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RELG 213 – Hinduism

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Response Paper 5

Comparing Hinduism and Ghanaian Christianity

From age one to ten I lived in Accra, Ghana with my family near my grandmother. There are many commonly practiced religions in Ghana but the most predominant are Christianity (I assume as a result of British colonization), followed by Islam, and then a plentitude of smaller traditional religions.

As a disclaimer, the ideas expressed in this paper are solely from my personal experience. I, by no means, claim any sort of generalization of Christianity as practiced in Ghana or of the Hindu tradition.

There are many clear parallels between the aspects of Christianity held in common between Ghana and the United States and Hindu traditions. To briefly mention a few, I find the communal aspects of practiced *bhakti* yoga to be quite similar to Christian worship. At the highest level, they are both about adoration of divine. The reason for prayer, singing, and dancing are, in both traditions, to honor the deity. Likewise, Christian communion can be compared to Hindu *prasad* in that practitioners partake of holy food.

We can also explore the similarities between those aspects of Christianity that are unique to Ghanaian culture and Hinduism. First, we see a much more liberal and fluid blending of traditional ideas with Christian worship. In Ghana, we find that although a person may be, Christian they may still partake in rituals that are remnants of the religions of their grandparents. An example of this is the pouring Schnapps or bitters in honor of the deceased. The elder leading the meeting or ritual will say some words about the deceased and then say the phrase “twa omanye aba”, and all others will response “yao” (I don’t actually know what this phrase means but I do remember mimicking the ceremony with my friends as a child and pouring out our juice boxes in honor of those who are no longer with us). This ritual has no basis in the Christian tradition but it is a time honored event that continues till this day. This is very similar to a discussion we had in class about Indian practices surrounding how they honor the dead and how those practices might actually be in conflict with Hindu ideas of *samsara* and *moksha* but they are still done because they “feel right”. This idea rings very true in Ghana. If I were to venture to conjecture, I would say it is because these non-Christian spiritual traditions have been practiced for a very long time, far before the advent of British Colonists and the introduction of Christianity. This idea is not lost on Ghanaian people. For some more devout Ghanaian Christians, there is a stigma to partaking in traditional spiritualism. Some even refer to it as “witchcraft” (this is a basis for many Ghanaian films, in which the devout Christian struggles against but eventually triumphs over his/her enemies who appeal to witch-doctors).

Another parallel between Ghanaian religious practice and Hinduism is the importance of festivals. One example is the *homowo* festival (this ties in to the previously discussed stigma of mixing Christianity and local tradition because my grandmother always warned us to keep our distance from it). The festival incorporates a number of activities but one of the most memorable from my childhood is a parade involving women who have given birth to twins in the past year. The mothers dress in traditional garb with face paint carry baskets filled with something I was far too short to identify and they are marched down the streets by huge crowds who tug on these baskets. Although I have never been to India, I imagine the atmosphere of *homowo* is very similar to the Hindu festivals we discussed in class. People from different religious backgrounds coming together to celebrate in a way that may not necessarily be in alignment with their individual sects!