

## A Brief Overview of the Post dated-Established Religions of the Indus Land – Some Common Features and their Link with Indus Valley Civilization

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**Abstract:** The documented religious history of the sub-continent begins with the Vedas scriptures of the Hindus written in approximately 1500 BCE, but the question that arises is who were the Hindus? When and where did they live? In order to answer questions about the origin of the Hindus, Jim Wills (2007: 268-9) gives us two theories based on recent archaeological discoveries. According to one theory the Indo-European Aryans either invaded or migrated to India through the Khyber Pass (into present-day northern Pakistan), where they found a stone-age people whose agricultural way of life was already ancient. Archaeologists have discovered many goddess figurines associated with these people, indicating religious affiliations with agricultural and fertility practices. But they also found an ancient seal engraved with a figure sitting in a yoga position. According to another theory based on more recent archaeological excavations and data found in the northwest of India (present day Pakistan) Hinduism just might prove to be much older than what scholars initially thought, and might have arisen completely independent of the Aryan cultural influence. In short, Hinduism predates the Aryans by centuries and could have a historical identity with the Indus Valley civilization.

**Keyword:** Hinduism, Dravidian, Indus, Christian, Brahman, Buddhism.

Warren Matthews is of the opinion that Hinduism formed before anyone kept contemporary written records of its development (Matthews, 1999:83-5). For a long time its precepts may have been orally transmitted, from one generation to the next, while later on they were collected and preserved in the Vedas. Archaeologists have used Vedas as sources to reconstruct the initial stages of the Hindu religion. According to them the Dravidian people lived in cities that were well planned with underground plumbing, and other refinements of a developed urban population. These features include a large tank, or pool, similar to the ones now used in Hindu temples. While some figurines indicate a concern with human fertility and other forces of nature, yet archaeologists do not know the full nature of their religion. About 1000 BCE, the Aryan tribes migrated into both Greece and India. They belonged to an Indo-European group and had

entered the India sub-continent through Iran, bringing with them the language and religious concepts of both Persia and Greece. These Aryans (a word meaning noble men) were basically herders and nomads who drove their animals ahead of them. Their deities were based on nature, like the phenomena of heaven and earth. They paid tribute to their gods by sacrificing animals and sharing the flesh with them in a meal. The god's portion was sent through smoke rising from the sacrificial fire; worshippers ate their portions during the service. Devas represented things that were good for humans, while Asuras were evil powers that represented things harmful to humans. It was the ethical duty of religion to keep things on the right path and for good to prevail over evil. As time passed these Aryans mixed with the native people. They started sharing with them, their customs, traditions, rites, symbols and myths. Hence each contributed and each received. Even

the earliest hymns of Hinduism reveal a worship that retained many Aryan practices; for example, the later worship of Shiva reflects traditions of the Dravidians.

Scholars cannot pin point the exact time when Hinduism began, but they believe that it developed in an early stage of the interaction between Aryans and Dravidians.<sup>1</sup> They further propose that it was during this time that groups and strata of Hindu society began to form. According to them this proposition can be based on two theories; one theory is that the organization of Hindu society began as a result of *varna* (colour). The invaded people were dark, while the invading Aryans were light, because the conquerors were of lighter colour; therefore they were superior to the dark-skinned locals. While according to the other theory this class differentiation developed due to psychological preferences. The Aryans were militants and ruling in nature, while the locals were settled urbanites who preferred artisan and merchant activities. It is difficult for scholars to determine which is right, for in the second millennium BCE this differentiation was neither

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<sup>1</sup> Many scholars today negate the “Arrival of the Aryan Theory”, according to them such a movement never occurred. Upinder Singh in her book talks about the Kenneth Kennedy’s analysis of the skeletal record, which reveals that the first phase of discontinuities in physical types in the north-west occurs between 6000 and 4500 BCE, and the second one after 800 BCE. There is no evidence of any demographic disruption in the north-west during and immediately after the decline of the Harappan civilization. It is pretty obvious that no invasions took place during the period when the Indo-Aryans were supposed to have entered India, nor were there any large-scale migrations, but a series of small-scale inflows is a more likely possibility. Many archaeologists have tried to identify the Indo-Aryan migration with the help of archaeology but have been unsuccessful so far. Dr. Mughal further emphasizes the point by stating cultural continuity rather than discontinuity.

rigid nor universally recognized; it developed in a firm caste system at a much later stage. A *varna* system was also proposed by Massimo Vidale and Heather M. L. Miller in a joint paper in which they stated that the community differentiation might have occurred due to occupational specialization that was pretty obvious during the Mature Indus Phase (Vidale and Miller, 2000; 130-1). Kenoyer also suggests that some people following their ancestor’s occupation may have become richer in comparison to others, which could have led to the beginning of the Hindu caste system or a wide class differentiation by the Mature Indus Phase (Kenoyer 1998).

Historians, archaeologists and scientists have approached the problem from several perspectives. One method is to examine the ancient texts, literature and archaeology collectively as it reveals a varied cultural mosaic of the sub-continent between 2000 and 500 BCE. Previously most of the stories were considered to be mythological in nature, but recently they have been examined scientifically too. For example one such myth describes a mythological causeway<sup>2</sup> that connected India and Sri Lanka (see Map I.1)<sup>3</sup>. It enabled

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<sup>2</sup> Archaeological studies reveal that the first sign of human inhabitants in Sri Lanka date back to a primitive age, about 1,750,000 years ago and the bridge’s age is also almost equivalent to it.

<sup>3</sup> “Space images taken by NASA reveal a mysterious ancient bridge in the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka. The recently discovered bridge currently named as Adam laqno Bridge is made of chain of shoals, about 18 miles (30 km) long. The bridge and laqno unique curvature and composition by age reveals that it is manmade. The legends as well as Archaeological studies reveal that the first signs of human inhabitants in Sri Lanka date back to the a primitive age, about 1,750,000 years ago and the bridge and laqnos age is also almost equivalent. This information is a crucial aspect for an insight into the mysterious legend called *Ramayana*, which was

Hanuman, the monkey god, free access to rescue a captured Hindu princess (Sita wife of Rama). The very mention of a monkey god allows one to dismiss it as anything to do with reality, but satellite images (whose veracity is questioned by some) have revealed what has been labelled as Hanuman Bridge, thought to have existed in ancient times, validating that a causeway did indeed exist<sup>4</sup>. If there is some truth in these

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supposed to have taken place in more than 1,700,000 years ago. In this epic, there is a mentioning about a bridge, which was built between Rameshwaram (India) and Srilankan coast under the supervision of a dynamic and invincible figure called Rama who is supposed to be the incarnation of the supreme. This information may not be of much importance to the archaeologists who are interested in exploring the origins of man, but it is sure to open the spiritual gates of the people of the world to have come to know an ancient history linked to the Indian mythology.” NASA Images Find 1,750,000 Year Old Man-Made Bridge, *The Hindustan Times*: Mumbai, 10-10-2. <http://rense.com/general30/nasa.htm>

<sup>4</sup> “Adam’s Bridge, also called Rama’s Bridge, chain of shoals, between the islands of Mannar, near northwestern Sri Lanka, and Rāmeswaram, off the southeastern coast of India. The bridge is 30 miles (48 km) long and separates the Gulf of Mannar (southwest) from the Palk Strait (northeast). Some of the sandbanks are dry, and nowhere are the shoals deeper than 4 feet (1 m); thus, they seriously hinder navigation. Dredging operations, now abandoned, were begun as early as 1838 but never succeeded in maintaining a channel for any vessels except those of light draft. Geologic evidence suggests that Adam’s Bridge represents a former land connection between India and Sri Lanka. Traditionally, it is said to be the remnant of a huge causeway constructed by Rāma, the hero of the Hindu epic *Rāmāyana*, to facilitate the passage of his army from India to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for the rescue of his abducted wife, Sītā. According to Muslim legend, Adam crossed there to

Adam’s Peak, Ceylon, atop which he stood repentant on one foot for 1,000 years.”

*Encyclopaedia Britannica*:  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/5208/Adams-Bridge>.

ancient stories that describe an early Hindu culture that predate a supposed Aryan invasion, then surely the Aryans did not invent early Hinduism, they simply conquered early practices of it. A similar view is expressed by V. Gordon Childe,

“India confronts Egypt and Babylonia by the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium with a thoroughly individual and independent civilization of her own, technically the peer of the rest. And plainly it is deeply rooted in Indian soil. The Indus civilization represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment. And it has endured; it is already specifically Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore if Aryans were the true originators of Hinduism, where does the mediating yogi of the Indus fit in, which is not only a symbol religiously adapted by Hinduism but by Buddhism and Jainism too - religions that purely originated in India. There are also pre-Aryan tree spirits and the objects resembling the *linga* (a phallic device symbolic of the god Siva). All these symbols endure in later Hindu civilization.

The Hanuman Bridge is also known as Adam’s bridge; according in Muslim legend, it was crossed by Adam to reach Adam’s Peak, which is in Ceylon (see Figure I.1), where he stood repentant on one foot for 1,000 years.<sup>6</sup> This Peak has religious significance not only for the Muslims and Christians, who believe in Adam, but also for the religions that originated on this land. They all have their own legends and stories to show their religious affiliations with this Peak; in short the Peak is a holy place for all

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<sup>5</sup> *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 21, s. v. “The Indus Civilization.”

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/5208/Adams-Bridge>.

four religions; Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>7</sup>

According to a Buddhist's legend, the Buddha is believed to have left the print of his left foot on Adam's Peak, and then, in one stride crossed to Siam (now Thailand) where he left the impression of his right foot. The Thai version is called *Phra Sat*, and it is supposed to be the companion of the foot print on Adam's Peak and it is of similar size. Other, footprints were found in Laos (Pha Baat Phonsan), Cambodia (Phnom Santuk) and China (Wu-Tai Shan). Buddhists attribute its large size to the fact that the Buddha was believed to be about thirty-five feet tall. The real footprint on Adam's Peak is believed to be set in jewels hidden beneath the visible rock (see Figure I.2). According to the Islamic version, the Arabs record it as being the solitary footprint of Adam where he stood for a thousand years of penance on one foot. An Arab tradition tells that when Adam was expelled from heaven, God put him on the peak to make the shock of leaving Heaven less terrible and thus send him to Ceylon, it being the place on earth closest to and most like heaven. In view of this belief at the top of the mountain lies the sepulcher of Adam, *Adam-malai* (Mount of Adam).

The Christian are of the view that the Portuguese, who came to Sri Lanka in 1505, called the mountain *Pico de Adam* (anglicized Adam's Peak). They believed that St. Thomas the Doubter came to India and Sri Lanka, where he baptized Gondoporus, the Indo-Parthian king, and after leaving his footmark on the mountain, St. Thomas ascended to Heaven.

The Hindus believe the footprint to be the footmark of Lord Shiva, the third member of the godhead of the Hindu Holy Triad. The God is

supposed to have settled on the summit to shed his divine light upon mankind. Hence they call the mountain *Sivanolipadam* (Foot of Shiva's Light). Devotees of Shiva ascend the mountain beseeching divine help and the providence to be born in the celestial abode (i.e., Mt. Kailas, in Tibet). There exists a deeper connection between Adam's Peak and Mt. Kailas as both are located on the same geographical axis, and have similar pyramidal shapes. Therefore Adam's Peak is sometimes also considered as a natural and spiritual "replica" of Mt. Kailas, one of the holiest and the most enigmatic places on the planet.

No one is sure about the significance of Adam's Peak, but since ancient times until today it has attained a legendary status as a destination of mystic pilgrimages for several world religions. Whose footprint is there? Is it a real footprint of a giant? Is it a natural phenomenon? Why then are these phenomena repeated in several places in the world in the same size? Who made this print? Humans? Nature? And who made it in Thailand? in Laos? in Cambodia? Is there any connection between all these footprints? Does the pyramidal shape have special meaning? Why should it be called a perfect triangle when the mountain does not have such perfect slopes? Is there any connection between these triangles and the giant footprints? These are some of the questions asked by the author of this article. The point to be established here is that while we might never be able to understand or unravel the true significance of this Peak, yet it has since ancient times held not only historical significance but religious ones too and all the major known religions of the Near and Middle East own this spot. I believe that all the religions of this region own this place because all mankind is of one lineage and due to the vast time span that the humans have spent on this earth the true story or legend about Adam's peak has been lost somewhere in the past, yet all four

<sup>7</sup> "Whose footprint is on the peak?" UN Special, N 631, July-August 2004, [http://www.unspecial.org/UNS631/UNS\\_631\\_T26.html](http://www.unspecial.org/UNS631/UNS_631_T26.html)

religions do not deny it to be a place of religious significance (see Figure I.3). Doesn't this remind one of the Flood Myth - where myths of different and distant regions all believed that a Great Flood came and one pious man saved some of the people? The roots of religion in the Indian subcontinent are much deeper and older than what was previously thought by archaeologists and certainly predate the so-called arrival of the Aryans in this part of the world. Another important question is who were the true originators of Hinduism, are they the Aryans, whose turbid migration or arrival on a large-scale in our part of the world is imprecisely known; or the people that predate them – the people of the Indus civilization. Now let us discuss major features of the religious beliefs of the Hindus.

Although it is said that there are more than thirty-three million gods in India, still it must be remembered that since Brahma is All, therefore all the gods are ultimately faces of Brahma (see Figure I.4) (Wills 2007). He can take male, female or animal form. A point to be noted here is that Brahman is not even a god, but is an undefined principle and all the other gods are ways of expressing or visualizing the inexpressible. Therefore a question arises, whether Hinduism is polytheistic, pantheistic, or monotheistic? The answer may vary, depending on how one wants to interpret it (Wills 2007). Most scholars today believe that it is a monotheistic religion, whose adherents believe in one God, Brahma (the absolute spirit), who is beyond human reach and understanding. There are a multitude of different images that make Brahma visible and knowledgeable to worshippers (Keene, 2002: 15). Let's now briefly discuss the attributes of the Hindu God.

“God is the primary cause of all True knowledge and of everything known by its means. God is All Truth, all-knowledge, All-beatitude, Incorporeal, Almighty, Just,

Merciful, Unbegotten, Infinite, Unchangeable, Without a beginning, Incomparable, the Support and Lord of all, All-pervading, Omniscient, Imperishable, Immortal, Exempt from fear, Eternal, Holy and the Cause of the universe. To him alone is worship due.” (Ten Principles of the Arya Samaj) (Keene 2002: 15).

There is no doubt that like other traditions of the world, Hinduism has also divided and changed, has been added to and adapted. It also has fostered social evils, such as the caste system, but it has also bettered countless lives. It predates the modern, scientific explanations for the origin of the cosmos and modern psychology by thousands of years, as it is considered to be one of the oldest surviving, living tradition of the world. Although it has changed over the years, yet at the same time it has retained essential human truths, such as the various stages of life, that go a long way toward explaining how to live in today's world. Some scholars describe it as an organic system, rather than a religion (Wills 2007: 273).

The Hindu scriptures reveal the slow development of its philosophy and tell about their gods and myths. These scriptures are compiled into four books, known as *Rig-Veda*, *Sama-Veda*, *Yagur-Veda*, and *Atharua-Veda*. The *Rig-Veda* consists of religious poetry, while the other three are compilations of incantations and spells. Later, sometime around 500 BCE, the Upanishads began to be written, probably as a response to the teachings of Buddhism. These scriptures include details about the Brahman-Atman philosophy, the practice of Om meditation, and about the four levels of consciousness. Thus they became the philosophical section of the *Vedas*, moving Hinduism inward to the mind and embodying it in what is known as “intellectual” Hinduism. The resulting compilation describes two great principles: (the Laws of Manu), (the way of

society), (the way of the Yogi) and (Yogi Sutras).

According to the Laws of Manu, there are four stages of a man's life: *kama* (pleasure), *artha* (gain), *dharma* (righteousness), and *moksha* (liberation). In simpler words they can be designated as; student, householder, hermit, and renunciant. These four stages in a man's life work somewhat like this; when he is young, he gets educated and does things that young people usually do, like gathering with like-minded friends, going to parties, debating with elders, meeting potential mates: in short, generally having a good time. Then a time comes when he wants to settle down; he gets married, has kids, moves to the suburbs, buys a house, gets a dog, puts up a white picket fence: all these things show that he has reached the second stage of life, the householder. Then he reach a stage when all these things somehow seem strange and meaningless, the inner thriving to acquire more starts to fade and he start to wonder, what is life all about. It is now that he discovers a spiritual side that was hidden within him. The charms of life and the quest for more begins to disappear, for he has reached a point where he understands that life is not eternal. In short he has reached the third stage of his life, where, now he prefers to read a book beside a fireplace at home and understands why some people go off to become hermits. The fourth and final stage of man's life - when retiring from activity may not be enough - occurs when he wanders off somewhere, to seek the spiritual meaning of life, leaving family and belongings behind. It is said that this stage is complete, only when he is given food and sustenance by one who was formerly his servant.

Some scholars suggest that understanding the four stages of life helps to explain the vast differences found between the social attitudes of the people of India and those living in America or western societies. According to Indian people westerners have never reached beyond stage

two: throughout their life spans they have only learned to depend on materialistic gains for happiness. Indian people according to this doctrine believe that it is impossible to accumulate enough goods and wealth to provide one with happiness. Westerners think that wealth would help them in their lives; Hindus believe this attitude towards life quite immature and backward. For them a lifetime of accumulated wealth represents spiritual poverty, which needs to be pitied. Meanwhile, many westerners think of India as being full of impoverished people who can and should better themselves. This is the basic difference in the religious mentality, understanding and comprehension of traditional Hindu society. In comparison, to those of the western (Judeo-Christian) Islamic beliefs consider wealth as a sign of god's blessings (Wills 2007: 268-72).

A core belief of the Hindus is in the endless cycle of birth, life on earth, death and rebirth, with each person being reincarnated at a level determined by how they spent their previous existence.

Do not do to another what you would not like to be done to yourself; that is the gist of the law - all other laws are variable.  
(*Mahabharata, Veda* 39) (Keene 2002: 8-9).

An important common element among the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religions is the practice of yoga, (a practice that one also encounters illustrated on a seal during the Mature Indus Period which predates any of these religions).

The way of the Yogi consists of scriptures that include the details about the techniques of yoga through a process of eight steps, called limbs; There are, nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-greed; purity, contentment, mortification, study, and devotion; posture; breath control; withdrawal of attention

from the senses; concentration; meditation; contemplation.

In the spiritual exercise of meditation (yoga), the body is envisioned as being “centred” and brought up through the seven chakras, or centres of energy that are located from the base of the spine to the top of the head. The way of the yogi and society come together in the scriptures called *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the “Song of the Lord”, (part of the long epic of the Mahabharata) in which Lord Krishna himself specifies the method of spiritual progress.

It is considered quite difficult to learn all that is written in these scriptures, and in order to understand these one requires a spiritual leader, who is called a *guru* in Hindi. This *guru* helps one to find the best *bhakti* or spiritual path leading to moksha (liberation), where one finally loses his egocentricity and becomes one with Brahma (the One God) (Wills, 2007: 273). Hinduism is the oldest surviving world religion that is still active today. It has covered a time stretch of thousands of years. It is deeply rooted in the traditions and history of India and one can easily trace its origins back to the beginning of the second millennium BCE, but some scholars suggest that it is even older with the earliest-known antecedents in the Indus valley civilization, an area from where civilization on the sub-continent began. The word ‘Hindu’ was first used by the Persians (it derives from the Sanskrit word “Sindhu”), indicating the River Indus. It was not long before the word was applied generally to all the people of India, but today it just refers to the followers of the Hindu religion.

The forms of worship and the spiritual discipline mentioned in the *Vedas* remain an important part of Hindu spirituality today. Over this long time span Hinduism absorbed many ideas from other religions as it spread into southern India (Keene, 2002: 10-11).

Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay and subject to the laws of nature. One and indivisible at the root, it has grown into vast tree with innumerable branches (Mahatma Gandhi 1869-1948) (Keene, 2002: 11).

It is true that for many Hindus today, the temple is the centre of religious life, but there are others for whom the communal acts of worship are not important and they rarely visit a temple. Buddhism another religion of the Indian sub-continent post-dates the Indus civilization. Some say that it surfaced about the time that some of the Hindu Upanishads were being written down; was first practiced by a young prince from among the Shakyas of northern India. Others say that Buddhism should be seen as part of the Shamana tradition<sup>8</sup>, which is much older than

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<sup>8</sup> “There are only two references to the word Shramana in Vedic literature. One is in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad where it is placed next to the term *tapasa*, indicating that the Shramana like the *tapasa* was a class of mendicants. It has been argued renunciation was not uncommon to the Vedic society, with Yatis, Munis, Shramanas quoted amongst earliest renouncers. In the pastoral cultures of Vedic people, the renouncer Munis and Yatis were looked down upon. The renouncers meditated upon death, link between births and death conditioned by attachment to desire. These themes surface in Vedic literature for the first time in the Upanishads. After passing through *henotheism* and pantheism, the anthropomorphism of Vedas entered the period of monism in the Upanishadic period. It is in the Upanishadic period that theories identifiable with Shramanas come in direct contact with brahmanical ideals. According to Ananda Guruge, a renowned Buddhist leader, the Shramana movement impacted Vedic education through the Upanishads, with debate and discussion replacing parrot-like repetition of the *Vedas*. Many Upanishads compile contradictory positions where the favourite style of debate is to pose questions until the other cannot answer. The infinite regress notwithstanding, Upanishadic arguments do not involve finding logical contradictions in opposing doctrines. The heterogeneous nature of Upanishads shows infusions of both social and philosophical elements, pointing to

Hinduism (David, 2007: 124). This young prince was the son of King Suddhodanna and Queen

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evolution of new doctrines from non-brahmanical sources. While the Upanishadic doctrines of Brahman and Atman can be traced back to the Vedas and Brahmanas, the doctrines of Transmigration (as punarjanma), Karma (as action), and Emancipation (as *moksha*) do not follow with consistency from Vedic traditions, and are fundamental to the Shramana religions.

Several śhramaṇa movements are known to have existed in India, even before the 6th century BCE, and these influenced both the Astika and the Nastika traditions of Indian philosophy. It was as a Shramana that the Buddha left his father's palace and practised austerities. The Brahmajāla Sutta mentions many śhramaṇas with whom Buddha disagreed. Some scholars opine Shramanas of Jaina tradition were widespread in the Indus Valley, with

the relics of Indus Valley civilization representing Jaina culture, like the standing nude male figures (Jaina Kayotsarga), idols in Padmasana and images with serpent-heads, and the Bull symbol of Vrshabadeva. However, other scholars opine the Shramana cultures arose and flourished in the Gangetic areas, rather than the Indus Valley. Additionally, some scholars opine the term Shramana appears in texts of the Brahmanas as a religious order other than the Vedic (i.e., Astika) traditions. The Shramana tradition of the Jaina religion is considered the oldest of the non-Aryan group, as an independent pre-Buddhist religion, and is suggested to have existed before the Brahmin cult. From rock edicts, it is found that both Brahmanas as well as Shramana Buddhist ascetics enjoyed equal sanctity.

Though Shramana traditions are associated with ascetism, some shramana traditions were, in fact, peculiar as materialists, in the sense they preached a worldly existence and carried denunciation of brahmanical orthodoxy to the extreme. The Shramana traditions included a range of beliefs, such as the Cārvākas, who on one end of the spectrum lived a luxurious life, to the Jainas, who on the other hand, developed a theory of extreme self-mortification. Some Shramanas were openly critical of the sacrificial traditions of the Brahmins and the concepts of Karma, claiming them to be simply a swindle.”

“Shramanas” *Chinese Buddhist Encyclopaedia*, <http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Shramana>

Maya, and they named him Siddhartha Gautama. He spent his early life in the palace protected from the harshness of the world (Hackin, 1994: 69)<sup>9</sup> and surrounded by luxury and pleasures. Later, brief visits outside the palace showed him a side of life that he had never witnessed before, a side that was deliberately hidden from him. The misery of the poor and sick disturbed him to such an extent that he wanted to devote his life to relieving their pain. Leaving his royal life behind, he began search as to how one could release the suffering of others. His search,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Siddhartha during his early years was deliberately kept from the harshness of the world following an interpretation of a dream that his mother had before his birth. Queen Maya in her dream saw a white elephant with six tusks, entering into her through her right side ( true incarnation). The Brahmins who interpreted this dream prophesized that a son would be born to her who would bear upon his body the signs of great monarchs. If he would decide to rule he would be a Chakravartin (sovereign of the world); but if he abandoned his wealth to adopt the life of a wandering ascetics he would become a Buddha and would help in relieving the people from the miseries of life, which are caused by old age, sickness and death.

<sup>10</sup> For seeking true knowledge he joined hands with many other holy men. Leaving every luxury of life behind for five years he lived in extreme poverty with five companions. Then one day sitting in isolation, meditating, away from everything, under the Bodhi tree he attained enlightenment. This process taught him the three stages of enlightenment, resisting the temptations of Mara (the evil one) and took three nights to complete. On the first night all of his previous lives passed before him, during the second night he saw the cycle of birth, life, death and the cycle that governs it. On the third and final night he understood the Four Noble Truths; the universality of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cure for suffering and the way to find that cure. He now realized that all people suffer, and this suffering stems from human craving and if this craving ceases then the suffering also automatically stops. This realization led him to become Buddha – the enlightened one. It is known that after this he was asked three times by

which began in his late twenties, ended in his mid-thirties. Hence forth he became known as Buddha (The Enlightened One) (Keene, 2002). He devoted the remaining years of his life to spreading this message in different parts of India (see Figure I.5) (Mathews 1999: 127). Buddha was himself a Hindu, yet his essential break with Hinduism was not that he denied the existence of God or supernatural beings, but his complete rejection of the Hindu caste system and sacrificial cults (Gibbons, 2007: 124).

The Buddhist teachings, which lead one to attain the stage of *nirvana* (eternal peace), can only be achieved by understanding the Four Noble Truths and following the Eightfold Path, also called the Middle Way (Keene, 2002: 74).

This, O Bhikkus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering; presence of objects we hate is Suffering; separation from objects we love is suffering; not to obtain what we desire is suffering. Briefly, the fivefold clinging to existence is suffering. All existence is dukkha (suffering). By Buddha (Keene, 2002: 74).

Thus all Buddhist practices were designed to help people eliminate their selfish desires and their attachments to this world; by doing this they would be able to finally free themselves from the cycle of birth, life and death and they can only achieve this stage by following the Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way:

Right understanding of the Four Noble Truths

Right thoughts, leading to love towards all living forms, even the most humble.

Right speech, which must be pure, noble and well intentioned.

Right action, involving moral behavior, being considerate to others and showing kindness to all living creatures.

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Brahma (god of the Hindus), to help others towards enlightenment.

Right livelihood, meaning a Buddhist must not earn a living from anything that involves violence or from following their religion; Buddhist monks must be kept by the community.

Right effort to banish all evil thoughts.

Right mindfulness, involving constant awareness of the needs of others.

Right concentration using meditation, which allows a person to become inwardly calm and at peace with themselves and the world (Keene, 2002: 75).

These eight points explain the nature of Buddha's teachings. It tells us how to escape from the miseries and sufferings of life. All this depends on our *Karma* (the law of cause and effect). Thus a morally good life generates positive *karma* in the next life, but the ultimate goal is not only to achieve positive *karma* in the next life but to be completely released from the law of *karma*, hence achieving the state of *nirvana*. The different steps of the Eightfold Path are like the spokes of a wheel; although they each have their own value yet they only gain strength when they are united with one another.

A number of other teachings were later added to the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, among these the most important are the Five Precepts (moral guidelines), which all Buddhist try to follow. These are as follows;

They avoid taking life or harming any living thing.

They avoid taking that which is not given.

They avoid all sexual misconduct.

They avoid all unworthy speech, such as lying, rumour-spreading and gossip.

They avoid any contact with drugs and alcohol, since these cloud the mind and judgment (Keene, 2002: 77).

Buddha taught these principles to his fellow beings till the day he died. Buddhism is a humanistic philosophy with deep psychological insights. Some practitioners worship gods, others do not. Buddha himself is not worshipped as a god, but is respected as a complete, spiritual leader (Wills, 2007: 81-4). Steve Hagen in his book describes Buddha in these terms.

The Buddha never considered himself to be something other than a human Being - only someone who was fully awake. He never claimed to be a god, or even to be inspired by God. He attributed his realization and understanding solely to human endeavour and human ability. We call Gautama "The Buddha," but many other Buddhas, many other awakened human beings, exist, and have existed... Buddha is not someone you pray to, or try to get something from. Nor is a Buddha someone you bow down to. A Buddha is simply a person who is awake-nothing more or less (Hagen, 1998).

The principle concept of Buddhism is that human consciousness can be transformed from attachment to ego, suffering, and objects of desire to the unattached bliss of *nirvana*. And the path to *nirvana* was demonstrated by Buddha himself. Therefore, the fundamental practice of Buddhism is meditation, and its fundamental social expression is the *samgha* (it's order of priests). Some say that one of the keys to understand Buddhism is the concept of *anatman*, which means "no self". One can only end suffering through ending desire, for suffering is like fire, it needs fuel. Remove the fuel and the fire goes out. Desire is in fact the fuel that feeds suffering (Wills, 2007: 81-4).

After the death of the Buddha, Buddhism developed traditions and hierarchies - as religions seem to do once their founders are dead. Just as Christianity was later divided into Catholic and Protestant sects, Buddhism separated into two great traditions, Hinayana

(The Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (The Greater Vehicle). The Buddha during his life time was never depicted in any visual form, but later one sect developed his visual presence, while the other still portrays him symbolically. Before moving to the second post - Hindu religion I want to refer to observations, of Jim Willis about the similarity in the life stories of The Buddha and Jesus Christ (Wills, 2007: 81-2). One is unable to ignore the parallels found in their legends. Both left their homes to find the truth that exists beyond average human existence. Both went into the wilderness, where they were tested by the devil with three temptations. They both gathered and attracted a group of disciples, one of whom betrayed them. After returning from a retreat in the wilderness both preached a sermon that summed up their teaching: The Buddha delivered his speech in the Deer Park, while Jesus preached on the Mount of Olives. The similarity of their legend does not end here, as both died at the hands of other men, but even then forgave them before their deaths.

Such comparisons do not suggest that one religion is an imitation or copy of the other. It is obvious that the two rose independently of each other and stand as separate entities. There are many points of contrast between the two, especially in their teachings concerning the nature of God (many Buddhists do not believe in a personal deity), time (linear versus circular), and afterlife (heaven versus Nirvana) (Wills, 2007: 81-2).

Such observations suggest to me that the basic teachings of all religions are pretty similar; regions may differ, individuals who preached this message may differ, but the basic message had always been one and still remains the same. I believe that God time and again has sent his various messengers to the different parts of earth to guide mankind. As according to one famous

Islamic Hadith, Allah sent 124,000 prophets into the world.

The origin of Jainism, another religion of India that post-dates the Indus civilization, is considered to be contemporary with Buddhism. Some believe that it has periodically been renewed by enlightened people or *Jinas*, since a beginningless time. Other people date it to the sixth century BCE when Mahavira practiced it (see Figure I.6). Like the Buddha, Mahavira was a prince. He belonged to the Kshatriya clan and renounced his position and his wealth at the age of thirty to wander as a spiritual seeker. During his wandering he encountered legendary austerities.

“Once when he (sat in meditation), his body unmoving, they cut his flesh, tore his hair, and covered him with dirt. They picked him up and then dropped him, disturbing his meditational postures. Abandoning concern for his body, free from desire, the Venerable One humbled himself and bore the pain.”<sup>11</sup>

He continued to meditate for twelve consecutive years in silence and fasting, after which he finally achieved liberation and perfection. He devoted the next thirty years of his life to spreading this message until the very day he died at Pava (a sacred pilgrimage site). It is said that at his death his community consisted of 14, 100 monks, 36, 000 nuns, and 310, 000 female and 150, 000 male lay followers, who came from all castes, as Jainism is free from any caste system. The religion that started to spread from Bihar today consists of 3,350,000 million Jains in India, with several thousand elsewhere in Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America. It is true that today they are a minority in India, yet they seem to have greater influential force because of their wealth. Most of them marry,

although there are some who chose to become monks and nuns.

As said earlier, the history of Jainism may not begin with Mahavira, as various scholars suggest that its roots are much deeper. According to one doctrine, only in the current age there have been twenty-four enlightened *jinas* (victors), who are better known as Tirthankaras (literally fords or bridge builders). Each of them was responsible for establishing a four-fold community of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Mahavira is considered to be the twenty-fourth and last *jina*. He lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (he was born around 599 BCE and died in 527 BCE according to the Shvetambara sect, or in 510 BCE according to the Digambara sect).

The first Trithankara was Lord Rishabha, who is known for establishing social institutions such as marriage, family, law, justice, and government. He also taught the arts of agriculture, crafts, reading, writing, and mathematics, and is also known to have built villages, towns, and cities. Twenty-three more Trithankara followed him over an enormous span of time. Nothing much is known about them, but the twenty-second is known to have been a historic figure. Some scholars suggest that he was the cousin of Lord Krishna, renowned for his compassion for animals, and that he also left his wedding procession and decided not to marry; for fear that many animals would only be slaughtered to cater for his wedding feast. After this incidence he became an ascetic who preached religion for many years. Following suit, his betrothed princess also became a nun. Then came the twenty-third Trithankara who also is known to have been a prince. He left everything and became an ascetic and a great preacher of Jain principles, and lived from around 877 to 777 BCE.

On the basis of these observations and documents, scholars today are unable to deny

<sup>11</sup> *An Encyclopedia of The World's Faiths: Living Religions*, s. v., “Jainism.”

the extreme antiquity of Jainism as a non-Vedic religion. The well documented ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures refer to a Jain tradition that existed long before the life of Mahavira. There are some scholars who have even suggested that the roots of Jainism can be traced in the Indus civilization. How true or authentic this suggestion is, time will tell.

After the death of Mahavira the religion split into many sects, but eventually two main branches emerged. The Shvetambara and Digambara located in northwest and southwest India respectively. The one main doctrinal difference between these two sects is that the Digambara sect asserts that an enlightened *jina*, does not eat, drink, or take part in common bodily processes and activities, while the Shvetambara sect asserts that an enlightened *jina* continues to function like other humans until his death. However, probably the most noticeable disagreement to us today is over clothing: the Digambara (wearing the sky) assert that to reach enlightenment a person must renounce all clothing, while Shvetambaras (wearing white) believe that clothing is necessary for attaining the spiritual path.

The two sects also differ over the subject of women's abilities. The Digambaras strongly assert that women do not have the strong body and willpower needed to attain liberation; they can only be liberated if reborn into a man's body. While, Shvetambaras assert that women are capable of the same spiritual achievements as men. They also believe that the nineteenth Trithankara was a female.

Another very important aspect of Jainism concerns the 'Absolute'. They do not believe in a creator God, though they do believe that their doctrines originate from an omniscient and omnipotent being. "The *Jina*" collectively stands for the term God. Thus they believe that

they do not require or seek verification of any kind for their doctrines from any other source.

One doctrine Jains share with not only Hindus but Buddhist too is the absolute law of *karma*. Other than Karma, Jains also believe in the absolute nature of the soul (*jiva*), which for them also exist in even the very lowest forms of life; the soul is present, no matter how oppressed the person is with the weight of *karma*. Every soul bears the weight of *karma*. *Karma* is, in fact, the glue that binds humans to the cycle of rebirth, which is the operative element in *samsara* (recurring rebirth of the soul). The soul journeys through infinite incarnation from lower life forms to high, but Jains believe that the human incarnation is the most important, as only through the human form can a person obtain release, and only from human form can a person choose and carry out those thoughts and actions that can bring escape from eons of labor. For Jains there are eight different kinds of *karma*: four are destructive, the other four are non-destructive.

#### Four Destructive Karmas

1. Mohaniya - Insight and conduct deluding
2. Jnanavaraniya – Knowledge obscuring
3. Dar-shanavaraniya – Perception obscuring
4. Antaraya – Restricting of energy

#### Four Non-Destructive Karmas

1. Vedaniya – Feeling producing
2. Nama-Identifying the individual creature
3. Ayu – The longevity of a birth
4. Gotra – The family environment

Jain holy men have given careful attention to what they consider the central problem for human existence (Mathews, 1999: 183-6). I would like to quote David Gibbon here,

“All living things have a soul, which activates the body it inhabits. It is the only conscious thing in the universe, and also has energy and can experience bliss, but only liberated souls experience this fully. The universe is full of an infinite number of *monads*, units of existence, which are eternal. When a living being dies, the soul is immediately reincarnated to occupy another body-which can be of any type, so one must respect all souls, for each has the potential to become a *siddha*. All beings can suffer, and to harm another life-form brings an influx of *karma*. This is why the Jains espouse nonviolence to all creatures (*ahimsa*), which is their chief ethical doctrine. They have consequently earned a reputation for compassion and tolerance.” (Gibbons, 2007: 129).

I would also like to quote a summary on the three religions of India that I have talked about, given by Warren Matthews,

“There is a gentleness in the Jain view of life that commands respect. In a violent world, people who practice ahimsa seem as welcome as an oasis in a desert. There is a similarity with Theravadin Buddhism, for the meditating monk is an example of the devotion of life that even laypeople hope to encourage and, perhaps, one day achieve. A religion that inspires a person to work out his or her own salvation by imitating a model requires great fortitude. It is a cool life indeed where humans are not warmed by the glow of divine grace. But Jains know where responsibility lies and need not waste efforts on rituals and myths that may not yield results. Release comes to those who earn it. In spite of the absence of a creator deity in Jainism, it shares some beliefs with Hinduism. The Law of Karma; the existence of the soul, which is reincarnated; and the cycle of rebirths until moksha is earned are similar to Hinduism. The extremes of depriving the body of clothing and food are closer to Hinduism than to the Middle Path chosen by Buddha. Like Buddha, however,

the Jains can obtain release without deities. The focus is on humans and human models for them to follow. Jainism, too, has a logic that takes into account the relative truths and knowledge of humans. What we experience and reason as humans is more relative than absolute. Jainism requires of humans a commitment in faith long before they can know whether they will obtain release.” (Mathews, 1999: 183-6).

In spite of the many differences among the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism; they all agree or accept the concept of *karma*, and *karma* deals with keeping a human being in line. In simple words, whatever one does during his or her lifetime, would eventually affect or would bear consequences either on his or her soul or afterlife. Maybe this is the one and only point that in a way binds these three religions together, despite many huge differences. As we know that there is a common world myth about the ‘Immortal Soul’. Therefore would it be wrong to suggest that all mankind had some kind of a concept about an afterlife or they were pretty aware that for their actions they could be held answerable. Some quotes from the Quran;

Whatever good (O man!) happens to thee is from Allah; but whatever evil happens to thee is from thy (own) soul. And We have sent thee as a Messenger to (instruct) mankind: and enough is Allah for a Witness (Quran 4: 79).

Verily We have revealed the Book to thee in Truth for (instructing) mankind. He then that receives guidance benefits his own soul: but he that strays injures his own soul. Nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs (Quran 39: 41).

The significance of discussing these three religions was not to count their dissimilarities but their similarities. Though all three originated in greater India all three have their own history, religious leaders, scriptures, rituals and practices, but they also have some common elements that cannot be over looked. These

common elements that I have highlighted in this paper can be in some way traced to the time period of Indus civilization. It seems that these elements have travelled through time; their appearance under different religious heads might have changed, but somehow they have been able to keep their essence alive throughout this regions prehistory and history.

Let us now briefly overlook the similarities between the three post-dated religions of the land, and the icons, script and imagery, whose meaning is unknown;

1. The mediating yogi
2. The all in some way are considered as part of the Shamana tradition (renouncers)
3. This tradition is considered to be much older than Hinduism today
4. Supreme god of Hindus is "Brahma", he is one and all powerful, the rest are his different personifications
5. Jain doctrines also originate from an omniscient and omnipotent being
6. Jainism is considered non-Vedic
7. The concept of Karma is common between all three religions
8. Buddha preached to reach the state of "nirvana", eternal peace

### Conclusion

The significance of highlighting these points was to bring before you a wider picture of the people of this land and their age old religious affiliations. Despite of the dissimilarities between the three established religions of this land the one common element is "*karma*", which is pretty evident during the Indus time period too, though we do not have any text to back it, but we do have their archaeological remains which speak louder than words. The term "*Karma*" in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain

philosophy means somebody's current and future lives are determined by that person's behavior in this and previous lives. Though we do not know whether the Indus people believed in many lives, but one thing is evident that they spent their current lives doing many good communal deeds and the scarcity of burial goods tell us that they did not believe that material things could help them in their future life. This notion is backed by their various personality traits, which are evident through their archaeological remains and can be described with the help of adjectives like homogeneity, equality, and unity among many others. This concept of *karma* is present in every religion of the world including the three monotheistic religions. Another very important fact is that all these religions believe in one Supreme Being, whether it is "Brahma" of the Hindus or belief in an unnamed omnipotent of the Janis or the un-talked about god of the Buddhist. We also have come across the term of "Shamans", (mediating yogi or elders of the family could be a symbol of such men) in association with this region, which definitely goes back a long way, maybe it was the human link between man and god, since Indus times and which is pretty evident even today in the region. We find many such people in the villages and cities of both Pakistan and India playing an active part even today.

It only seems fair to assume that the religion of this land was as sophisticated, and functioned at different levels to serve different classes of people according to their cultural needs and mental capacity, as most advanced religions do. And it is quite evident that its links can be traced to the Indus civilization, which most likely influenced the evolution of religions not only in India but in other nearby countries of the region too.





Map I.1 A mythological causeway that connected India and Sri Lanka.  
(<http://www.rense.com/general30/nasa.htm>).



Figure I.1 Adam's Peak, Sri Lanka. (<http://www.teatrails.com/excursions/adams-peak>).

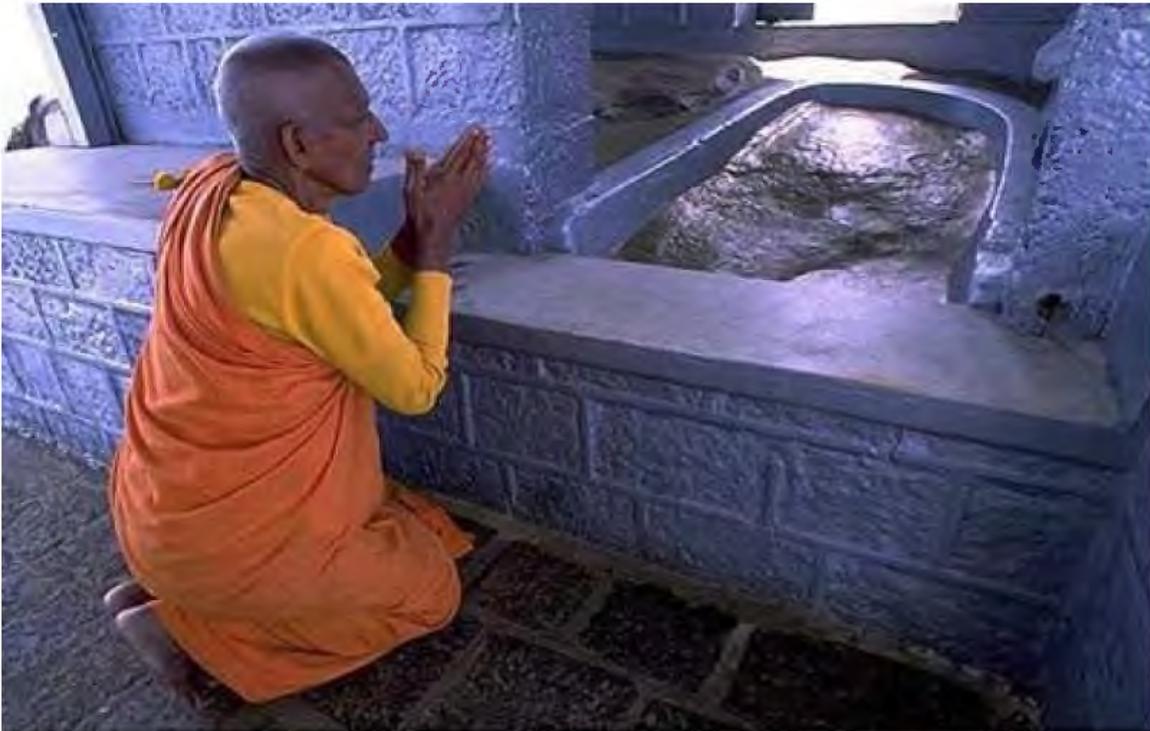


Figure I.2 Adam's Footprint on the peak. (<http://sripada.org/adams-peak-history.htm>)



Figure I.3 Adam's Peak place of religious significance. (<http://dailynews.lk/?q=features/sri-pada-sacred-awesome-mystical>).



Figure I.4 Sculpture of Brahma.  
(<http://www.lotussculpture.com/9bc14.html>).



Figure I.5 Sculpture of Buddha.  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist\\_poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_poetry)).



Figure I.6 Sculpture of Mahavira. (<http://heritagesculptures.com/products/>).