

# SCOP Indian Religion

Version 3.0

*For the purpose of these sheets, religions are categorized as belief systems that are still widely practiced.*

*Green-shaded terms are the most frequent subjects to appear in SCOP question sets.*

*Important terms are marked in **bold**; a bolded term is worth researching online for more information.*

## Indian Religions

The following religions focus on **samsara** (the cycle of life, death, and rebirth) and how **karma** (positive or negative actions and intent) and **dharma** (the laws and duties that govern a person's life) influence a person's path through samsara. Many terms below are used by more than one of these religions, but are listed with the religion for which they are most often used as a clue.

### Buddhism

#### Divisions

Theravada; Mahayana (including Zen, Pure Land, and Tibetan)

#### Beliefs

Enlightenment brings a person to **Nirvana** (a state without suffering, the end of **samsara**). A **Buddha** is someone who has achieved enlightenment. **Gautama Buddha**'s teachings include the **Four Noble Truths** (including the **Eightfold Path**), and the **Middle Way**.

**Bodhisattvas** are enlightened individuals who remain on Earth to help others become enlightened.

#### Texts

**Tripitaka** (or "Tipitaka" or "Three Baskets"), the Theravada version of which is the **Pali Canon**. The Tripitaka contains the **Sutta Pitaka**, a collection of **Sutras** (or "Suttas" or "sayings"). Some notable sutras are nicknamed Lotus, Diamond, and Platform

#### Rituals and Practices

Meditation, accompanied by the recitation of **mantras** or reflection on **koans**

#### Stories and Figures

**Siddhartha Gautama** (Gautama Buddha), the first Buddha of the current Buddha cycle, and the recognized founder of Buddhism. At the Buddha's birth, a seer named **Asita** announced that he would become either a great king or a great religious leader. His father raised him in seclusion in a pleasure palace, away from human suffering, to ensure that he became a king. After encountering three people representing age, poverty, and sickness, he left the palace to live an ascetic life. He later shifted from pure asceticism to the **Middle Way** (a more moderate way to avoid self-indulgence), and achieved enlightenment after meditating under a **Bodhi tree**.

### Hinduism

#### Beliefs

**Moksha** is the condition of escaping **samsara**. Gods govern various aspects of human life (see "Stories and Figures" below).

#### Texts

**Mahabharata**, which includes the **Bhagavad Gita**; **Vedas**; **Upanishads**

#### Rituals and Practices

**Puja**, a prayer ritual

#### Stories and Figures

The **Trimurti** consists of three Hindu gods: **Brahma** (representing creation), **Vishnu** (preservation), and **Shiva** (destruction and regeneration).

- **Shiva** is often depicted with a blue throat, a result of drinking the **halahala** poison to save the world. He has a destructive **third eye**. His primary consort is **Parvati**, and he is the father of the elephant-headed god **Ganesh** (or **Ganesha**). His mount is the bull **Nandi**.
- **Vishnu** has ten **avatars** (earthly incarnations), including the blue-skinned **Krishna** (who serves Arjun as a charioteer in the **Bhagavad Gita**) and **Rama** (the hero of the **Ramayana**). His consort is **Lakshmi**.
- **Brahma** (not to be confused with Brahman or Brahmin) has four heads and four arms. He was born from a lotus that emerged from **Vishnu**'s navel. His consort is Saraswati, and he rides a swan or goose.

#### Holidays

- **Diwali**, a festival of lights that celebrates the birth of **Lakshmi**.
- **Holi**, a festival in which celebrants throw colored powders over each other and burn a bonfire to celebrate the defeat of the demon Holika.

## Jainism

### Divisions

Digambara ("sky clad"); Svetambara ("white clad")

### Beliefs

**Ahimsa** is the practice of extreme non-violence; to avoid harming insects, some sects sweep in front of them as they walk or wear masks. Some sects do not wear clothing.

### Stories and Figures

**Mahavira** is the twenty-fourth Tirthankara (spiritual teacher).

## Sikhism

### Beliefs

Founded on the principle that there is truth in every religion and that it is essential to establish a relationship with the divine.

### Texts

The **Adi Granth** (respectfully called the **Guru Granth Sahib**)

### Rituals and Practices

The Five Ks are the five signs of Sikh faith that Sikhs must wear. They are:

- **Kirpan**, a symbolic blade. Kirpans vary in size from small daggers to near-sword length.
- **Kesh**, uncut hair, which is often wound under a turban.
- **Kanga**, a comb.
- **Kara**, an iron bracelet.
- **Kachera**, a cotton undergarment.

Male Sikhs take on the name **Singh** as a surname or a middle name; female Sikhs take on the name **Kaur**.

### Stories and Figures

Ten **gurus** (holy teachers), including **Guru Nanak** (the first Sikh guru) and **Guru Gobind Singh** (the tenth Sikh guru). The eleventh and permanent guru is the holy text **Adi Granth**, also called the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

### Holy Sites

Sikh holy buildings are **gurdwaras**, which welcome people of all faiths (or no faith). The **Golden Temple** at Amritsar is the holiest gurdwara.