

An Overview of Hinduism, its Adherents, and Contemporary Indian Political Dynamics

This report provides a comprehensive overview of Hinduism, exploring its multifaceted religious traditions, core tenets, and the historical evolution of the term "Hindu." It delves into the diverse philosophical schools and practices that define this ancient religion. Additionally, the report examines recent political developments within India, highlighting specific internal party dynamics and significant international engagements involving Indian leadership.

Hinduism: An Ancient and Diverse Tradition

Hinduism is an expansive term encompassing a wide array of Indian religious and spiritual traditions, known as **sampradayas**. These traditions are largely unified by adherence to the concept of **dharma**, which signifies a cosmic order maintained through rituals and righteous living, as elaborated in the Vedas. While the term "Hindu" is an exonym, the religion is also referred to by the modern term **Sanātana Dharma**, meaning 'eternal dharma', and historically as **Vaidika Dharma** or **Arya dharma**. Often cited as the world's oldest surviving religion, Hinduism is characterized by its diverse systems of thought, covering theology, mythology, and other topics found in its extensive textual sources.

Hindu scriptures are categorized into **śruti** ('heard') and **smṛti** ('remembered'). Major texts include the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Mahabharata (featuring the Bhagavad Gita), Ramayana, and Agamas. Core beliefs within Hinduism revolve around **karma** (action, intent, and consequences), **saṃsāra** (the cycle of death and rebirth), and the four **Puruṣārthas**, which are the proper goals of human life: **dharma** (ethics/duties), **artha** (prosperity/work), **kama** (desires/passions), and **moksha** (liberation from passions and **saṃsāra**). Religious practices include **bhakti** (devotion), **puja** (worship), **yajna** (sacrificial rites), and **dhyana** (meditation) and yoga. While Hinduism lacks a central doctrinal authority and many adherents do not claim denominational affiliation, scholarly studies recognize four major denominations: Shaivism, Shaktism, Smartism, and Vaishnavism. Furthermore, six **śāstika** schools of Hindu philosophy recognize the authority of the Vedas: Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta.

The Identity of Hindus

Hindus are defined as individuals who religiously adhere to Hinduism, also known by its endonym *Sanʔtana Dharma*. Historically, the term "Hindu" served as a geographical, cultural, and later religious identifier for people residing in the Indian subcontinent. The term is believed to originate from the Avestan scripture Vendidad, referring to the "land of seven rivers" as Hapta Hendu, which is cognate to the Sanskrit term *Sapta Sindhu?*. This term, found in the Rig Veda, referred to a North-western Indian region and eventually to India as a whole. Greek cognates include "Indus" for the river and "India" for the land. Similarly, the Hebrew Bible refers to India as *hʔd-dʔ*. By the 16th century CE, the term "Hindu" began to specifically refer to residents of the subcontinent who were not Turkic or Muslim, marking a shift towards a more exclusive religious identity alongside its earlier geographical and cultural implications.

Contemporary Indian Political Developments

Recent political discourse in India includes developments within the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party, where figures such as Sengottaiyan, O. Panneerselvam (OPS), and V.K. Sasikala have been actively advocating for a united party. During these discussions, E. Palaniswami (EPS) remained notably silent on the matter. On the international front, a significant event involved a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. This convergence of leaders has prompted discussions regarding its potential implications, particularly whether it represents a mere photo opportunity or a more substantial warning to Western powers.

Sources

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