



Hinduism

Comparative Theology

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Introduction

- **During the fourth century B.C. Aryans--the same people that developed Greek culture--conquered much of present-day India.**
- **Their pantheon of gods, similar to that of the Greeks, combined with indigenous Indian traditions of meditation to form a loose combination of beliefs and practices that came to be known as Hinduism.**

Introduction

- **Hinduism is not really one religion, but many different religions that interact and blend with one another. There is no known founder and no creedal statements of faith. In fact, there is no agreed upon authority save the voluminous sacred body of texts, Vedas, which were written over 1400 year period.**

Introduction

- **The contents of the Vedas are practically unknown to most Hindus and the texts are seldom drawn upon for information or advice. Interestingly, one can be a good Hindu and believe in one god, many gods, or no god at all! For Hindus, contradictory ideas are not a problem as all reality is seen as “one”. ***

- **There are, however, two foundational concepts that almost all Hindus believe: reincarnation and karma.**
- **Reincarnation is the process that the atman, the eternal, uncreated soul, must endure while on the great wheel of samsara (where a soul must go through thousands or even millions of lives all full of suffering) before reaching moksha.**

- **Moksha is the goal as it is liberation from suffering and uniting with the infinite (the end of the soul cycling). For the Hindu, karma is the cumulative value of one's life actions, good minus bad, which determines one's reincarnation level after death. Positive karma would seemingly raise one's station and negative karma would lower it.**

- **Hinduism had never been a missionary religion until the twentieth century and is largely limited to India and groups of emigrant Indians mainly because of its infusion with the caste system.**

- **This is not to say, however, that Hindu thought has not had an effect on American culture. The clearest depiction of this in the unquestioned Vedantic motto: The world's religions offer varying approaches to God, each one true and valid, each religion offering the world a unique and irreplaceable path to God-realization. Vedanta is Hinduism practiced by non Indians here in the States.****

Views On God

- **Brahman is the supreme reality for the Hindu. It is the “thing” to which the also divine atman is trying to unite.**
- **While the Brahman is impersonal, many gods or incarnations of gods who are worshiped by Hindus have personal attributes. Chief among them are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.**

- **In the Hindu “trinity”, Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva is the destroyer. Avatars or incarnations of Vishnu have been sent to earth to bring the message of salvation to man.**
- **Vishnu's incarnations include Rama, a benevolent king, and Krishna, an impetuous, violent, and erotic figure.**

Views On God

- **The gods are sometimes amoral; their freedom from the usual restraints necessary to humans is often celebrated, and they are often represented with sexual imagery.**
- **In addition to these main three gods, there are thousands, perhaps millions of gods/demigods to choose from.**

Man and the Universe

- **The material universe is not the creation of a personal God but is rather a sort of unconscious emanation from the divine.**
- **As such it is (1) beginning less, and some would say endless, and (2) unreal, an illusion because the only true reality is Brahman.**

Man and the Universe

- **Hindus believe that the universe "pulsates," recurrently being destroyed and recreated over periods lasting about 4 billion years.**
- **The world is seen as a huge series of repeated cycles, each cycle being nearly a copy of the last.**

Man and the Universe

- **Man is compelled to play a part in this gigantic, illusory, and wearisome universe. Each human soul is also beginning less and has gone through a series of reincarnations.**
- **Hinduism "solves" the problem of the existence of suffering and evil in a fairly neat manner: all present suffering, it says, is exactly deserved, being the paying back of one's karma, the accumulation of deeds done in past lives--and all present evil will be exactly repaid in the form of suffering in future lives.**

Man and the Universe

- **As a result traditional Hinduism often has not paid much attention to relieving the suffering of people, although social reform movements have arisen in the last century.**
- **What is not addressed, is how the cycle began for the uncreated atman and why it is separated from Brahman to begin with.**

Man and the Universe

- **Life is seen as basically painful, full of distress that is only temporarily masked by earthly pleasures. But underlying the unreality and misery, the human soul is identical with supreme Brahman, who has no part of this sorry universe.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **The final goal of salvation or moksha in Hinduism is escape from the endless round of birth, death, and rebirth.**
- **That can mean an eternal resting place for the individual personality in the arms of a loving, personal God, but it usually means the dissolving of all personality into the unimaginable abyss of Brahman.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **There are basically three paths from which to choose for moksha. They are the path of works (karma), the path of knowledge (jnana) and the path of passionate devotion (bhakti).**
- **When following the path of works, the person strives toward salvation by performing works without regard for personal gain.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **He must follow the occupation of his caste, marry within his caste, eat or not eat certain foods. By following these obligations, the person using his path may hope for a better position in the upcoming reincarnation. A more difficult and exclusive path is the path of knowledge.**
- **This path is available only to men and then only of the highest castes. It includes self renunciation and exploring the Sacred Scriptures, usually with the help of a guru.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **It usually has three steps: Hearing (or reading), thinking, and meditation through yoga. Hindus believe the greatest obstacles to moksha are your own body, mind and personality. Through yoga, the body is controlled by the use of body postures, solitude and breathing exercises.**
- **The mind is restrained through meditation techniques using mantras. The personality or self is suppressed by gurus or masters who humiliate as well as teach. By far the most common path chosen is that of passionate devotion.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **Devotees of this path may choose any one of the thousands of gods, goddesses or demigods in the Hindu arena and passionately worship that god.**
- **It satisfies the longing for a more emotional and personal approach to religion.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **In the way of devotion, the focus is one obtaining the mercy and help of a god in finding release from the cycle of reincarnation. Some Hindus conceive of ultimate salvation as absorption into the one divine reality, with all loss of individual existence.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- Others conceive of it as heavenly existence in adoration of the personal God. For a Hindu, to also follow Christ along this path would be legitimate.
- Most Hindus consider that they have many (as in thousands) reincarnations ahead of them before they can find final salvation, although some sects believe that a gracious divinity will carry them along the way more quickly.

- **Because of the vast number of reincarnations of any given individual, Hinduism recognizes that most people's lack of spiritual development means they must lead normal lives.**
- **However, it is thought that as a person matures he can grow closer to the ideal of full renunciation of the personality.**

- **Thus, pursuit of wealth and love of the opposite sex are considered proper to certain stages of the great wheel of samsara when people grow old (in terms of reincarnations) they often leave behind their worldly possessions to pursue the life of a wandering monk.**
- **Yet no matter what stage of life one is in, "renouncing the fruits of your labors" is the supreme law of morality.**

- **Hindus seek to remain conscious of the illusory nature of this world and so progressively deny themselves, at least in thought, all forms of material, emotional, and even spiritual rewards and property.**
- **For centuries the notions of reincarnation and karma have been used to support the cruelties of the Indian caste system, which relegates the majority of people to poverty and subservience.**

- **Probably as a result of Western influence the caste system has been substantially dismantled, although the idea that all human suffering is deserved is still responsible for a great deal of injustice.**

- **Hindus have a magical and legalistic notion that one can acquire spiritual "points" through contact with all manner of holy objects and persons; that is by and large the Hindu notion of grace.**
- **At least among the uneducated an image of a family god is kept in the house, and villages generally have their local icon as well.**

- **Animals such as cows, monkeys, and snakes are revered. Certain rivers--the Ganges in particular--are thought holy, and bathing in them is thought to improve one's karma.**

- **For the most progressed on the path of knowledge, certain portions of scriptures are memorized and chanted, sacred stories are acted out in plays and songs, and gods are prayed to in an ecstatic manner.**
- **Holy men are highly revered, and in serving them Hindus hope that some of their holiness will rub off and aid them to moksha.**

Conclusion

- **Hinduism is really the smorgasbord of religions—there is a little something for everyone, unless of course you happen to be born an Untouchable (those so low in India, they are not even part of the caste system and therefore not eligible for salvation-they are continually reincarnated as Untouchable) in which case, your uncreated, eternal atman will never be united with Brahman.**

Conclusion

- **What there is not is absolute truth. Our personal, loving God became incarnate only once in human history and teaches that He is “the way, the truth and the life” not one of many ways as Hinduism proposes.**
- **Our God created our souls for the purpose of communing with Him we are not divine within ourselves.**

Conclusion

- **While our soul is eternal, it is appointed for men to die once and after this the judgment (Heb 9:27).**
- **There is no need for constant recycling because we serve a God of grace who gives us all we need on our path to Him—first and foremost the conquering of our greatest enemy death through His crucifixion and resurrection.**

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