

Diversity in India

Religion

Religious diversity has been an important part of Indian life for centuries, despite the lack of an official state religion in India. Religion plays an important role in temple festivals, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and family traditions. In terms of religious practice, Hinduism is the most popular in India, followed by Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Christianity.

Religious composition of the Indian population, 1961-2001

RELIGION	1961		1981		2001	
	VALUE (MILLIONS)	Amount in percent	VALUE (MILLIONS)	Amount in percent	VALUE (MILLIONS)	Amount in percent
Hindus	367	83.4	550	82.6	828	80.5
Muslims	47	10.7	76	11.4	138	13.4
Christians	11	2.4	16	2.4	24	2.3
Sikhs	8	1.8	13	2.0	19	1.9
Buddhists	3	0.7	5	0.7	8	0.8
Jains	2	0.5	3	0.5	4	0.4
Others	1	0.3	3	0.4	7	0.6
All Religions	439	100.0	665	100.0	1,029	100.0
The religion is not stated	c	d	d	d	1	0.1

Among 1,000 Indians, only 23 Christians, 19 Sikhs, 8 Buddhists, and 4 Jains were present in 2001. Muslims are the second largest religious group in the country. Christian, Jains, and Sikh populations are concentrated in fewer states than Hindus and Muslims. Approximately half of the Christian population in the country was concentrated in the four southern states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Punjab is home to 76 percent of the 19.2 million Sikhs, and Maharashtra is home to 73 percent of the 8.0 million Buddhists in India. Traditionally, many Buddhists come from the Dalit caste (untouchable Hindus), who converted to Buddhism to overcome their low status. 4.2 million Jains live in four major states, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, who make up 72 percent of the total population.

During the 1991 and 2001 censuses, the population of India increased by 21.5 percent, but this growth was not equally distributed among religious groups. The number of Parsis actually declined. Muslims grew by 29 percent over the period, while the Sikhs (after Parsis) grew by 17 percent. Aside from Muslims, three other religious communities experienced faster growth: Jains (26 percent), Buddhists (23 percent), and Christians (22 percent). While different growth rates can be alarming, actual figures indicate that the change is much less significant than it appears. Between 1991 and 2001, Hindus grew by 140 million, while Muslims grew by 37 million. There was only a small decrease of Hindus, from 84 percent to 81 percent, between the 1961 and 2001 censuses. According to census data, India's religious makeup will remain the same decades from now. The Sikh proportion remained at 2 percent throughout the entire period. Moreover, family planning is on the rise among all groups, so further stabilisation is very likely.