

## PRINCIPLES, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF HINDUISM PHILOSOPHY

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Hinduism encompasses a vast array of beliefs and practices, as well as folklore, philosophy, and literature. To attempt to condense all of these elements into a reading unit of only a few thousand words would be to undermine Hinduism's primary strength—its diversity of beliefs and practises. Hinduism began basically as a system of laws or guidelines to support people in living a disciplined life. These rules promote the value of self-realization through meditation, fulfilling commitments, and moral values. It is not just the teachings of one particular individual or divinity. The worship of several deities, each of whom represents a different moral principle, natural force, or quality, makes it polytheistic in fact. In this article, principles, beliefs and practices of Hinduism philosophy has been discussed.

**Keywords:** Perspectives, Development, Hinduism, Philosophy

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Hinduism, according to Klostermaier, appears in a bewildering array of shapes and forms and is presented and interpreted by its followers in such a variety of ways that, in terms of its content, it is impossible to define. Sanatana dharma is another term for Hinduism as it is currently practised [1]. Many Hindu followers, including Gandhi, identified as Sanatana Hindus. Sanatana, which means eternal, and dharma, which means moral code, have etymological connections, suggesting that this religion is timeless and has no known human or divine origins. Hinduism has a vast body of writings and beliefs, but it also has a set of principles and insights that have been passed down from generation to generation since the beginning of time. Its followers view these teachings and precepts as binding on their society and having universal applicability. Numerous Hindu sects—often referred to as "sampradays"—emerged and developed with their own distinctive beliefs, rituals, and modes of worship within the general structure of these precepts. Hinduism is an amalgam of numerous traditions, and there is no one individual who can be identified as its founder. It began as a regulated way of living rather than a religious system, which was later transformed over time into religious ideas. Holy books like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas were formed from writings that were initially intended to improve the lives of common people and to enlighten practitioners. The Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda are the four authentic texts of Hinduism. They contain hymns, incantations, rituals, and advice on how to carry out these practises in daily life. Hinduism places a strong emphasis on empathizing with natural forces like Varuna, Agni, and Vayu (water). The concept of "Trimurti," or "Three Forms," which includes the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, is linked to the three stages of life: birth, life, and death. In this sense, Hinduism is both a religion and a way of life.

According to Klaus Klostermaier, a well-known researcher of Hinduism, the Hindu tradition has shown that it is open to novel ideas and scientific thought, and many features of Hinduism overlap with and share ideals with humanism. Academics frequently refer to Hinduism as a "way of life," and many individuals all around the world also adhere to humanism as a way of life.

According to researchers, it is difficult to create a trustworthy timeline for Hinduism because of a number of factors, including the religion's extreme diversity and the fact that it was only recently recognized as a single, distinct religion. Another difficulty is that Hinduism's written narratives cover a wide range of historical periods and modes of existence.

Nevertheless, detailed timelines of Hinduism have been created by scholars. The majority of sources place the origins of Hinduism around 1500 BCE, with the Aryan invasion of India and the following creation of the Rig Veda.

The timeline that follows has been condensed to only include the most crucial details and is how it is typically presented:

3,000–1500 BCE: Indus Valley Civilization

6,000–1900 BCE: Indus-Sarasvati Civilization

1500–500 BCE: Vedic Period -- beginning with the Aryan migration

500 BCE–500 CE: Epic, Puranic and Classical Ages

500 CE–1200 CE: Early and Middle Medieval Period --Theological establishment of Vedanta. 1200–1757 CE: Muslim Period -- Development of the theistic traditions

1757–1947 CE: British Period -- The reform movements and birth of neo-Hinduism

1947 CE -- present: Hinduism established as a world religion

Neo-Hinduism is a term that is typically used to describe Hindu thinkers who have been committed to organised, practical service to humanity and who have been willing to reinterpret ideas and traditional philosophies in light of new circumstances and influences outside of Hinduism, among other things.

### **HISTORY:**

The main distinction between Hinduism and almost all other major world religions is the absence of any historical evidence that Hinduism was ever established by an individual or a group of people as a single, organized, and canonical collection of beliefs and practises. As a result, it is challenging to identify a single, defining central doctrine or religious authority that would oversee the complete spectrum of faiths and beliefs that fall under the umbrella of Hinduism. [2]. But rather than being viewed as a weakness of Hinduism, it should presumably be seen as one of its strengths. Hinduism has also always been in a constant state of flux because it is still a developing and evolving system of principles and religion. Hinduism has been compared to a massive banyan tree that continually develops new roots, which turn into trunks, from which new shoots and branches emerge. [3]

### **HINDUISM ORIGIN AND THE 'HINDU' TERM:**

Maya Warrier asserts that the term "Hinduism" has a shorter history than the word "Hindu." In the middle of the first millennium BCE, Persian invaders used it for the first time to refer to indigenous people who lived alongside and beyond the river Sindhu, which flows along the northwest frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. There were no overtly religious undertones to the term. It only pertained to a small geographic area that, over time, accumulated a tremendous variety of linguistic and cultural characteristics. The term "Hinduism," on the other hand, has a much more recent history and was first used in the 19th century to distinguish itself from "foreigners," such as Muslim conquerors and settlers from central Asia, European traders and explorers, as well as tourists and merchants from other parts of the world who visited India. It acted as a catch-all phrase for a wide range of socio-religious practises and beliefs that have always been prominent in the Indian subcontinent. Later, the British orientalist who became interested in the study of ancient Indian liturgical and philosophical literary sources, which were primarily written in Sanskrit, used this word extensively. As time went on, "the term 'Hinduism' came to be identified with the religious traditions of Indian people, and Indian reformers too, in due course, came to use this term to refer to the religion of the Hindus." [4]

### **PRINCIPLES, BELIEFS AND CONCEPTS OF HINDUISM:**

The following examples demonstrate the various methods in which Hinduism is defined and described:

Hinduism places more emphasis on a person's values and personal development than it does on the picture of God they hold in their minds. In the Hindu value system, the development of the individual's intellect and personality is more significant than their choice of faith or religion. Because of the importance it places on the ideals present in all religions, it is usually described as the most secular faith in the world, along with Buddhism. [5]

Hinduism is diverse in that there are various systems of thought within it. Local customs and the worship of specific deities differ from place to place. However, it is unified as a single practise by a few key

principles. The foundation of traditional Hinduism is the belief in Brahman, the underlying universal life energy that pervades and encompasses reality and can be worshipped as Vishnu, Shiva, or Shakti.

Hinduism offers a variety of spiritual pathways, allowing individuals to progress and mature at their own rate. Under its broad principles, it accepts different schools of thought.

Absolute and total freedom of worship and thought are guaranteed by Hinduism.

Hinduism is a philosophy of living as well as a religion.

The Hindu religion is a collection of predetermined guidelines for "good living," or Dharmic," behaviour. Source: Hinduism's tenets.

There are several particular beliefs and notions that fall under these overarching principles:

**Dharma:** In Hinduism, all people are born with a set of responsibilities. Hindu scriptures assert that when a person performs their duties, everyone will profit, and that when everyone upholds their personal dharma, society as a whole will prosper. There are several methods to define dharma. It implies both the obligations that follow regulations and the rules themselves. Anyone who prioritizes dharma in their lives aspires to act morally and responsibly in accordance with their duties and commitments.

**Karma:** The vast majority of Hindus adhere to the concept of karma, which explains how past actions have an impact on the present. The traditional Hindu concept of reincarnation, or the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, is connected to karma. Hinduism teaches that if one thinks and behaves with love and compassion, the "soul" will benefit. A person will have happiness in their next life if they have positive karma. Karma has an immediate impact on the life circumstances into which one is "reborn."

**Moksha:** "Moksha" is the phrase used to describe the soul's liberation from the cycle of reincarnation and mortality. When the soul recognizes its true nature and unites with Brahman, this takes place. There are other ways to get there, including "the path of duty."

**Brahman:** The concept of Brahman is exclusive to Hinduism and has not been incorporated by any other faith. Brahman makes no mention of the anthropomorphic concept of God seen in Abrahamic religions. Brahman, the ultimate source of all things, is not at all a "he."

**Yamas:** In order to free themselves from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, Hindus who practise Raja Yoga—one school of Hindu philosophy—place significance on a set of essential values known as yamas and niyamas. The first yama, nonviolence, is regarded as the cornerstone upon which the other yamas are built. Sincerity, honesty, and compassion are among the yamas, which describe a person's behaviour in daily life.

**Niyamas:** Hindu scriptures assert that, in addition to the yamas, a separate set of practises known as the niyamas should also be followed in order to improve one's karma. The niyamas include traits like being modest and providing for others, among others.

#### **DIVERSITY:**

Internal disagreements exist in the majority of the world's main religions regarding one or more religious topics. There is no denying, however, that Hinduism's variety of practises and beliefs is on an entirely different scale from the degree of diversity found in the majority of other religious traditions. The absence of a central founder person or founding event, a canon of texts that is generally recognized, as well as the obvious absence of any overarching institutional structure, are the causes of this degree of diversity. Almost nothing about Hinduism could be said without some sort of qualification. [6]

#### **TEXTS AND SCRIPTURES:**

There is a vast body of literature that could be said to be part of the Hindu tradition, just as there are many different religious practises and ideas within Hinduism. The most famous of the languages used in the Hindu texts is Sanskrit. However, hardly any Indian tongue does not have its own Hindu texts or versions of some of the major Hindu epics. Hindu writing written in Sanskrit is primarily divided into two groups: *rutis* and *smrtis*. [7]

#### **HINDU SECTS OF ŚHAIVISM AND VAIŚNAVISM:**

The three different sects of Hinduism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Saktism, have surprisingly different belief systems. In fact, some scholars of Hinduism, such as Heinrich von Stietencron, argue that we should understand Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Saktism as separate religions<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, according to

a number of historical reports, the ice between Shaiva and Vaishnavas in ancient India was frequently broken. However, there are compelling arguments against the thesis put forth by these academics who favour a stricter application of this difference. Although the three devotional sects are based on three different mythic stories, there are some fundamental similarities between their practices, such as the performance of puja, pilgrimage, and prayer, that make it clear that these are simply outward manifestations of the diverse and multifaceted nature of Hinduism as a religion. Additionally, there are not as many radical differences and distinctions between these two devotional organisations as some academics, like Stietencron, believe. Even though they might not be put in the main sanctum of the sanctuary, one can frequently find Shiva idols in Vaishnava temples and Vishnu idols in Shiva temples. [8, 9]

#### **ŚĀKTISM- GODDESS WORSHIP IN HINDUISM:**

Important historical and anthropological studies have revealed that some of the earliest societies practised goddess worship rather than the veneration of a male deity. After the agricultural revolution, worship of male deities increasingly supplanted it. In that sense, Hinduism is the only faith that is still practised to a large extent today. Goddess worship appears to have been widely practised during the Indus Valley Civilization, according to historical data, but it is very difficult to support and substantiate claims that this practise has persisted ever since. Aditi and Uma, two Rig Vedic goddesses, appear incredibly insignificant in comparison to the power conferred upon some of the male deities. According to many academics, the goddesses do not take on a significant role in Hinduism's religious life until the period of the epics and Puranas. While others contend that, in contrast to the goddesses portrayed in the Rg Veda, the majority of the goddesses who gain notoriety during the epic period are merely consorts to their male deities and lack an independent status. [10]

#### **MAIN RITUAL PRACTICES IN HINDUISM:**

Probably the two most significant devotional practises in Hinduism are daraana and puja. In a religious setting, the word "Darana," which literally means "to see," has the meaning "auspicious sight."

The deed of pilgrimage is also performed in a manner that serves Darana. When carefully examined, seeing, or daranaa as it is known in Hinduism, is a two-way process in the sense that both the one who sees and the one being seen are involved. In this context, it should be noted that Shiva is frequently portrayed as having a third eye on his forehead, which is even more important given that Jagannath, a popular representation of Krsna, is shown with conspicuously large, round eyes. Daraana is therefore more of a reciprocal process in which the believer not only rejoices at the sight of the deity but also at the sight of the deity. [11]

The practise of "puja" is another crucial ritual practise in modern Hinduism. Many Hindu households practise pujas as a daily ritual, but there are also special forms of it that are prescribed for special occasions like birth and death, marriage, and many of the Hindus' yearly festivals. Puja rituals are typically done on behalf of the devotees by the priests (pjri) on special occasions like weddings and other yajnas.

Puja typically entails praising the deity through song and making ritual offerings, such as lighting an oil lamp or burning camphor, in front of the deity's picture. The gods are said to treasure sweets as a lucky meal. Offering food to the deity, ideally some sweets like rice pudding etc., is regarded as an important but not necessary component of the common puja ritual. This sweet is thought to have attained the status of an auspicious meal known as prasad, which is for "grace," after being offered to the gods. The food presented again becomes food to be offered to the devotees as a token of god's grace in a two-way process. This entire procedure, which is a part of the pāja ritual, represents the giving of the grace of God to the devotee in the shape of prasad. [12]

#### **HINDU REFORMATION IN THE COLONIAL ERA:**

The British crown gradually came to exert authority over the subcontinent's government and economy after the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent. On the one hand, it helped propagate Christian values and culture, which were already well-established in southern India because of Portuguese

missionaries' visits there. Academics in the West were interested in Indian religion and culture at the same time that Hinduism was. This field of study is known as indology. British Indologists often took one of two positions when defining Hinduism: either they criticized Hindu belief and practise as being heathen and immoral, or they praised some literary and Sanskritic parts of Hinduism for their wisdom and intellect. [13]

Hinduism's reformation movement came into being primarily as an informed reaction to the aforementioned outsider's perception of their faith. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and Swami Vivekanand were just a few of the educated Indians who headed it. In order to instill pride in a uniquely Hindu identity in the presence of the foreign rulers, many of these thinkers painted an image of a glorious Hindu past. Additionally, it led to a critical mindset towards some of Hinduism's publicly taboo practices, such as child marriage and widow burning. The Hindu renaissance is the word used to refer to this time of reforms within Hinduism as a whole. One of this movement's key characteristics was that it didn't start as a reactionary reaction against any other culture or faith. Instead, it developed in an attempt to take into account the growing sensitivity to and importance given to ideas like gender equality, individual rights, and liberty, among others, as a result of the west's increasing scientific temper and rationality. [14]

Despite this, it is important to note that some scholars, particularly Edward Said, have expressed some scepticism regarding the interest of western scholars in studying the culture and religion of the complete Oriental world, including India and its religions. After occupying the east politically and geographically, said claims that the western colonizers were eager to intellectually conquer the local populace. As part of that conquest, Western scholars took on the responsibility of interpreting and translating the Indian literary texts, which were highly prized by its people from the perspectives of culture and faith. In doing so, they participated in annexing the intellectual heritage of its people. [15]

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In a nutshell, Hinduism is a faith that emphasizes inclusivity. It places more emphasis on a person's values and personal development than it does on the picture of God they have in their minds. In the Hindu value system, a person's intellectual and personal growth take precedence over their choice of faith or religion. Because it respects the positive value systems entrenched in all religions, it is, together with Buddhism, the most secular and tolerant religion in the world.

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