

The Hindu Heritage An Overview

by

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Topics of Discussion

Part I

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Scriptures
- ◆ Hindu View of God
- ◆ Hindu View of the Individual
- ◆ Hindu View of the World
- ◆ Major Doctrines

Part II

- ◆ Caste System
- ◆ Power of Mantra

Questions

Scriptures

- ◆ Hinduism has numerous scriptures
- ◆ Not all scriptures have the same authority
- ◆ Hindus generally fail to understand and the hierarchy of their scriptures. This weakness provides ammunition to the critics to denigrate Hinduism

Hindu Scriptures

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graph TD; A[Hindu Scriptures] --> B[Sruti]; A --> C[Smriti]; B --- B1["♦ Vedas (Four)  
- Rig  
- Sama  
- Yajur  
- Atharva"]; B --- B2["♦ Upanishads  
(over 100 originally, only 50 or  
so preserved)"]; B --- B3["♦ Bhagavad Gita"]; C --- C1["♦ Dharma Shastras (Law Codes)  
Ex: Manu Smriti"]; C --- C2["♦ Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata)"]; C --- C3["♦ Puranas (Mythology) – There are many; each  
tradition has its own. Ex: Shiva Purana and  
Bhagavat Purana"]; C --- C4["♦ Agamas and Tantras: (sectarian scriptures)  
Some traditions consider their Agmas as Sruti  
scriptures Ex: Shiva Purana"]; C --- C5["♦ Darshanas (Manuals of Philosophy) –  
Each school has its own literature. Ex: Yoga  
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Sruti

- ♦ Vedas (Four)
 - Rig
 - Sama
 - Yajur
 - Atharva
- ♦ Upanishads
(over 100 originally, only 50 or so preserved)
- ♦ Bhagavad Gita

Smriti

- ♦ Dharma Shastras (Law Codes)
Ex: Manu Smriti
- ♦ Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata)
- ♦ Puranas (Mythology) – There are many; each tradition has its own. Ex: Shiva Purana and Bhagavat Purana
- ♦ Agamas and Tantras: (sectarian scriptures)
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Hindu Concept of God

- Hindu view of the Ultimate Reality is expressed in the following verse of the Rig Veda:

“Ekam sat vipraha, bahudha vadanti.”

(Rig Veda 1.164.46)

“Truth is one, wise call It by various names.”

- Truth here means the Ultimate Reality, called *Brahman* in the Upanishads.
- Note the words “wise” and “various names.”
- In Hinduism, *Brahman* is both immanent (personal) and transcendent (impersonal)
- *Brahman* and the English word ‘God’ do not mean the same.

Hindu Concept of God, cont'd

Brahman , the Cosmic Absolute
(beyond description)

Immanent
(personal aspect,
can be prayed, and
worshipped, but not
realized)

Transcendent
(impersonal aspect,
can be realized, but
not worshipped)

Male Aspect

Ishvara or God (note capital G)
worshipped by many names
and forms known as deities
or gods (note small g)

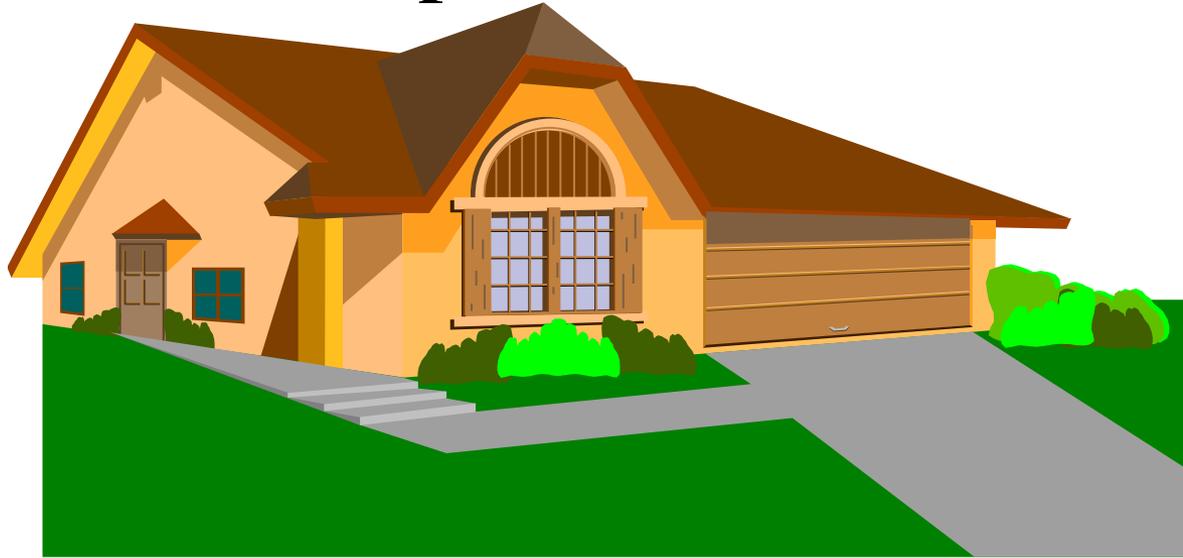
Female Aspect

Divine Mother, worshipped
by many names and forms
known as deities or goddesses
(note small g)

Hindu Concept of God, cont'd

- Hindu Trinity (*Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva*)
- Theism
- Henotheism
- Monotheism
- Polytheism
- Pantheism
- Panentheism
- Hinduism is not polytheism
- Hinduism can be called monotheistic polytheism or panentheism

Hindu Concept of the Individual



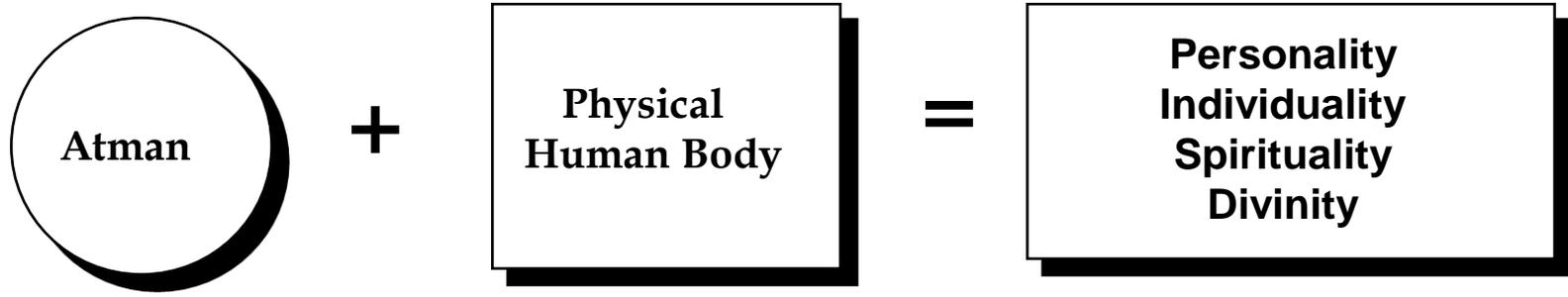
Just as a man living in a house is called a householder, *Atman* (meaning “God within”) living in a human body is called an individual. When this “human house” becomes old and irreparable, *Atman* leaves the house and we say that the individual has died.

Hindu Concept of the Individual, cont'd.

- Atman is uncreated, immortal and divine.
- Although Atman is generally translated as soul or spirit, Atman and soul do not mean the same.
- Atman has two states of existence, liberated and bound.
- In the human body, Atman is deluded by cosmic ignorance, called *Maya* in Sanskrit.
- There are various viewpoints regarding relationship of the liberated Atman with Brahman.
- In Hindu view, an individual is not born a sinner, but commits sin under the influence of *Maya*. Thus, the purpose of Hindu religious life is to transcend Maya.

Hindu Concept of the Individual, cont'd)

Why are individuals different from each other?



just as

<u>Electricity</u>	+	<u>Type of Appliance</u>	=	<u>Type of Application</u>
Electricity	+	Refrigerator	=	Cold
Electricity	+	Oven	=	Heat
Electricity	+	Television	=	Audio & Video

Opposing Functions

Hindu Concept of the World

Brahman (Infinite, Undivided and Changeless)

**Cosmic Ignorance
(Maya)**

**Cosmic
Consciousness
(Heavenly Father)**

**Cosmic Energy
Divine Mother
(Shakti)**

**Time
Space
Duality**

Sattva

Rajas

Tamas

Appearance of Brahman as things and beings of the world
The Infinite, Undivided and Changeless appears as finite, divided, and changing

Major Doctrines

- Divinity of the Atman
- Unity of Existence
- Ahimsa
- Harmony of Religions
- Law of Karma
- Doctrine of Incarnation
- Freedom of Thought
- Law of Dharma
- Three Debts of Human Life
- Four Stages of Hindu Religious Life
- Four Ends of Human Life

Divinity of the Atman

- Each human being, regardless of religion, geographic region, gender, color or creed is in reality Atman clothed in a physical body. Since Atman is inherently pure and divine, every human being is potentially divine. In Hindu view, a man is not born a sinner, but becomes a victim of ignorance under the influence of cosmic ignorance, called Maya. Just as darkness quickly disappears upon the appearance of light, an individual's delusion vanishes when he gains self-knowledge.
- Practical Significance: Eliminates fear of God, encourages freedom of thought, and removes psychological barrier to human growth. No fear of eternal hell.

Unity of Existence

- Science has revealed that what we call matter is essentially energy. Hindu sages tell us that the cosmic energy is manifestation of the Universal Spirit (*Brahman*). Brahman has become all things and beings in the world. Thus, we are all interconnected in subtle ways. “All is One and One is in all,” declare the sages.

- Practical Significance:

Encourages universal brotherhood, reverence for all forms of life, and respect for our environment.

Hindu scriptures address earth as Mother Earth.

Ahimsa

- Ahimsa means non-violence, non-injury, or non-killing. Hinduism teaches that all forms of life are manifestations of Brahman. We must, therefore, not be indifferent to the sufferings of others.
- Practical Significance: Creates mutual love between humans and other forms of life, and protects our environment. Ahimsa provides basis for Hindu notion of morality. “That mode of living which is based upon a total harmlessness towards all creatures or (in the case of necessity) upon minimum of such harm, is the highest morality.” (Mahabharata Shantiparva 262.5-6).

Harmony of Religions

- Hinduism believes that there is no one religion that teaches an exclusive way to salvation. All genuine spiritual paths are valid and all great religions are equally true. “In whatever way humans love Me (God), in the same way they find My love. Various are the ways for humans, but in the end they all come to Me.” (Bhagavad Gita 4.11)
- Practical Significance: This doctrine lays foundation for universal harmony. The attitude of religious tolerance is one of Hinduism’s greatest gifts to mankind.

The Law of Karma

- Hindus believe that God, who is all-loving and merciful, does not punish or reward anyone. He molds our destinies based upon our own thoughts and deeds. Every action of a person, in thought, word, or deed, brings results, either good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action, in accordance with the adage, “As you sow, so shall you reap.” Moral consequences of all actions are conserved by the Nature.
- Practical Significance: Eliminates fear of God and hell; enhances self-confidence and strengthens the concepts of righteousness and fairness.

Doctrine of Incarnation

- Hindus believe that God incarnates Himself on earth to uphold righteousness, whenever there is a decline in virtue. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, “Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and predominance of unrighteousness, I (God) embody Myself. For the protection of the good and for the destruction of the evil-doers and for the re-establishment of righteousness, I am born form age to age.” (BG 4.6-4.7)
- Practical Significance: Encourages righteousness and fosters hope for the mankind.

Freedom of Thought

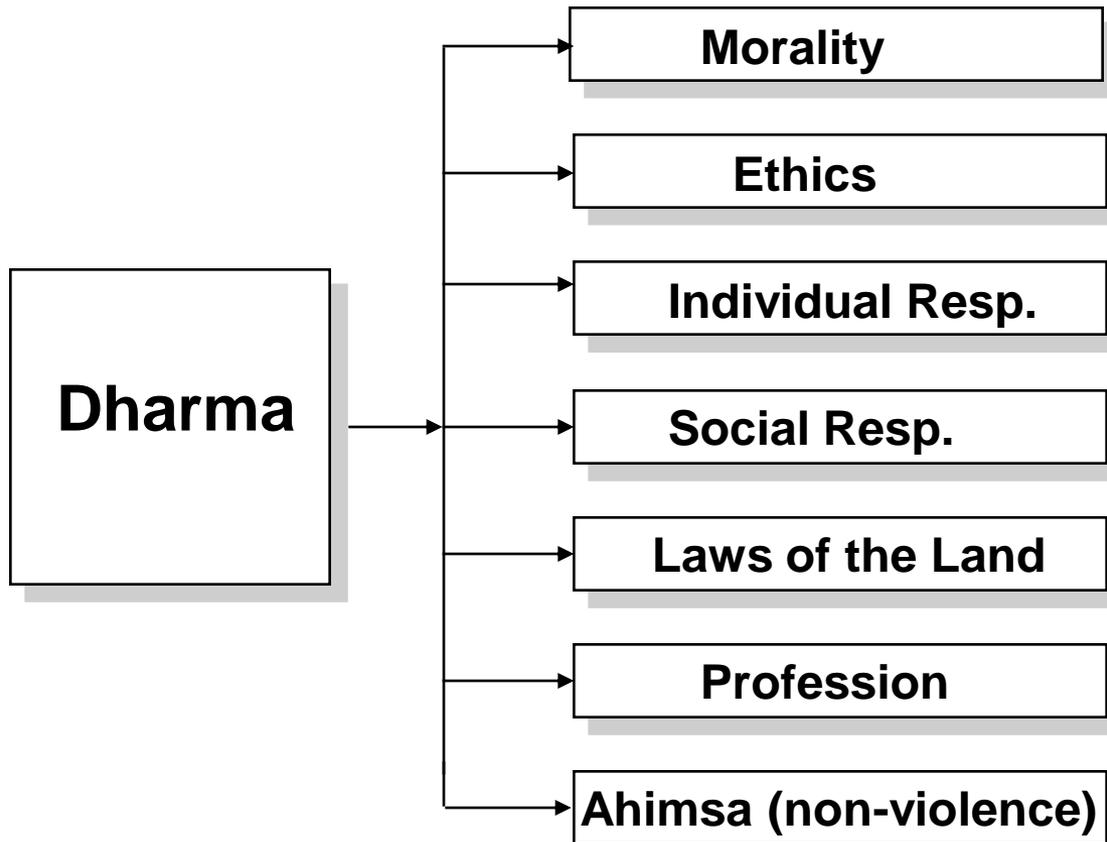
- Hindus believe that wisdom is not an exclusive possession of any particular race or religion. Hinduism, therefore, provides everyone with absolute freedom of thought in religious matters. One is free to approach God in his or her own way, without conforming to any dogma or blind faith. An open mind is all that is needed to study Hinduism. Hindus place the greatest value on experiencing truth personally.
- Practical Significance: Eliminates blind faith and dogma. Encourages reason and logic for mutual understanding. Hinduism is a God-loving religion and not God-fearing one.

The Law of Dharma

- The thought of dharma generates deep confidence in the Hindu mind in cosmic justice. This is reflected in the often-quoted maxims: “The righteous side will have the victory.” “Truth only prevails, not falsehood.” “Dharma kills if it is killed; dharma protects if it is protected.” “The entire world rests on dharma.”
- Dharma is the law that maintains the cosmic order as well as the individual and social order. Dharma sustains human life in harmony with nature. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the law that sustains the universe.

The Law of Dharma

“Don’t do to others what you don’t want done to you.”



3 Debts, 4 Stages, and 4 Ends of Human Life

■ Three Debts:

- Debt to God
- Debt to Sages and Saints
- Debt to one's parents and ancestors

■ Four Stages:

- Brahmacharya (Studentship)
- Grhastha (Householder)
- Vanaprastha (Retirement)
- Sannyasa (Renunciation)

■ Four Ends:

- Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha

Universal Aspects of Hinduism

- Divinity of the Atman
- Universal Tolerance and Harmony
- Acceptance of the Diversity of the Mind
- Emphasis on Purity of Reason
- Capacity to Absorb New Ideas
- Ahimsa (Non-violence)
- Universal Prayers

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Part II

- ◆ Caste System
- ◆ Power of Mantra

Questions

Caste System

- Caste system has done more damage to Hindu society than the foreign invasions.
- Critics say that caste system is an integral part of the Hindu religious tradition.

Rig Veda:

“When they divided *Pursha* how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth? What do they call his thighs and feet? The Brahman was his mouth, of his both arms was the Kashtriya made. His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet Shudra was produced.”

- There is no suggestion in the above verse that Shudra is inferior to Brahmin.

The above verse simply suggests a natural classification of the people in any society, as follows:

- Educators and administrators (***Brahmins***)
- Businessmen and agriculturists (***Vaisyas***)
- Law and order enforcement agencies (Kshatriyas)
- Labor force (***Shudras***)

Bhagavad Gita 2.20:

An individual is essentially *Atman* (self or spirit) clothed in a physical body. *Atman* being divine and immortal, an individual is essentially divine.

The above verse confirms that the worldly education, social status or power cannot render an individual superior or inferior to others.

Swami Vivekananda:

Each human being is potentially divine and eternally pure.

When the Vedas refer to the four-fold division of society, they use the Sanskrit word *Varna* meaning “class,” and not the word *Jati* meaning “caste.” The word *Varna* was mistakenly translated as “caste” by the Portuguese during their colonial establishment in India.

Conclusions:

- Caste system is not a part of the Hindu religious thought. Practice of caste system in any form, whatsoever, violates the basic tenets of Hindu dharma.
- Any form of discrimination based upon race, caste, color, creed or gender is against the inner spirit of Hindu religion.

The Most Sacred Shiva Mantra

Om namah Shambhavaaya cha

Mayo bhavaaya cha

Namah Shankarraaya cha

Mayaskaraaya cha

Namah Shivaaya cha

Shivataraaya cha.

O Supreme Lord Shiva:

We offer our salutations to Thee, the Giver of happiness.
We offer our salutations to Thee, the Auspiciousness. We
offer our Salutations to Thee, the Bestower of bliss and
still greater bliss.