

## Exploring the Religions of Asian Indians

*"All paths to God are valid – and therefore all religions have to be honored.  
The whole world is one family."*

### Overview

India is a diverse land of religions and spirituality. It is not only the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, but numerous other faiths are practiced there, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and others. Through viewing clips from [Remarkable Journey](#) and completing the following activities, students will explore the various religions with connections to India, as well as the way Asian Indians have integrated their diverse religions into communities across North Carolina. As a culminating activity, students will delve further into one particular religion mentioned during class by creating a scrapbook of that religion.

**\*\*Teachers are encouraged to modify the activities and sections throughout this plan, and each section (shaded in gray) is written so that it can be done alone or in conjunction with any and/or all of the other sections.**

### Materials

- *Remarkable Journey* documentary, available for free K-12 use at <https://vimeo.com/237623028>; password: **remarkable**
- Accompanying PowerPoint (Slides 22-23), available at <http://k12database.unc.edu/files/2017/11/RemarkableJourneyPPT.pdf>
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to [CarolinaK12@unc.edu](mailto:CarolinaK12@unc.edu) with the PPT title in the email subject line.
- *Remarkable Journey* full documentary Discussion Guide (optional); available at the end of this Teaching Guide or by clicking [here](#).
- Four religions worksheet, attached
- Religion Scrapbook Assignment, attached

### Procedure

#### India: Birth Place to Four of the World's Major Religions

1. As a 2-3 minute warm-up, project [slide 22](#) of the accompanying PPT for students to consider and respond to silently, in writing: "All paths to God are valid – and therefore all religions have to be honored. The whole world is one family." What religion do you think believes this and why?
2. After a few minutes, ask students to share their thoughts with the class, listing the various religions to which the students tribute the concept and explaining their reasoning. Finally, let students know that this is a tenant of Hinduism. **Asudhaiva Kutumbakam** is a Sanskrit phrase found in Hindu texts such as the Maha Upanishad, which means "the world is one family." Ask students if any of them already know

anything about Hinduism. Explain to students that **Hinduism** is an Indian religion, a way of life, widely practiced in South Asia. **Hinduism** has been called the oldest religion in the world, and some practitioners and scholars refer to it as **Sanātana Dharma**, "the eternal tradition," or the "eternal way," beyond human history.

4. Ask students if any of them can identify any of the other major faiths of India then let them know that they will be exploring the faiths of India in today's lesson. Provide students with the religions worksheet (available on page 24 of the teaching guide.) As an overview, tell students that you are going to play a four minute video clip for them from [Remarkable Journey](#) and that they should jot down anything they learn about each of the four on the worksheet as they view. If any of the images they see in the clip stick with them, they can also sketch. After viewing the clip, discuss the questions below.

- **The Four Major Faiths of India | 20:41 – 24:19**

- While to Pall and Sawtanter Sandhu "the most beautiful angle about India is its diversity," what is the "common thread" that weaves the entire population together?
- What are the four major faiths of India and what do you know about each? (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, & Sikhism)
- What are the **Vedas**? (The wisdom and teachings of ancient India's **Sages**, or **Rishis**, handed down through oral tradition, inspired and laid the foundations for early Indian civilization. Considered sacred revelations, these were called '**the Vedas**'- and contained knowledge of the sciences, healing practices, hymns, arts, stories, and the basic tenets of a **Hindu** philosophy of life.)
- Usha says that "**Hinduism** to us is **Sanatana Dharma**." What does this mean?
  - "Basically it's a nature religion where we are looking at peace and harmony, both within ourselves and also with the environment around us." (Go to <http://veda.wikidot.com/sanatana-dharma> for additional information.)
  - What does Moni mean in saying that Hinduism is not just a religion, but a lifestyle?
  - What are some of the aspects of Hinduism mentioned in this clip?
    - "...the many images are symbols through which Hindus experience the concept of a unifying, universal spirit: **Brahman**. That one-ness is represented by the **bindi**, from the **Sanskrit** word "bindu" – a symbol that is seen as the source of all creation."
- Usha notes (and as we discussed at the start of class) that "The ancient sages said 'All paths to God are valid – and therefore all religions have to be honored. **Vasudhaiva kutumbakm**'...they looked at the '**whole world as one family**.'" What is your opinion of this concept from the Sanskrit? Do you think this is a common world view, the "whole world as one family?" Explain.
- Additional information to share or review with students:
  - According to the 2011 census, 79.8% of the population of India practices Hinduism.
  - **Jainism**, guided by **Mahavira**, emphasizes total nonviolence, expressed in the word "**Ahimsa**." **Mahatma Gandhi** was deeply influenced by Jain philosophy.
  - **Prince Siddhartha Gautama** was a Hindu who became the **Buddha**, 2,500 years ago. He taught the way to "right" understanding in life, and the practices to help end suffering through detachment, compassion, and non-judgment.
  - And **Sikhism** was founded by **Guru Nanak** in India in the 1500s. Many Sikh men maintain a strong visual identity as part of their faith practice (i.e., the **turban**.) Their sacred text includes teachings from many spiritual traditions of the world.

- **Optional:** Teachers who want to provide more specific information regarding each religion can also utilize the following videos:
  - Hinduism - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EICcU9oN-s>
  - Buddhism <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxq-RiLb-6M>
  - Jainism - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_VA7mWWn58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_VA7mWWn58)
  - Sikhism - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-ejxm-QHn4>

### “Dharma”

5. Next, focus students on the word “**dharma**,” which was briefly mentioned in the clip. Ask them to share anything they think they know about this concept and explain that dharma is a key spiritual concept with multiple meanings in [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#), [Sikhism](#) and [Jainism](#). Tell students they are going to view a 5 minute clip that will tell them more about this and that they should fill out the middle of their worksheet with words, phrases and/or sketches that represent what they think Dharma is. After the clip, discuss using the questions below.

- ***The Indian Focus on Serving Others - “Dharma” | 46:22 - 51:20***
  - This segment begins with a quote from Gandhi: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” What does this mean? What examples are shared in this segment of Indians following this philosophy? (i.e., Priya Sunil Kishnani becoming a doctor, not for the money to but make society a better place; Jayant Baliga with a dream of creating a technology to help mankind rather than a dream of getting rich; Dr Jindal’s *People’s Medical Clinic*; Rakesh and Dolly Agarwal’s eye clinics; etc.)
  - What is Dharma and what are some of the various ways that Indians live by this belief?
    - For Indians, the commitment to family, providing for community, and sustaining a spiritual society is ongoing through their belief in “[Dharma](#).” Usha describes Dharma as “duty, duty to oneself, to take care of your inner self, and create the peace and harmony within, so that you can express that in the world. To do something in the greatest good of all is Dharma.”
  - What does Vandana’s father always asking “Whom did you help today” tell you about the Indian culture? How does this compare to the typical American culture?
  - Why did Priya want to become a doctor? Why did Jayant want to work in technology?
  - In what ways does Gandhi’s spirit of service continue to influence Indians and their contributions to communities across NC today?
  - If you yourself are connected with any religion, do you see any comparisons between your beliefs and Dharma? Explain.

### Other Religions Practiced & Welcomed in India

6. Explain to students that while Hinduism is the most practiced religion of India, its second most practiced religion is not one of the four that claims India as its birthplace. Allow students to predict what this religion is then let them know that behind Hinduism (as of the 2011 census), Islam was noted as the most popular faith, with 14.2% adhering to it. The remaining 6% (as of 2011) adheres to other religions (Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and various indigenous ethnically-bound faiths). Let students know that

Christianity is actually the 3rd largest religion in India. Play the one-minute clip for students and use the discussion questions below to debrief.

- **Other Religions Welcomed in India | 24:20 – 25:19**

- In addition to the four major faiths practiced in India, what religions from outside the Indian subcontinent are practiced there? (**Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam**)
- What countries do you typically associate the practice of Islam with? Does it surprise you that Islam is the second most practiced religion in India?
- In this clip a quote from the [RigVeda](#) was shared: “May all noble thoughts come from all corners of the Universe.” How is this concept illustrated in India’s diversity of religion?
- What examples do we see of not only a diversity of religion, but a tolerance of such diversity? Is this common in other parts of the world, even in America? Explain.
- Were you surprised to hear that India has the second largest Muslim population in the world? How does this change your conception of Islam?

### Indians Maintain Religious Practices & Build Faith Communities in North Carolina

7. Ask students to focus on Afroz Taj’s comment at the end of the clip they just viewed, who says that “India is a garden of all kind of flowers, and they know how to live with each other.” (This quote is also available for projecting on [slide 20](#) of the PPT.) Ask students to discuss what they think he means by this. Ask students to then evaluate whether they think this philosophy is one that is true of America. Have students consider what it might be like to come to a new country where the religion that you practice is looked upon as totally foreign, or even negatively due to the lack of knowledge surrounding it. How might you cope?
8. Play a final four-minute clip for students that addresses the ways Indians have built faith communities in North Carolina. Ask students to fill in their worksheets as they watch and answer: How have Asian Indians maintained their religious practices in North Carolina, while still integrating with the community here? Use the discussion questions below to further debrief the segment.

- **Indians Maintain Religious Practices & Build Faith Communities in North Carolina | 25:20 – 29:50**

- Although Indians often came together in temples to practice their varied religions, why do you think they also “yearned to replant their own [specific] faith traditions?”
- What challenges did Indian immigrants face in maintaining their diverse faiths in a predominantly Christian North Carolina? Why do you think people from different religions sometimes negatively judge those who practice other religions, even though the root of what they believe in (faith, love, family, etc.) can be similar?
- What is a [Gurudwara](#) and where was the first one built in North Carolina? What does Herjit’s family’s willingness to travel 100 miles to worship there tell you about the importance of religion and community in their **Sikh** faith?
- Why is having a [mosque](#) so important to Muslims?
- How do you think practitioners of Hindu felt when a [Hindu temple](#) was opened in 2009 in Cary, NC?
- According to Ajantha, why are the various religious spaces of Indian faiths – such as [temples](#),

**mosques** and **Gurudwaras**, as well as Indian Orthodox and Catholic churches – an important aspect of the Asian Indian experience in North Carolina?

- Marisa Dsouza stated, “We incorporate our food, we incorporate the way we dress, and we incorporate some of the Indian festivals. We have a [Keralite](#) friend and we celebrate [Onam](#) with rosary and after the rosary all the non-Christian friends came to join in the celebration.” How does this one comment illustrate the great respect, tolerance and acceptance of all faiths and practices that Indians encompass? Similarly, how does Parul’s grandmother respond when he asks her why she has [Mahavir Bhagwan](#), some Hindu idols, and a small picture of Jesus?

9. Project [slide 23](#) for students to examine. It is worth noting to students that in America, the religious shares of Indian Americans are markedly different from those of India itself (where an estimated 79% of the population is Hindu and only 2.5% is Christian. (Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/30/5-facts-about-indian-americans>) Teachers may want to ask students to hypothesize why the difference.

### Religion Scrapbook Assignment

10. As a culminating activity, students (individually or in partners, depending on the teacher’s discretion) will delve further into one particular religion mentioned during class by creating a scrapbook of that religion. Provide students with the attached assignment sheet and go over the details, accepting any questions students have and letting them know how much class time (if any) and homework time will be provided for completion. Teachers should edit the attached assignment sheet to include additional specifics that might be needed for a particular class (i.e., how many pages a scrapbook should contain, specific questions to answer, a written description to accompany the scrapbook, etc.)

# The Flavor of Memory

*I feel like everything I make is a memoir on a plate. And I just think if I cannot eat in India, the memories will keep me alive and this food is an expression of everything I am.*

*-Vimala Rajendran, Curryblossom Cafe*



The taste, texture, and smell of certain foods or spices can effectively trigger memories of meals, events, and even places from the past. What is one food that you associate with a certain place, event, or person? Use the space below to illustrate or explain that memory.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## Religion Scrapbook Assignment

### Circle the religion you will research:

Hinduism      Buddhism      Jainism      Sikhism      Judaism      Zoroastrianism      Christianity      Islam

Scrapbooks are fun ways to express your creativity. They include compiling and collaging various images, clippings, drawings, text, etc. in creative and meaningful ways. For this assignment, you will create a scrapbook of the religion assigned to you that will educate its reader about the religion and pull them in visually. To do this, you must research the religion and gather information and images, then decide how to put your research together and display it in a creative and visually appealing way. Final scrapbooks can be done digitally (a technological scrapbook in a platform of your choice, such as Google Slides or Power Point) or by hand.

While you have some creative leeway in what you present and how, your scrapbook must contain information about the religions:

- Founders/Prophets/Key Figures
- History/Historical Aspects
- Key Beliefs/Tenants
- Prayers/Quotes
- Symbols
- Practices (Prayers, worship habits, meditations, etc.)
- Accessories of Practice (dress, head covering, jewelry, face/body paint, etc.)
- Spaces for Worship/Architectural Features/Artistic Features
- Events/Celebrations/Holidays
- Presence of Religion in America/North Carolina

In true scrapbook form, you should include labels with the visual images that explain the necessary information. In addition to images, consider including excerpts of text, quotations, symbols and hand drawings. You should also think about the overall design and “feel” of your scrapbook as it relates to your particular religion. Have fun and be creative!

### Questions/Notes:

