



Course: World Religions

Lesson Three

Title: Hinduism

Text: Acts 17:16 'Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.'

Introduction: Characteristics of Hinduism

Hinduism is a synthesis of the religions of the Indian sub continent.

Hinduism embraces all forms of religion or none.

A person who denies the existence of God can still be a Hindu.

Hinduism has no founder.

It has beliefs but it holds to no particular fixed creed.

Does not hold to the final authority of any particular scripture.

Hinduism changes its form as the need arises – it has evolved over the past 3500 years..

Hinduism has no centralised organisation

Hindu is a Persian word for 'Indus River'.

Hinduism was the name given to the religion of Indians by the invading muslims in the 13th century..

In India, Hinduism is known as ***Sanatana Dharma*** (eternal law).

Four main denominations within Hinduism

- 1) **Vaisnava tradition** – followers of Vishnu (revealed as Krishna or Rama).

Krishna Consciousness is identified with the followers of Vishnu.

Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu.

Devotees of Vishnu mark their forehead with three vertical lines of Ash.

- 2) **Shaivites** – followers of Shiva.

Characteristics of Shaivites: Yoga; Meditation; Love for all living things.

Devotees of Shiva mark their foreheads with three horizontal lines of Ash.

- 3) **Shaktas** – followers of Shakti (mother goddess)

Known by other names Devi, Parvati, Durga, Kali).

Followers of Durga display their devotion with a red mark between the eyebrows.

- 4) **Smartas** – Usually worship five deities (Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Ganesh, Surya).

Six manifestations of deity (Ganesha, Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu, Surya, Skanda).

Allows devotees to choose deity to worship.

There are two schools of Hindu philosophy (Darshanas)

Yoga and Vedanta

- 1) **Yoga** - Spiritual practices (Sadhana). Meditation based on Sankhya.

Aim of yoga – paths to reach the goals of life.

Ultimate goal union with God

Four paths of yoga

- 1) Karma – path of action. The need to fulfil your duty.
- 2) Jnanam – path of knowledge
- 3) Raja – path of meditation
- 4) Bhakti – path of devotion. Faith expressed in devotion. God is worshipped in the rituals, ceremonies, hymns of praise and through veneration of the idols.

- 2) **Vedanta** - Metaphysics (mysticism as opposed to Vedic ritualism).

Self realisation (cosmic consciousness)

Advaita Vedanta (a branch of Vedanta school)

Teach that only Brahman is real.

Everything else is an illusion.

True knowledge of Brahman is the only way to be liberated from suffering.

The soul (atman) is an illusion and only Brahman exists.

Freedom will come through knowledge of the reality of Brahman and the loss of illusion.. The path of knowledge (jnanam)

Four other schools of Hindu philosophy are no longer upheld separately.

Vaisheshika - Empiricist physics.

Nyaya - Logics and epistemology.

Sankhya - Mind and matter.

Mimamsa - Hermeneutics and ritual as opposed to ascetics and mysticism.

Introductory Story: Integration of Hinduism into Western Society.

The popularity of Hinduism in Western Culture has come primarily through Yoga techniques.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008)

Taught Transcendental Meditation.

Regarded the Bhagavad Gita as the 'scripture of Yoga' (1963).

Influence upon the Beatles and others in the pop world made TM popular in Western Society.

Personal Story: Speaking with a student on a train in India.

When I was on a train travelling across India I met a young Indian student.

He was a college student, and thought Christianity was a western religion that was having a detrimental influence on Indian culture.

One concern that he had was that a Christian woman who married did not put a mark on her forehead between the eyes as a token of faithfulness to her husband.

I told him that the mark was not cultural but religious. The mark represents the place of the third eye. It is associated with the worship of Hinduism and not merely a cultural tradition.

We spoke together for some hours and discussed together how the gods of Hinduism have their origin not in India but in Babylon.

1. Origins of Hinduism

Hinduism originates from Babylonian religion.

It contains many similarities with Babylonian religion.

The Babylonian religious system was developed at the time of Nimrod (Genesis 10)..

The wife of Nimrod was Semiramis.

According to tradition she is the founder of the Babylonian worship of the Mother and Child.

Third Millennium BC

Excavation (1921-22) in the Punjab and Indus Valley, show that in the third millennium BC the cities were built on the River Ravi and River Indus.

Dependence on the river caused them to be held sacred.

Ritual bathing.

Political and Religious combined.

Mother goddess – giver of life and fertility.

Male god – horns and three faces in position of yogi.

Surrounded by animals – Shiva 'Lord of the beasts'.

Second Millennium BC

The Aryans invaded India mid 2nd millennium BC.

Language developed into Sanskrit.

Pre Aryan – gathered around rivers

Aryans gathered around fire.

2. The Scriptures of Hinduism

Scriptures divided into Sruti (revealed) and Smriti (remembered).

The Most important 'sruti' texts are the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The Vedas (the sacred books of knowledge)

Four Vedic books

1. Rigveda - collection of over 1000 mantras (hymns).
2. Samaveda – arrangement of mantras for use in offering sacrifice.
3. Yajurveda – instructions for sacrifices
4. Atharvaveda - spells and incarnations to be used against evil. Duties and Spiritual truths.

The Brahmanas (commentary on the Vedas)

The Upanishads (mystic speculations)

Upanishad means 'to sit near to' – conveys the idea of being taught by a teacher or guru.

123 books.

12 accepted by all Hindus.

Form the Vedanta school of Philosophy.

Brahman – main principle of Vedanta.

Philosophy and Cosmic reality.

The Bhagavad-Gita (literally: Song of the God).
Bhagavad Gita is part of epic, the Mahabharata.
Great importance to Vedanta thought.

3. Teachings of Hinduism

Main Beliefs held in Hinduism

1) The Absolute - Brahman

One Universal Spirit, Brahman (World Soul).

Hindu Trimvirate

The Brahman is a triad of gods (trimutri).

- 1) Brahma; the creator.
- 2) Vishnu; the preserver.
- 3) Shiva; the destroyer.

Other attributes of the triad are symbolised and called gods or goddesses. Multiplicity of gods - manifestations or attributes of Brahman.

2) Karma (actions) and Dharma (duty and ethics)

Good and bad actions determine a person's destiny.

Action and reaction; Cause and effect.

A good action has a good reaction.

A bad action has a bad reaction.

Submission to Fate – because fate is determined by Karma.

3) Reincarnation

Life is a continuation of births and rebirths (samsara).

A person's Karma will determine the existence in the next life.

4) Varna (class system -caste)

Karma will determine caste.

Brahmin – highest caste

Karma determines destiny and is responsible for rebirth as a woman or an untouchable.

5) Nirvana

Complete freedom from all suffering by non existence through realisation that nothing exists except God.

It is self realisation – self does not exist.

God realisation – only God exists.

Summary:

- 1) Unlike other religions Hinduism does not have a founder, but it is closely related to the religious system that began in ancient Babylon.
- 2) Hinduism does not uphold any particular creed and is not exclusive. This has allowed the religion to evolve. Hinduism can embrace other concepts of God and develop them within the concept of Brahman.
- 3) Hinduism maintains the cycle of birth and rebirth continues until Nirvana is reached. Destiny is determined by Karma.
- 4) Christianity maintains that salvation is through the finished work of Christ and sin is forgiven through the sacrifice of Christ. If any person is in Christ they are a new creation in Him. This is not reincarnation but a completely new creation.

[Back to Index](#)