic exploitation (Naoroji, 1901) (Patnaik, 2018). Commenting metaphorically on this long history of plunder, Dr. Chenna Krishna Reddy, Professor of Chemistry, observed that the invaders 'plundered the honey but not the art of making it,' suggesting that India's spiritual, intellectual, and cultural vitality endured despite centuries of external domination. Even religious observances, such as ritual bathing in sacred rivers, were occasionally burdened with special levies. Over time, these measures contributed to the erosion of indigenous social and cultural institutions. In the post-

independence period, several scholars have argued that mainstream historiography tended to minimize or overlook the more destructive aspects of these invasions (Elst, 2002; Thapar, 2013). A balanced historical inquiry, therefore, calls for a critical and comprehensive re-examination of this period, acknowledging both the cultural losses and the enduring resilience of Sanatana Dharma.

Institutionalized Discrimination against Hindus: And yet, even this was not the end. The persecution would deepen, and the assault on Sanatana Dharma would take on new, more insidious forms. There is more to be told; much more. In addition to Jizya and pilgrimage taxes, Sanatana Dharmis whether farmers, traders, artisans, or merchants, were crushed under an ever-expanding web of levies. Muslims alone were exempt, a policy designed to induce conversions among the vulnerable, while countless courageous Hindus chose martyrdom over apostasy. Except for the Rajputs; no non-Muslim could ride a horse, elephant, or palanquin as they were symbols of dignity and status. Hindus were forbidden from bearing arms, rendering them utterly defenseless against tyranny. Their properties, estates, and even family members, wives and young daughters could be seized at the arbitrary will of Islamic rulers. Humiliation was not incidental; it was institutionalized. Hindus were routinely derided and dehumanized. They were prohibited from constructing new temples or repairing the ruined ones. Existing temples could be seized or desecrated without justification. Adding to this injustice, every Hindu household was compelled to host any Muslim traveler, regardless of the sacrifice or suffering it caused. This relentless persecution was not merely political domination; it was a sustained war on the soul of a civilization.

Private and community celebrations could be intruded upon at will, and Hindus were forced to accept such violations in silence. Restrictions permeated every facet of life. Non-Muslims, regardless of status, wealth, or influence, were prohibited from dressing finer, eating better, or living more comfortably than Muslims. Hindus were barred from wearing ornaments or bearing arms. They were relegated to degraded tenements far from Muslim neighbourhoods, prohibited from publicly observing festivals, and even prevented from mourning their dead with traditional cries for fear of disturbing Muslims. These were not merely discriminatory measures; they were calculated instruments of dehumanisation. Christopher Klune, a well-known American author whose books are popular in India, discussed in his article how non-Muslims under the Delhi Sutanate were often treated as second-class citizens, subjected to restrictions and discriminatory practices. He started his article in this way: 'The Republic of India stands as one of the most pluralistic nations in the modern world, with many people of varying faiths co-existing under one national identity.'

The underlying purpose of these oppressive measures is clearly revealed in historical records such as Ziauddin Barani's Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi. Barani candidly recounts Alauddin Khilji's chilling strategy: to 'grind down the Hindus so that they may not be able to rise in rebellion.' This was no act of incidental cruelty but a calculated, strategic and systematic policy of domination, designed to ensure that Hindus remained permanently impoverished, powerless, and subservient. In the same vein, Qazi Mughisuddin advised that Hindus, as tribute-payers, should display unqualified servility, with their position deliberately kept beneath that of Muslims. Exorbitant taxation, enforced austerity, and relentless humiliation were not merely tools of governance, they were instruments of dehumanization, aimed at stripping Hindus of dignity, autonomy, and any potential for resistance, reducing them to little more than sources of bonded labour and revenue for the Sultanate.

Islamic Destruction of Hindu Temples: The societal oppression of Hindus under Islamic rule was accompanied by a relentless assault on their sacred spaces. Temples; centres not only of worship but of community, learning, and culture, were often prime targets of destruction. According to Samavedula Venkata Rama Sastri, thousands of temples were demolished by Muslim invaders, with many razed sites repurposed for the construction of mosques (masjids). Such claims are not based solely on Hindu narratives; numerous Islamic chronicles, penned by court historians and chroniclers of the time, provide chilling testimony to these acts. These records frequently describe the desecration of temples, idol-smashing, looting, massacres of devotees, and even instances of rape, not as moral outrages, but as pious deeds performed in the service of Islam and in imitation of the Prophet's example (Sunnah). The glorification of such acts in these sources underscores their ideological and religious motivations, rather than mere political expediency. Some of the writers of that time who praised the attacks on the temples; Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi (Ziauddin Barani), Kitab al-Hind (Al-Biruni), Tarikh-i-Yamini (Al-Utbi on Mahmud of Ghazni)

Hundreds of Muslim historians, eager to celebrate the 'heroism' of their patrons, documented these atrocities in detail. Their writings stand as irrefutable evidence of the deliberate and systematic destruction of Hindu sacred life. Far from condemning such acts, they hailed them as religiously mandated victories. The following examples, taken from Islamic

and scholarly sources, expose the scope of this devastation. Quwwat al-Islam Mosque, Delhi; constructed by Qutb-ud-din Aibak after demolishing a grand temple built by Prithviraj Chauhan. Parts of the original temple were deliberately incorporated into the mosque walls, a cruel reminder of conquest. Atala Masjid, Jaunpur; built by Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi using stones from the demolished temple of Atala Devi. 1.Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque (Delhi): This mosque was commissioned by Qutb-ud-din Aibak and built using materials from the ruins of 27 Hindu and Jain temples. 2.Atala Masjid (Jaunpur): Founded by Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi in 1408 on the site of a demolished temple dedicated to Atala Devi Temple, this mosque incorporated temple pillars, lintels, and other structural parts.

The Shahi Masjid in Kannauj, reportedly constructed by Ibrahim Sharqi over the remains of a pre-existing Hindu temple, illustrates one among many documented instances of temple desecration in medieval India (Eaton, 2000; Lal, 1999). From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, historical and archaeological evidence indicates that several rulers during the Islamic period engaged in campaigns that affected Hindu sacred architecture. Temples, centers of spiritual devotion, cultural learning, and community life, were often dismantled, repurposed, or replaced with mosques or other monuments signifying political and religious authority. Scholars have observed that such acts were seldom random or isolated. In many cases, they reflected deliberate policy or ideological intent, framed within the theological and legal discourse of the time (Eaton, 2000; Sharma, 2019). Court chronicles and juristic writings sometimes presented these actions as assertions of imperial power or as manifestations of religious piety. A critical assessment of this legacy remains essential for understanding India's complex civilizational history. An academically grounded acknowledgment of these realities also highlights the enduring resilience of Sanatana Dharma and the continuity of India's spiritual and cultural heritage (Thapar, 2013).

The Somnath Temple, one of the holiest sites of Sanātana Dharma, was famously sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century CE. Contemporary and later chronicles record that Mahmud ordered the temple's sacred idol to be broken, with fragments carried to Ghazni as trophies of conquest (Eaton, 2000; Lal, 1999). These remnants were reportedly displayed within the mosque at Ghazni, one piece embedded near the threshold, symbolizing triumph and subjugation (Ali, 2003). The Persian chronicler Abu Nasr and other Islamic historians described Mahmud's successive campaigns across northern India, noting that several temples were destroyed and replaced with mosques as he advanced through regions such as Lamghan, Narain, and Thanesar (Bosworth, 1996). Accounts of the Thanesar campaign mention widespread violence and devastation, illustrating the scale of the conflict between the invading forces and local defenders. While these chronicles often reflect the ideological and political narratives of their time, they nonetheless document the extensive cultural and religious disruption caused by Mahmud's invasions. Such records provide a significant lens through which to understand the early medieval encounters between political expansionism and religious identity in the Indian subcontinent. They also underscore the endurance of Hindu religious traditions, which continued to flourish despite successive episodes of iconoclasm and conquest.

These incidents were not isolated; they formed part of a broader, systematic campaign to subjugate Hindus, annihilate their religious symbols, and consolidate Islamic supremacy. For over a millennium, a relentless torrent of Hindu tears and blood flowed across the land, leaving the nation steeped in grief, sacrifice, and betrayal. Tragically, many Hindus who converted to Islam became some of the harshest persecutors of their former brethren, deepening the wounds of history. The Mughal Empire reached its zenith under Aurangzeb but rapidly declined after his death in 1707 due to inept successors and incessant internal strife. Bloody conflicts such as the Mughal–Rajput war and the Mughal–Maratha struggle further enfeebled the empire. The swift and shocking incursion of Nader Shah of Persia, who mercilessly plundered Delhi by being in the very Sultanate, exposed the hollow core of Mughal authority. This marked a turning point, revealing that even the mightiest Islamic empire in India was built on unstable foundations.

Ultimately, these developments underscore the dual nature of Islamic rule in India: expansionist and destructive in its ambitions, yet fragile and transient in its legacy. The collapse of Mughal power paved the way for regional resistance and, in time, facilitated the rise of British colonialism. This vacuum of power enabled several regional entities, including the Rajput states, the Mysore Kingdom, Sindh, the Nawabs of Bengal and Murshidabad, the Maratha Empire, the Sikh Empire, and the Nizams of Hyderabad, to assert autonomy and expand their influence over vast territories. The political fragmentation of the subcontinent intensified as the formidable Maratha Empire gradually displaced Mughal authority. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 is often viewed as the end of Muslim supremacy in India, but such a reading is simplistic. While the battle did mark the ascendancy of British military and political power, it did not instantaneously extinguish Muslim rule. Several powerful Muslim states continued to resist British expansion. The Sultanate of Mysore, under the

leadership of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, fought fiercely against British forces in the late 18th century, while the Nawabs of Awadh engaged the British in the pivotal Battle of Buxar in 1764. These events reveal that Muslim authority, though weakened, persisted well beyond Plassey, even as the British tightened their control over India's political landscape.

The Battle of Plassey (1757) marked a pivotal turning point in Indian history, as the British East India Company defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, and installed a client regime to secure control over Bengal's vast revenues. However, this event did not immediately terminate Muslim political authority in India. The Mughal Empire, though significantly diminished and largely symbolic in function, continued to exist until 1857, while several autonomous Muslim polities maintained substantial regional influence. It was only in the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 that the British decisively eradicated the remaining structures of Muslim rule. The exile of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar II, the formal abolition of the Mughal dynasty, and the establishment of direct British Crown rule marked the definitive collapse of Islamic imperial authority in the subcontinent. Notwithstanding several centuries of Muslim governance, India's demographic and cultural composition remained predominantly Hindu. This endurance is exceptional in global historical contexts, where the religion of ruling elites often supplanted indigenous belief systems. In contrast, Hinduism demonstrated remarkable adaptability and continuity, surviving through extended periods of religious, political, and cultural suppression. Even during the British colonial period, the Hindu way of life continued to anchor the religious practices, social structures, and cultural identities of the majority population. This enduring vitality underscores the profound depth, resilience, and rootedness of Sanatana Dharma in the Indian cultural landscape.

The 1857 Rebellion and the Legacy of Repression: The British first arrived in India in 1608 as traders under the auspices of the East India Company, establishing their initial foothold in Surat. Over time, their commercial presence evolved into political dominion, particularly after the pivotal Battle of Plassey in 1757, which laid the foundation for nearly two centuries of British rule, culminating in India's independence in 1947. As Islamic power declined, British colonial expansion surged, ushering in a new era of foreign dominance. For many Hindus, this period inspired a retreat into religious and temple-centered life, as both Islamic and Christian authorities controlled the socio-political landscape. By the mid-19th century, Islamic rule had largely faded, with the failed uprising of 1857 marking the end of the Mughal Empire and clearing the way for direct British governance. This transition marked not only the collapse of longstanding Islamic political authority in India but also the beginning of an extensive period of British colonialism that reshaped the subcontinent in profound ways.

For the first time on a broad scale, Indians began to fear that the British were actively attempting to convert them to Christianity and erode their traditions and beliefs. This apprehension contributed to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, a major, though ultimately unsuccessful, uprising against the British East India Company. It began as a sepoy mutiny in Meerut on May 10, 1857, before spreading into widespread civilian rebellions across North and Central India. Known variously as the Sepoy Mutiny and the First War of Independence, the revolt was fueled by multiple grievances, including the introduction of greased cartridges offensive to religious sensibilities, widespread discontent among Indian rulers, and deep-seated cultural and political frustrations.

Although ultimately suppressed, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had far-reaching consequences. It signaled the end of East India Company rule and brought India under the direct administration of the British Crown, inaugurating the era of the British Raj. The failure of the uprising is often attributed to factors such as the absence of unified leadership, a lack of adequate resources, and disjointed military strategies, not to betrayal by its prominent commanders. Among its most valiant leaders was Tantia Tope, who demonstrated exceptional loyalty and tactical brilliance. Serving as the military commander for Nana Sahib, he became renowned for his effective use of guerrilla warfare against the British. However, his resistance came to a tragic end in April 1859 when he was betrayed by Man Singh, a trusted associate, and handed over to the British. Captured and executed shortly thereafter, Tantia Tope's martyrdom endures as a powerful symbol of courage and resilience in India's struggle against colonial domination.

The broader history of India is punctuated by episodes of profound suffering, especially during certain periods of Islamic rule. The rulers sought to impose their faith by undermining Hindu traditions through forced conversions and acts of violence. As highlighted by Dr. R. Ganesh (2017) in the Prekshaa Journal, even before the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire had begun to crumble under the weight of its own internal contradictions. Aurangzeb's reign, marked by policies of religious intolerance, persecution, and heavy taxation on non-Muslims, fostered deep resentment

among Hindus. Millions of followers of Sanatana Dharma suffered under these measures, irrespective of age or gender, leading to widespread discontent and sporadic resistance. However, the absence of unity due to entrenched caste divisions estimated in the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census to include over 3,000 castes and tens of thousands of sub-castes significantly weakened collective efforts to resist oppression. In such times, it often seemed that simply being born a Hindu in the sacred land of Sanatana Dharma was, in itself, fraught with peril.

Hinduism's Resilience: Strength in Diversity: The enduring vitality of Hinduism can be attributed to its inherently non-monolithic and decentralized nature. As Sanskrit scholar Rani Siva Sankara Sarma (2014) observes in The Last Brahmin, neither Islamic nor British rulers were able to eradicate Hinduism from India precisely because it lacks the rigid monotheism characteristic of Abrahamic faiths. Unlike religions anchored in a central doctrine or singular deity, Hinduism accommodates an expansive and diverse spectrum of beliefs, practices, and devotional expressions. While traditions associated with deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or Indra occupies a prominent place in Hindu thought, countless communities direct their worship toward local or personal gods. These may include sacred trees, ponds, lakes, cows, stones, cobras symbolized in carvings, rivers, or ancestral spirits. Regional deities such as Gangamma, Yellamma, Mallaiah, Reddemma, and Maremma exemplify the intimate bonds between religious devotion, the natural environment, and localized cultural traditions. This decentralized character ensured that although conquering powers could demolish temples, impose taxes, or suppress public rituals, they could not extinguish the pervasive and deeply rooted practices that flourished within households and local communities.

Hinduism's flexibility and its ability to accommodate an immense plurality of forms of worship enabled it to survive and adapt under sustained political and religious pressure, preserving its essential continuity across centuries. Devotional practices in rural areas, among nomadic groups, and within marginalized communities often operated independently of urban temples and state patronage. Worship was deeply interwoven with daily life, local festivals, and the natural environment, making it resistant to centralized control and difficult for conquering powers to suppress or standardize. As observed by Sarma (2014), along with Dr. Reddy and Lokeshwari, the strength of Hinduism lies in its intrinsic plurality. Its absence of a centralized authority, its openness to diverse spiritual paths, and its anchoring in personal and communal spaces enabled the religion to withstand centuries of systematic assaults, coercive conversions, and cultural repression. This pluralistic and decentralized framework ensured that Hinduism not only remained the majority faith in India but also continued to evolve and flourish despite recurrent external challenges. Its capacity for adaptation, nurtured through multiplicity and cultural rootedness, ultimately safeguarded it from both the violent incursions of Islamic powers and the more insidious political strategies of the British Raj.

Although rituals and modes of worship differ across Hindu communities, certain foundational social and familial values remained remarkably consistent. Central to the Hindu worldview is a hierarchical ethic of reverence that places the mother first, followed by the father, the teacher, and the guest, and only then is God acknowledged. This hierarchy of respect, embedded in daily conduct, reflects the teaching of the Taittiriya Upanishad (6th to 5th BCE): Mātṛ devo bhava, Pitṛ devo bhava, Ācārya devo bhava, Atithi devo bhava: 'Revere the mother as God, the father as God, the teacher as God, and the guest as God.' While Islamic rulers were able to demolish monumental temples and impose rigid restrictions on Hindu public worship, they proved unable to extinguish the deeply ingrained and localized expressions of Hindu devotion. Countless Hindus continued to venerate deities associated with their villages, ancestral traditions, or specific elements of the natural world, such as trees, rivers, stones, and sacred groves. These forms of worship, woven into the fabric of everyday life and family practices, remained beyond the reach of invaders and colonizers, preserving the continuity of Hindu tradition despite external pressures.

These personal and localized deities were intangible, mobile, and inseparable from the rhythms of daily life, rendering them effectively immune to centralized control. While invading powers could demolish temples, impose punitive taxes, or restrict public rituals, they were powerless against the widespread and deeply rooted private expressions of faith that flourished in homes, fields, and village communities. This diffuse and personal mode of worship ensured that the spiritual and cultural core of Hinduism remained intact, resilient in the face of sustained oppression. Within this worldview, God is conceived as universal and omnipresent, not confined to a singular location, form, or prescribed ritual. Hindu worship, therefore, is inherently adaptable, pervasive, and individualized, markedly distinct from the more centralized and doctrinally uniform practices of Islam and Christianity. For many Hindu communities, especially those outside the bounds of orthodox traditions, devotion is seamlessly integrated into daily activities, local customs, and

interactions with the natural world. This deep entanglement with lived experience rendered Hinduism resistant to external suppression and ensured its survival across centuries of political and cultural subjugation.

This widespread, decentralized, and deeply embedded mode of religious practice enabled Hinduism to withstand centuries of targeted violence, forced conversions, and cultural domination. It preserved not only the continuity of faith but also the enduring transmission of core values and social norms, even under extreme adversity. Significantly, religion in India was not always manifested in formal or institutionally structured ways. For many Hindus, devotion was, and continues to be, expressed through simple, spontaneous acts of reverence: folding one's hands while passing a neighborhood shrine, offering prayers to a humble, unadorned stone idol, or acknowledging the sacred in everyday surroundings. Such a flexible, adaptive, and profoundly personal system of worship ensured that foreign rulers, despite their capacity to destroy monumental temples or levy restrictive taxes, could not uproot the daily, intimate practices of millions. Unlike faiths that rely on centralized authority or codified ritual systems, Hinduism's lack of a singular power center became its greatest strength. Its diffuse and pluralistic character rendered it impervious to systematic eradication, allowing it not merely to survive but to flourish across centuries of external oppression.

Broadly speaking, Hinduism is not merely a religion in the conventional sense but a comprehensive way of life. It functions as a philosophical system, an ethical framework, and a cultural tradition that informs every dimension of daily existence, from family structures and social relationships to occupation, education, and personal behavior. Central to this worldview are the principles of dharma (righteous duty), karma (the moral consequences of action), and seva (selfless service, often expressed as 'service to man is service to God,' which together provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and virtuous life. Unlike ritual-centric or doctrinally rigid religions, Hinduism integrates spirituality seamlessly into the fabric of everyday life. Its rituals, festivals, and observances are deeply intertwined with agricultural cycles, local customs, ecosystems, and community practices, allowing individuals to encounter the sacred in ordinary acts rather than exclusively through formal worship. This holistic integration of faith with daily living; coupled with Hinduism's decentralized, pluralistic, and adaptive character; has enabled it to withstand centuries of foreign invasion, cultural suppression, and proselytizing pressures. In doing so, it has preserved not only its religious practices but also the broader social and moral fabric of Indian civilization.

Hinduism places profound emphasis on dharma, the moral and ethical principle that governs both individual conduct and the broader social order. The timeless Sanskrit maxim, 'Dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ' often rendered in English as 'Dharma protects those who protect it succinctly captures this core tenet. The aphorism implies that adherence to righteous and ethical behavior not only upholds social harmony but also ensures the welfare and protection of the individual. In Hindu philosophy, acting in accordance with dharma aligns one's life with the cosmic order, inviting support and guidance even in moments of adversity. Conversely, ignorance or violation of dharma is believed to precipitate disorder, misfortune, and inner turmoil. This principle underscores a reciprocal relationship between moral responsibility and personal security, reflecting the deeply rooted ethical foundation of Hindu thought. In this framework, dharma is omni-centered, complex yet integrative, manifesting in ways that balance the demands of the self, society, and the universe at large. It encourages self-discipline, self-restraint, and ethical conduct, not as isolated virtues, but as interdependent obligations that sustain both individual well-being and collective order.

By adhering to dharma, an individual cultivates virtues, achieves inner peace, and advances spiritually. This inward, self-centered dimension of dharma emphasizes personal discipline, self-restraint, and moral integrity; qualities necessary for the development of character and the attainment of higher states of consciousness. The other-centered aspect of dharma underscores one's duties toward family, society, and community. It promotes justice, compassion, honesty, and service, ensuring that individual actions contribute to social harmony and the welfare of others. In this sense, dharma serves as the ethical glue that binds communities, fostering an environment where mutual respect and social responsibility prevail. Ultimately, dharma encompasses an omni-centered or universal dimension. It aligns both individual and social behavior with the cosmic order, also referred to as Sanatana Dharma, the eternal law of the universe. This aspect transcends personal or societal benefit, seeking the well-being of all living beings and the balance of the cosmos itself. Actions performed in accordance with dharma thus sustain harmony on both the micro and macro scales.

When it is seen holistically, dharma is an integrative principle, uniting self-interest, social duty, and universal order. It is neither exclusively egoistic nor solely altruistic; rather, it harmonizes personal development, communal welfare, and cosmic balance. This is further reflected in two foundational expressions of Hindu ethical thought. The maxim 'Dharmo

rakṣati rakṣitaḥ' emphasizes the reciprocal and sustaining nature of righteousness. In contrast, the Vedic benediction 'Sarve janāḥ sukhino bhavantu (May all beings be happy) articulates a universal, altruistic aspiration that extends well beyond the self or one's immediate community. Together, these principles encapsulate Hinduism's ethical vision, rooted in both personal integrity and collective well-being, with a cosmic scope.

The authors of this review assert that one of the most remarkable features of Hinduism is its universality and inclusiveness; qualities that have been instrumental in ensuring its survival despite centuries of both brutal and calculated assaults. The maxims cited above are the expressions underscore a balanced integration of personal duty, social responsibility, and cosmic harmony, extending benevolence and goodwill beyond human society to all forms of life. Hinduism's ethical and spiritual framework, characterized by its adaptability and depth, has allowed it to endure severe oppression without compromising its fundamental values. Unlike rigid, doctrinally constrained traditions, Hinduism embraces a plurality of beliefs and practices, thereby accommodating a wide array of communities and cultural expressions. This flexibility has not only preserved the continuity of religious faith but has also sustained social cohesion and moral stability across millennia. In essence, Hinduism's resilience lies in its capacity to hold unity amid diversity, maintaining its inner essence while evolving with the changing tides of history.

Religious Tolerance and Social Interaction in India: The dynamic interplay among the major religions in India; particularly Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity is a profoundly complex and often contentious subject, shaped by centuries of historical interaction, divergent theological frameworks, and evolving social practices. A key philosophical characteristic frequently associated with Hinduism is its inherent tolerance and pluralism. Rooted in its metaphysical foundations, Hinduism is not governed by a single, centrally defined creed, but instead embraces the idea that there are multiple paths to the divine. This is encapsulated in the well-known dictum from the Rig Veda: 'Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti' (Truth is one; the wise call it by many names). This philosophical openness has often been cited as a reason why Hindus, in general, may exhibit a relatively accommodative attitude toward followers of Islam and Christianity, including those whose ancestors converted from Hinduism. Rather than viewing such individuals through a lens of religious otherness, they are often perceived as fellow members of a shared cultural and social milieu. This attitude is reflected in everyday practices; for example, the willingness to accept offerings such as prasadam or food prepared for religious occasions by members of other faiths. Such exchanges are frequently regarded not as acts of spiritual compromise but as gestures of neighborly goodwill and cultural coexistence.

In contrast, a significant source of tension stems from the practice of proselytization undertaken by certain groups within Christianity and Islam. Many Hindus view these active and often well-funded missionary efforts as an existential challenge to their religious and cultural identity. Christianity, in particular, is sometimes regarded as a 'concealed threat' due to the perception that some of its denominations pursue long-term strategies aimed at large-scale conversion. Such activities are often seen as undermining the indigenous spiritual and cultural fabric of India, disregarding the ancient and deeply rooted heritage that Hinduism represents. This perspective holds that missionary efforts overlook the profound ancestral and civilizational connections that many converts continue to share with Hinduism and the broader Indian spiritual tradition. Similarly, Islam's historical legacy in India includes extensive episodes of religious expansion and conversion; leading to cultural and social transformations whose effects remain deeply felt. Although contemporary conversion efforts may differ in form, the historical memory of religious imposition during earlier periods continues to influence Hindu perceptions of Islamic proselytization. These tensions underscore the complex interplay between religious plurality and the defense of cultural identity in contemporary India.

A further point of friction arises from perceptions of asymmetrical social behavior. While many Hindus readily accept food, tokens of goodwill, or invitations to social and religious events from members of Muslim and Christian communities, it is suggested that some individuals or groups within these latter faiths refuse to reciprocate. Such refusals, especially if rooted in literalist interpretations of religious texts that discourage interaction with 'idolaters, 'unbelievers,' or 'infidels' may be interpreted by Hindus as forms of social exclusion or religious discrimination. For those who feel slighted, this selective rejection fosters the impression of being regarded as 'untouchable' or inferior in a religious context. This sense of exclusion, whether overt or implied, can generate feelings of contempt or hostility. At its core, the argument posits that Hinduism's inherent pluralism and openness stand in stark contrast to what is perceived as exclusivist attitudes and missionary zeal by certain groups within Christianity and Islam. The resulting tension contributes to a deeply distressing social and religious environment, marked by mistrust and a perceived lack of mutual respect.

The authors of this review argue that the sociopolitical security and cultural character of India, a constitutionally pluralistic nation, are often assessed through the demographic lens of its religious majority. A compelling perspective suggests that the preservation of a Hindu demographic majority is intrinsically connected to the continuation of India's long-standing ethos of religious tolerance and secular governance. This view is anchored in the philosophical and civilizational foundations of Hinduism, a tradition noted for its broad acceptance of religious diversity, absence of a centralized dogma, and a general non-proselytizing nature. Unlike some Abrahamic faiths, Hinduism does not rely on doctrinal exclusivity or aggressive missionary activity, instead promoting the ideal of, quoted above, 'Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti as a guiding principle of coexistence. Proponents of Hindu majoritarian stability contend that as long as Hindus retain their demographic majority and corresponding political influence, India's unique model of sarva dharma Sama bhava (equal respect for all religions) is likely to remain intact. They posit that this majority acts as a stabilizing force, ensuring the protection of minority rights, safeguarding the multiplicity of religious expressions, and maintaining the democratic framework that upholds cultural pluralism. The argument suggests that, historically, Hindu-dominant societies have offered relative religious freedom to adherents of other faiths, exemplified by the peaceful coexistence of diverse communities over centuries.

Additionally, the argument raises a concern over the possibility of demographic shifts that could challenge this equilibrium. Critics point to the rapid expansion of proselytizing religions in other parts of the world, where majoritarian dominance has, at times, been linked to the suppression of minority faiths. The apprehension, therefore, is that a decline in the Hindu majority could result in an altered sociopolitical landscape, potentially leading to the erosion of India's pluralistic fabric. However, this perspective is not unchallenged. A counter-argument emphasizes that the protection of pluralism should not hinge solely on demographic dominance but rather on the commitment to constitutional values and the effective functioning of secular institutions. Critics also caution that linking national stability exclusively to the demographic strength of a particular religious group risks legitimizing majoritarian anxieties and could inadvertently promote exclusionary or defensive identity politics. Instead, they advocate for a robust secular governance model that transcends religious identities and fosters an equitable civic culture for all communities, irrespective of size. In conclusion, the debate surrounding religious demography and tolerance in India is emblematic of broader questions about the relationship between identity, power, and pluralism. Whether one views Hindu majoritarianism as a guarantor of secularism or a potential threat to it, the ongoing discourse reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of India's multicultural democracy.

There are concerns regarding a shift in majority. The primary concern raised is that a shift in the demographic majority to an Abrahamic religion, namely Islam or Christianity, could fundamentally alter the nation's socio-political and religious framework. Take Islam for example, it dreams of Sharia. The impact of Sharia Law will be like this. If a Muslim majority were to establish Sharia law as the governing principle, the immediate fear is the erosion of modern liberal democracy. Some countries, like Iran, enforce male guardianship systems that require women to obtain a man's permission to marry, travel, or control their own finances. This is seen by some as a regression toward societal models observed in neighboring countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Specific concerns often focus on the potential loss of equal status for women, the suppression of non-Muslim religious practice, and a resultant period of significant unrest, conflict, and violence within the country.

The establishment of a state governed by a strictly interpreted Christian doctrine is similarly feared to result in the marginalization of the Hindu majority and the imposition of a singular religious worldview, leading to the breakdown of India's unique syncretic culture. Therefore, the review's central point is that the current Hindu majority is a prerequisite for the survival of a diverse, liberal, secular and peaceful Indian state for all its citizens. In Iraq and Syria; the rise of groups like the Islamic State (ISIS) led to mass atrocities and genocide against minorities. The Yazidi community in Iraq, for instance, suffered massive kidnappings and killings. The Christian community in Iraq has reportedly plummeted from approximately 1.5 million before 2003 to well under 300,000 in recent years due to displacement and persecution. Pakistan and Bangladesh: Hindus and Christians have historically faced episodes of violence, land grabbing, and desecration of temples. The Hindu population in Pakistan has shrunk drastically since 1947, and Hindus in Bangladesh have also faced violence, particularly around elections, leading to displacement and migration to India.

In Western societies, where Christianity has been the predominant faith for several centuries, religious liberalism is more prevalent, and instances of fundamentalism are comparatively rare. The intellectual community in these regions gradually transcended the boundaries imposed by religious dogma, thereby facilitating remarkable progress in science

and technology following the Dark Ages. Even among the general populace, there exists a sense of inclusiveness that, in many ways, parallels the pluralistic outlook traditionally associated with Hinduism in India. In contrast, in certain Eastern like India, individuals who have converted from Hinduism to Christianity often display a more rigid and exclusivist religious orientation. They tend to refrain from engaging in or accepting practices associated with Hindu rituals, whereas many Hindus exhibit a more accommodative approach, extending respect toward other faiths and their symbols.

It has also been observed that certain individuals who have converted to other faiths occasionally attempt to persuade or influence their Hindu neighbors to adopt Christianity (Chatterjee, 2011). For many Hindus, religion constitutes one among several interrelated dimensions of life, interwoven with cultural, ethical, and social values, rather than an isolated or exclusively theological pursuit. Conversely, within Islam and Christianity, religious affiliation often occupies a more central and defining position in shaping personal and collective identity (Smart, 1998). This divergence in the role and interpretation of religion has, at times, contributed to social and ideological tensions across communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that every religious tradition encompasses adherents who embody tolerance, compassion, and universal goodwill. Within certain Islamic and Christian congregations, religious discourse has occasionally included critical commentary on Hindu beliefs and practices. Such reflections, however, are typically framed within the broader context of doctrinal affirmation and interfaith contrast, rather than within the parameters of objective theological dialogue (Kumar, 2016).

Upanishadic Resonance: Eliot's Message to the World: T. S. Eliot, the Nobel Laureate and one of the most profound voices of modernist literature, composed, the masterpiece, 'The Waste Land' (1922) as a poetic response to the spiritual desolation and moral fragmentation that followed the First World War. The poem endures as a monumental synthesis of cultural, philosophical, and religious traditions; classical, Christian, and Oriental, woven into a modern idiom of despair and the quest for redemption. Among the manifold influences discernible in this work, the spiritual philosophy of Sanatana Dharma, as expressed in the Upanishads, holds a distinctive place. Eliot's study of Sanskrit and Pali at Harvard acquainted him with the depth of Hindu and Buddhist thought, which he later recognized as offering a universal key to spiritual regeneration and moral equilibrium; principles that lie at the very heart of Sanatana Dharma. T. S. Eliot, in The Waste Land, refers to the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad (V.2), an early and foundational text of Sanatana Dharma, where Prajapati (Brahma) utters the sacred syllable 'Da' thrice to his threefold creation: the devas (gods), manushyas (humans), and asuras (demons). Each group, guided by its own inherent nature, interprets the divine sound differently: the devas discern it as Damyata, 'control yourselves'; the manushyas perceive it as Datta, 'give'; and the asuras understand it as Dayadhvam, 'be compassionate.'

This triadic command, known as the Vajra Da or 'Voice of the Thunder,' encapsulates the eternal moral law that sustains the cosmos through restraint, generosity, and compassion. Eliot echoes this ancient revelation in the climactic movement of The Waste Land, where the thunder resounds, 'DA, DA, DA.' In invoking this Upanishadic triad, Eliot presents a spiritual remedy to the sterility of modern civilization, urging humanity to rediscover the lost virtues of discipline, charity, and empathy, virtues that lie at the core of the moral and spiritual vision of Sanatana Dharma. In addition to the triad, the poem reaches its end point with another triad by the resonant benediction 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih,' the traditional Sanskrit invocation for peace. Eliot glossed it as 'the peace which passeth understanding,' aligning the Upanishadic vision of spiritual stillness with the Christian ideal of divine tranquility. This closing invocation signifies the soul's reconciliation with itself and the cosmos after moral renewal through Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata. In this synthesis of Eastern metaphysics and Western modernism, Eliot implicitly acknowledges the universality and enduring relevance of Sanatana Dharma, whose wisdom continues to illuminate the path from ethical order to transcendental peace.

Through these Upanishadic triads, Eliot not only recalls the moral imperatives of Sanatana Dharma but also prepares the spiritual ground for the poem's final benediction, Shantih, Shantih, Shantih, the peace that follows understanding. Following the reverberation of the divine syllables 'Da, Da, Da,' Eliot concludes The Waste Land with the sacred benediction 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih,' drawn from the Upanishads. The expression 'Shantih Shantih Shantih' is chanted at the end of many Vedic and Upanisadic hymns, means 'Peace, Peace, Peace.' In Hindu philosophy, this threefold invocation symbolizes the attainment of peace on three levels of existence: Adhyatmika (peace within oneself, by overcoming mental and emotional disturbances), Adhibhautika (peace in the external world, by being free from

conflicts, sufferings, and environmental afflictions), and Adhidaivika (peace from divine or cosmic influences beyond human control, such as fate or natural calamities).

Thus, when the word Santih is repeated thrice, it is not a mere chant but a profound spiritual appeal for harmony, within the individual, among living beings, and throughout the universe. It reflects the essence of Sanatana Dharma, where peace is viewed not only as an external condition but as an inner state of alignment with cosmic order. Significantly, T. S. Eliot, the Nobel Laureate, deeply influenced by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, concluded his modernist masterpiece 'The Waste Land' (1922) with the same invocation: 'Santih Santih Santih' to suggest spiritual restoration and inner harmony after the cultural and moral desolation of the modern world. Eliot concludes The Waste Land with the invocation Shantih, Shantih, Shantih, preceded by the triadic injunction Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata. Drawn from the Bruhadaraṇyaka Upanishad (1.4.14), these expressions encapsulate the moral and spiritual virtues of self-control, compassion, and charity. Through their incorporation, Eliot universalizes the Upanishadic wisdom, presenting to the modern world the Hindu vision of inner and cosmic peace. (Raghavan, 1965)

Sanatana Dharma in Contemporary India: In contemporary India, Sanatana Dharma persists not merely as a religious system but as a profound spiritual, philosophical, and cultural continuum that undergirds the moral and sacred fabric of the nation. Its enduring influence is discernible in the ethical orientations, ritual practices, and socio-religious institutions that continue to shape the collective consciousness of Indian society. Despite the accelerating forces of modernization, urbanization, and scientific rationalism, the essential principles of dharma, karma, and moksha remain deeply embedded in the Indian worldview (Radhakrishnan, 1948). The sustained observance of festivals, pilgrimages, holy baths, and temple worship illustrates the living continuity of these traditions. Furthermore, the family as a sacred institution, the reverence for nature, and the practice of non-violence (ahimsa) continue to embody the ancient ethos of interconnectedness between the human and the divine. The global recognition of yoga, meditation, Ayurveda, and Vedantic philosophy reflects not only the adaptability of Sanātana Dharma to modern existential concerns but also its increasing relevance in addressing the psychological and ecological crises of the twenty-first century (Aurobindo, 1918). Indian youth, increasingly exposed to global culture, are rediscovering their spiritual heritage through literature, digital media, and community-based movements that reinterpret ancient wisdom in contemporary idioms. This synthesis of tradition and innovation underscores that Sanātana Dharma is not a relic of the past but a living philosophy capable of evolving with time. Through these varied expressions, it demonstrates not rigidity but a dynamic vitality that continues to engage with the moral, intellectual, and spiritual aspirations of individuals and societies in an ever-changing world. At the intellectual level, the current engagement with Sanatana Dharma reflects an ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity, continuity and change. Contemporary scholars and reformers have sought to reinterpret its foundational doctrines to address the ethical and social challenges of the present era, including environmental consciousness, gender equality, and social inclusivity (Rambachan, 2006).

The dharmic ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the vision of the world as one family, has assumed renewed importance, both in India's domestic discourse and in its cultural diplomacy, where it serves as a cornerstone for global ethical universalism. This ideal exemplifies India's longstanding cosmopolitan ethos, emphasizing plurality, tolerance, and mutual respect as intrinsic dimensions of human coexistence. Nevertheless, the modern manifestation of Sanātana Dharma is not without tensions. Its philosophical profundity is at times obscured by reductionist interpretations or politicized appropriations that risk distorting its universal and spiritual dimensions (Doniger, 2014). Yet, its resilience lies precisely in its inherent capacity for self-renewal, the ability to assimilate diverse influences while maintaining its essential identity.

Amid globalization and technological transformation, Sanatana Dharma continues to inspire new forms of ethical and spiritual reflection, offering a model for harmonizing faith with rational inquiry. It thus endures not as a static relic of antiquity but as a living, evolving current of thought, ensuring the unbroken transmission of India's civilizational ethos into the twenty-first century and beyond. In conclusion, as India negotiates the complex dynamics of modernity and globalization, Sanatana Dharma functions as an enduring source of ethical orientation and cultural cohesion. Its timeless emphasis on harmony, between material and spiritual pursuits, individual and collective well-being, and humanity and nature, provides a philosophical foundation for sustainable living and intercultural understanding. Consequently, Sanatana Dharma not only continues to shape India's civilizational identity but also contributes to the global search for peace, ecological wisdom, and spiritual renewal.

Conclusion: Sanatana Dharma, the unbroken thread weaving through the tapestry of India's history, is a living testament to the endurance of wisdom, faith, and cultural continuity. From the profound philosophical insights of Vedanta to the transformative practices of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and Raja Yoga, it offers a path that nurtures the mind, heart, and spirit alike. Its embrace of diverse conceptions of God, coupled with a spirit of tolerance and acceptance, reflects an understanding of life that transcends rigid boundaries and celebrates the unity within multiplicity. Through the rise and fall of empires, the challenges of oppression, and centuries of social and political upheaval, Sanatana Dharma has not only survived but flourished; its essence preserved in sacred texts, temples, and the eternal resonance of mantra and chant. The Gita, as the heart of this tradition, continues to guide seekers across generations, illuminating paths of duty, devotion, knowledge, and self-realization. What sets Sanatana Dharma apart is its remarkable capacity for resilience and adaptation. It does not merely endure; it evolves, integrating new experiences while remaining rooted in timeless principles. Its unique synthesis of philosophy, ritual, ethics, and devotion has allowed it to withstand the tests of history, offering continuity and inspiration to millions. Ultimately, Sanatana Dharma is more than a religion; it is a way of life, a moral compass, and a fountain of spiritual insight. Its journey through the ages teaches people that strength lies not in rigidity, but in harmony with diversity; that the sacred endures not through domination, but through understanding. The unbroken thread of Sanatana Dharma continues to illuminate the human quest for meaning of life, guiding people toward knowledge, compassion, and a life lived in alignment with eternal truth.

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