

# Origins of Human Rights: Buddhism and Hinduism

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# Shrikrishna Venkatesh Puntambekar - Freedoms

- Respondent to UNESCO's human rights questionnaire
- Gave multiple essential freedoms:
  - Freedom from violence
    - “*Ahimsa*” (respect for all living things, avoidance of violence)
  - Freedom from want
    - “*Asteya*” (Sanskrit term for "non-stealing")
  - Freedom from exploitation
    - “*Aparigraha*” (non-possessiveness or non-greediness)
  - Freedom from early death/disease
    - “*Armritatva*”/ “*Arogya*” - health (Hindi)



# Shrikrishna Venkatesh Puntambekar - Duties

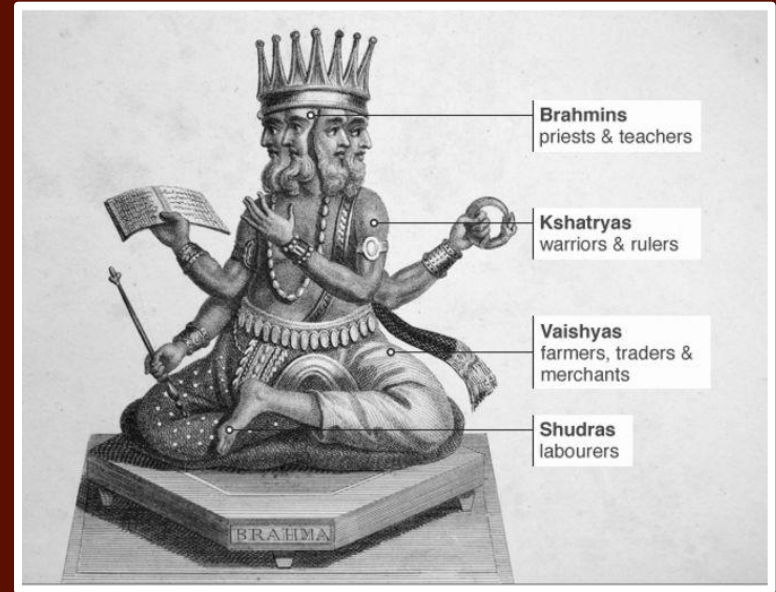
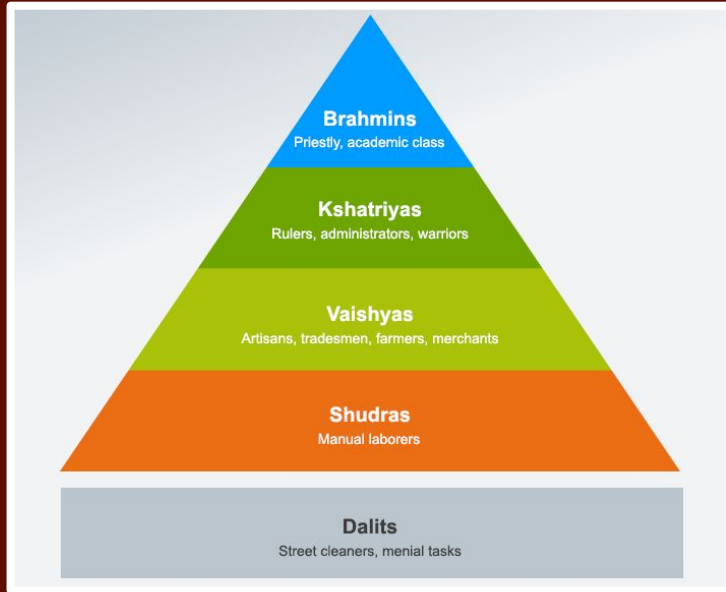
- He also laid out duties and responsibilities needed to achieve these freedoms:
  - **Absence of intolerance**
    - “*Akrodha*” (free from anger)
  - **Compassion**
    - “*Bhutadaya*” / “*Adroha*”
  - **Knowledge**
    - “*Vidya*” (religious truth, knowledge of true reality, similar to a god) / “*Jnana*”
  - **Freedom of conscience**
  - **Freedom from fear, frustration, despair**
    - “*Pravrtti*”, “*Abhaya*” (fearlessness in Hindi), “*Dhrti*” ('act with determination', 'patience', 'firmness')

# Religious Concepts in Hinduism

- *Dharma*: underlying right behavior and social order mandated by natural law
- Repaying debt to family, society, and gods
- *Mahabharata*: Hindu text
- Defines debt we owe to other humans
- Caste system & *varnas* (classes)
  - Body parts of *Purusha*
- Right to materials needed (e.g. food, shelter, tools)



# Caste System (Diagrams)



# Religious Concepts in Buddhism

- *Dharma*: underlying right behavior and social order taught by the Buddha
- *Eightfold Path*
  - Right Action
  - Right Speech
  - Right Livelihood
- Middle Way
  - “a holy man should avoid--the habitual practice of... self-indulgence, which is vulgar and profitless... and the habitual practice of self-mortification, which is painful and equally profitless” - The Buddha, First Sermon



# Primary Source: The Lotus Sutra Chapter II. Skillful Means

- *The Lotus Sutra* - tremendously influential Mahāyāna sutra
- The Six Perfections - *Pāramitā*
  - *Dāna* - giving, generosity
  - *Śīla* - integrity, virtue, discipline, moral code
  - *Kṣānti* - perseverance, patience, forbearance, acceptance, forgiveness
  - *Vīrya* - diligence, energy, enthusiasm, effort
  - *Dhyāna* - meditation, introspection
  - *Prajñā* - wisdom, truth, insight

# Primary Source: The Lotus Sutra Chapter II. Skillful Means

All those sentient beings  
Who encountered and heard the teaching  
Of the buddhas of the past,  
And who accumulated various merits  
Through acts of giving (*dāna*), integrity (*śīla*), perseverance (*kṣānti*),  
Diligence (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*)  
Have certainly attained the path of the buddhas.



# Primary Source: The Lotus Sutra

## Origin:

- The Lotus Sutra is an extremely important Mahayana sutra
- Chapter II written around 50 CE
- Translated into English by Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism)
- It was likely translated many times before by unknown translators

## Purpose:

- To convince others to join the religion
- To lay out the values of the Buddha and the religion as a whole

- (The translation) to allow English audiences to read the texts as accurately as possible

## Value:

- General moral ideas and values
- The basis for many schools of Buddhism

## Limitation:

- Translated dozens, if not hundreds, of times
- Small nuances or entire meanings of the original passages could be lost
- We don't know if the Buddha actually preached these things or if they were added later to adapt new ideas

# Five Pillars of Human Rights

- Universality
- Equality
- Liberty
- Justice
- Fraternity

# Sources

- Chapter One: Early Ethical Contributions to Human Rights
- Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra
- \*The Lotus Sutra\*
- [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/religion/f2001/edit/docs/buddhas\\_first\\_sermon.htm](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/religion/f2001/edit/docs/buddhas_first_sermon.htm)
- <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-indian-buddhism/>
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