

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HINDUISM (Part one)

1.0. Introduction .....	1
2.0. The Concept of God in Hinduism. ....	2
2.1. Brahman .....	2
2.2. Gods and goddesses. ....	3
2.2.1 The amorality of the gods.....	3
3.0. A Christian perspective. ....	4
3.1. Christ abolishes all distinctions.....	4
3.2. God and man in Christianity. ....	4
3.2.1. The god delusion. ....	5
3.2.3. God is indivisibly one. ....	5
3.3. God is a moral God. ....	6

### 1.0. Introduction

Hinduism has no single historical founder, no unified system of belief, no single doctrine of salvation and no centralized authority. In this sense it is different from other world religions. (Warrier in Partridge 2005:134)<sup>1</sup>.

The term Hinduism itself is a nineteenth century designation; however, archaeological excavations trace it back to the Indus Valley civilization (2500-1500 BC). The next 2000 years were dominated by the Aryans from whose writings, the *Vedas* – written in Sanskrit - much of Hinduism is based and evolved. Today there are over 900 million Hindus in the world making it the third largest religion in the world with the majority residing in India but due to migration patterns many have moved to the West. The origin of the caste-system, a highly controversial subject in India and much of the world, traces its origins to this period of the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* contained rituals prescribing various offerings to diverse gods. Those consecrated to perform them were the *Brahmins* or priests who assumed the highest position in the hierarchy. After them came the *Kshatriyas* (warriors or rulers), *Vaishyas* (merchants and commoners) and finally the *Sudras* (untouchables).

Alongside the *Vedas*, a corpus of texts called the *Upanishads* were developed which had a strong bearing on Hindu ideology and beliefs. The *Upanishads* placed a greater premium on spiritual knowledge at the expense of ritual performance. To understand Hindu concepts of salvation, which these series of studies grapple with, one must have some familiarity with the central concept of *Dharma*.

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<sup>1</sup> Partridge, C. (ed.). 2005. Hinduism. The New Lion Handbook: The World's Religions (Third Edition). Lion Hudson, Oxford.

*Dharma* is an “[...] ideology related to ritual and moral behaviour and defined good conduct according to such factors as one’s class (*varna*). Neglecting *Dharma* was believed to lead to undesirable social as well as personal consequences” (Warrier in Partridge 2005:137).

Dharma is thus what all Hindus ought to do in order to attain salvation. To determine this, however, is not an easy task. There is a broad consensus that *Dharma* has three vital components to it: *karma-samsara-moksha*. In brief, *Karma* refers to the law of cause and effect; *samsara* is the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation or the cycle of birth, death and rebirth while *moksha* is the teaching of salvation from the last stage.

In the first instance, I will start with an outline of the Hindu understanding of God and compare with it with the Christian one.

## **2.0. The Concept of God in Hinduism.**

Hindus may be polytheistic or monistic (believing that all reality is actually one), There are even orthodox Hindus who are atheistic. Many Hindus believe that there is one God (*Brahman*) who can be worshipped in many forms. (Warrier in Partridge 2005:146).

### **2.1. Brahman**

The concept of *Brahman* is very important in Hinduism. It can generally be understood to mean the ultimate reality or the cosmos. Sometimes this ultimate reality is personified as the god Brahma. Many Hindus believe that the Self is identical with the *Brahman*.

The great Hindu philosopher-saint Shankara (c.CE 788-820) expounded an austere non-dualistic (*advaita*) system. *Advaita* holds that one’s true self (*atman*) is literally identical to *Brahman*. (Warrier in Partridge 2005:142).

Thus, the objective of meditation and yoga in some schools of thought is to achieve oneness and harmony with *Brahman*. This concept basically proclaims a unity and interrelatedness of all things ontologically. Unknown to many, it is this theme which runs through Michael Jackson’s 1988 pop hit “You’re just another part of me”. Singing this song, you inadvertently end up affirming a central Hindu tenet. The planets are lining up is a reference to the Hindu practice of determining auspicious moments through astrology.

We're Takin' Over  
We Have The Truth  
This Is The Mission

To See It Through

Don't Point Your Finger  
Not Dangerous  
This Is Our Planet  
You're One Of Us

We're Sendin' Out  
A Major Love  
And This Is Our  
Message To You  
(Message To You)  
The Planets Are Linin' Up  
We're Bringin' Brighter Days  
They're All In Line  
Waitin' For You  
Can't You See . . . ?  
You're Just Another Part Of Me . .

## 2.2. Gods and goddesses.

Hindus may worship many gods but they also believe that all gods are one. (Warrier in Partridge 2005:148).

Although the above is true, the Hindu understanding of God is very flexible and fluid. For example, God can assume many forms and shapes like a baby, friend, lover, king, mother, male or female or formless like *Brahman*. Hindus also have a concept of god which bears some resemblance to the Trinity which they call *Trimurti* and comprises the three main gods – Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Nowadays, however, 5 deities are popular: Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Surya and Ganesha. Vishnu, the preserver of the world order, sometimes comes an incarnation to the world when it is threatened by destructive forces. The two most popular incarnations or *avatars* are Rama and Krishna.

### 2.2.1 The amorality of the gods.

In Hinduism, the gods and goddesses are considered to be amoral or simply above the constraints of morality. For example, one writer refers to the well-known Hindu epic *Ramayana* which is the story of Rama, an *avatar* of Vishnu, who entered the world to fight the forces of the evil king Ravana and rescue his wife Sita. She adds:

Although the gods ultimately win, they have to compromise and often resort to devious stratagems to achieve their victory. The end result is that of a tainted world in which even the gods are not entirely free from unethical actions. (Warrier in Partridge 2005:145).

Even Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, was known to seduce girls and steal items like butter. It must be emphasized that Hindus claim this behaviour is not appropriate for any human to emulate

but that is beside the point for them. Gods and goddesses expect humans to work out their own salvation following the precepts of *Dharma* but they, as gods, have transcended the human realm.

### **3.0. A Christian perspective.**

The Christian ought to firstly appreciate the fact that Hindus are concerned about salvation and the performance of duties which have eternal consequences. Furthermore, there is no denying that the life of Hindus pulsates with religiosity and the acknowledgement that there is a spiritual world which has a direct bearing on this physical world. Thus, we welcome a comparative exchange and desire to point the way to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **3.1. Christ abolishes all distinctions.**

Regarding the Hindu practice of caste-system *Varna*, it appears that the stratification by caste was ironically introduced through religion. The lowest caste *sudras* were deemed unworthy to offer rituals to please the gods. We maintain that a true and righteous faith should rather do exactly the opposite and abolish such unfair stratifications. In this sense, I do not single out Hinduism alone but am reminded also of the manner in which the Catholic Church set up a hierarchy based on priesthood which the Reformation challenged. The Bible states:

**Eph 2:13** But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

**Eph 2:14** For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us];

**Eph 2:15** Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace;

**Eph 2:16** And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

**Eph 2:19** Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

Furthermore, the apostle Paul makes it explicit that in Christ, all ethnic and other distinctions dissolve:

**Gal 3:27** For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

**Gal 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

#### **3.2. God and man in Christianity.**

Interestingly, Hindus of the *advaita* School believe the Self *atman* is identical with the ultimate cosmic reality *Brahman*. In one sense, the Biblical records show some similarity to a degree:

**Gen 2:7** And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

This means that the spirit or essence in man owes its origin to God. But that's where the similarity ends. Hinduism holds that man's soul is eternal and identical with the *Brahman* but the Bible teaches that man's soul and spirit are entirely dependent on God and not eternal. Furthermore, we may all have the same spirit substance as Michael Jackson's song implies but God has delineated the boundaries of our spirits which cannot merge in some kind of common human spirit pool. Our spirit identities are different, distinct and separate.

### **3.2.1. The god delusion.**

The dangerous implications of the Self and *Brahman* understanding of unity in Hinduism is that it allows for humans to become gods. In fact this is the objective of some Hindus – to achieve godhood. This is what the red dot on the forehead symbolizes for some practitioners – that through meditation, *Bhakti* or devotion to a deity or knowledge as a third vehicle, it is possible to gain enlightenment evidenced by the opening of the third eye. Christianity rejects such a suggestion as synonymous with the lie peddled by Satan. In fact, the first sin in the history of the universe was Satan and our first parents entertaining the delusion of godhood.

**Gen 3:5** For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

**Isa 14:12** How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! [how] art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

**Isa 14:13** For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

**Isa 14:14** I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

**Isa 14:15** Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

**Eze 28:2** Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart [is] lifted up, and thou hast said, I [am] a God, I sit [in] the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou [art] a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God:

### **3.2.3. God is indivisibly one.**

The Hindu concept of God is sometimes referred to as henotheistic meaning the belief in One God while remaining open to the existence and veneration of other gods. In contrast, the Bible is strictly monotheistic. God abides supremely and majestically alone with no co-eternals, co-equals or con-substantials.

**Deut 32:39** See now that I, [even] I, [am] he, and [there is] no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither [is there any] that can deliver out of my hand.

**Isa 44:24** Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I [am] the LORD that maketh all [things]; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;

**1Ti 1:17** Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, [be] honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Also, true monotheism denies coupling this one God with other co-gods in a cabal or committee of threes or fives such as the Trimurti. We find the similarity between Trinity and Trimurti to be highly suspicious in the least, but I will not pursue this subject further at this juncture. All we can affirm is that the Bible speaks of no such concept as the Trinity.

### **3.3. God is a moral God.**

Finally, with regards to amorality, it is salutary to define what we mean by morality initially. Morality can be conceived of as a code of conduct that is authoritative in matters of right and wrong. Most religions agree that morals are defined and instituted by God. Humanists believe that humans ought to discuss and evolve concepts of morality based on an “overlapping consensus” (Rawls 1971)<sup>2</sup>. However, the discussion here will be limited to those who share a common religious platform predicated on God as the Law Giver. Contrary to the amorality of Hindu gods, the God of the Bible is a moral God who Himself cannot transcend or compromise His standards of morals as He does not change and holds all immorality in contempt. Some scriptures elucidate this point:

**Lev 18:22** Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it [is] abomination.

**Deut 12:31** Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.

**Deut 12:32** What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

**John 8:46** Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

He does not have a nonchalant or complacent attitude towards morals but declares that they are implanted in the conscience of every individual which explains why Cain accepted his punishment when he killed Abel even before the Law was given. As such, the concept of gods who seduce and steal is questionable and really makes a mockery of the holy God who cannot sin. It would beg the question: why would anyone strive for salvation through whatever means if the end result is to become a god who can seduce and steal? These gods cannot be above morality and without sounding contemptuous, I think it is legitimate to challenge Hindus to interrogate this concept of amoral gods. In conclusion I would like to draw our attention the morals demanded by our God as outlined in the 10 commandments to remind us of His holy nature and challenge us. The first one is highly pertinent to our study.

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<sup>2</sup> Rawls, J. 1971. A Theory of Justice. Harvard University Press.

**Exd 20:3** Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

**Exd 20:4** Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness [of any thing] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth:

**Exd 20:5** Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation] of them that hate me;

**Exd 20:6** And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

**Exd 20:7** Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

**Exd 20:8** Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

**Exd 20:9** Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

**Exd 20:10** But the seventh day [is] the sabbath of the LORD thy God: [in it] thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that [is] within thy gates:

**Exd 20:11** For [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them [is], and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

**Exd 20:12** Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

**Exd 20:13** Thou shalt not kill.

**Exd 20:14** Thou shalt not commit adultery.

**Exd 20:15** Thou shalt not steal.

**Exd 20:16** Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

**Exd 20:17** Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that [is] thy neighbour's.

