

HINDUISM

Recently I had a look through the various Indexes that are listed on the ministry web site, firstly under –

Categorised 'Index of Articles'

And then secondly under –

Categorised Index for 'ASSORTED ARTICLES'

I was looking to see what, if any articles, I had written that dealt with the religion of **HINDUISM**. As I suspected, there was no direct article dealing in any way with this topic. The closest to one was an article in my March 2002 '**News From The Front**' newsletter that was titled –

The 'SWEET LORD' of George Harrison

This article addressed the association that Beatle, George Harrison, had with **The Hare Krishnas**, a sect within **HINDUISM**. The article can be accessed on this link –

<http://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-march-2002/>

To 'plug' this gap in '**Take Heed**' resources I turned to a short booklet that I obtained many years ago. It was one of a series of booklets written by a man called **Jim Allis** – Jim has his own blog located on <http://www.jimallis.co.uk/> and now with his kind permission I want to reproduce the text of that booklet that was titled –

HINDUISM: Right or Wrong?

INTRODUCTION

The word '**Hindu**' is derived from the Persian word for 'Indian'. '**HINDUISM**' is the main religion of the people of India. Under the banner of **HINDUISM** there are a large variety of cults and beliefs. In a way it is like a federation of religions. However wide in variety of expression there are certain main features that hold it together under 'one roof' so to speak.

Who is its founder? There is no founder. **HINDUISM** originated about the same time as Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt, 1500-2000 BC. Wild nomadic Aryan tribes invaded India from the North West and settled down in what we know today as the Punjab.

The Aryans spoke in a tongue related to Greek and Latin. This evolved into the classical and sacred language known as Sanskrit. The priests played an important role in composing hymns to their gods for use at sacrifices. These hymns were committed to memory down through the centuries. As many as 1028 of them were remarkably preserved and became known as '**Rig Veda**', some of the world's oldest religious literature and Hinduism's most sacred book. These hymns contained the beliefs of the people and were highly esteemed.

"However, as Aryan religion spread, it absorbed elements from the cultures already present, for example from the Indus Valley in the north and the Dravidian in the south. So **HINDUISM** as we know it today is like a great deep river into which, over a period of three centuries, many streams have flowed. These streams are the various beliefs and practices of the numerous races, ethnic groups and cultures of the Indian subcontinent. The underlying and dominant current providing unity is the religion then which grew out of the '**Rig Veda**' and later the **Vedic** scriptures. One of the discernable features of this Indian religion is the doctrine of **reincarnation**: the belief that at death the soul passes into another body until released from the continuous wheel of rebirth". (**A Book of Beliefs** – Lion books).

(Cecil: At this point could I give a link to a short piece and video link on REINCARNATION that I gave included in my article on the New Age Movement. It can be accessed on <http://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2015/February/New-Age-Movement.pdf> and the relevant portions are towards the end of page 2 and the beginning of page 3).

Hindu's number about 400 million. (Cecil: According to a more recent report on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/hinduism/> that figure is now around 900 million) The majority of people in India do follow **HINDUISM** to a large or lesser degree. **HINDUS** are also to be found in large numbers in other parts of Asia, Africa and during the last century their influence has greatly affected the peoples of Europe.

1. **HINDUISM HAS MANY GODS**

We may consider it strange that Hindus profess to be monotheists at heart when we are informed that they worship many gods! Basically they believe in one 'High' god – **BRAHMAN**, the 'Absolute' – who rules the world with other 'lesser' gods. These gods have a similar status to that of saints and angels in certain other religions. However to the average believer in **Hindu** villages they are considerably more important.

There are three branches or sects each with their own high view as to the nature and characteristics of the 'High' god. **VISHNU**, **SHIVA** or **SHAKTI**. Three different names for the 'High' god.

Families by long tradition worship or support one branch or another. These branches are not to be found in particular areas; they are well spread throughout India and beyond. Having said that, the branch that name their god **SHIVA**, are a particularly strong company in Kashmir in the north and Tamil in the south. **SHAKTISM** is strong in Bengal and Assam. It is not unknown for groups to worship at the shrine of another. "Educated Hindus believe that the three gods are merely differing ways of looking at the same High God or Ultimate Reality". (**'A Book of Beliefs' – Lion books**).

VISHNU

VISHNU is generally worshipped in the form of one of his incarnations. It is because of his great concern for the world that he descends from his throne in heaven from time to time in a visible form. Two of those forms are considered more important than the others. One is **RAMA**, the other **KRISHNA**. The cult of **RAMA** is comparatively recent: though he was known as a great hero he appears not to have been generally worshipped as a god until medieval times. He is depicted as the perfect ruler full of grace and very just in all his ways. His spouse **Sita** is the ideal of Hindu womanhood. The perfect wife and mother entirely devoted to her lord.

KRISHNA is a more complex figure. He appears as the boy miracle worker, the divine lover and very gifted. He is also seen as the divine flute player, luring the wives and daughters of cowherdsmen of Vrindavan (**Brindaban: Cecil – close to where KRISHNA was born and a place of pilgrimage**) to dance with him in the moonlight, a symbol of God calling the human soul. He appears as the teacher in the **Bhagavad Gita** (The most influential devotional work in **HINDUISM**).

SHIVA

SHIVA differs from **VISHNU** in several ways and in character. Unlike **VISHNU** he does not incarnate himself for the salvation of the world. He does, however. Appear as an occasional theophany to his most devout worshippers. He is believed to sit on the peak of Mount Kailas in the Himalayas, in a state of continual meditation, generating a powerful spiritual force which maintains the cosmos. He is most commonly worshipped in the form of a 'linga', an upright phallic pillar which proves his origin as a fertility god. He is also seen to be a very stern god with a dark and grim side to his nature.

SHAKTI

The mother Goddess is an ambivalent divinity; the gentler aspects of her character being seen in her manifestations as a bestower of blessings. A beautiful woman in middle age. In her fierce form she is quite the opposite. As **Kali Chandi, Durga** or **Chamunda**, she is usually thought of as a giantess with black skin, an enormous blood-red tongue and fierce tusks protruding from her mouth. She bears an assortment of weapons and is seen trampling on a demon. She wears a garland of skulls or human heads around her neck. It is believed that worshipping her averts evil. Frequent animal sacrifices are still performed in her honour.

OTHER DIVINITIES WORSHIPPED

As well as the three gods there are many others who have considerable importance and who are worshipped on special occasions. Of these the best known is **Ganesha** the elephant-headed son of **SHIVA** and **Parvati** who is petitioned for success before all enterprises. **HINDU** business men consult this god before large transactions. **Skanda**, the war god, is also seen to be a very important god. He is also a son of **SHIVA** and **Parvati**. **Hanuman**, the monkey god associated with the exploits of the divine hero **RAMA**, appears as a personification of the active power of God upon earth, and is a popular object of worship. Space doesn't allow for the many other gods worshipped among the **Hindus**.

ANIMALS and PLANTS are SACRED

Many animals, plants and natural objects are sacred in varying degrees, the most noteworthy being the cow. The cow is divine in her own right and is generally revered as the representative of Mother Earth. "Thus all cattle are inviolate and even among castes where vegetarianism is not the rule, beef is never eaten". (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* – p 510).

Certain trees are also sacred. The many-rooted banyan and the papal, two of the largest trees of India are sacred. All rivers and hills are more or less divine, and the extreme holiness of the Ganges, believed to flow from the head of **SHIVA**, needs no emphasis.

It is sometimes said among the **Hindus** that there are ten million gods. The **Hindus** really believe the gods can help them. "They may ward off smallpox or help with examinations or bring a male child or help the crops to grow. Men's anxieties are directed towards them, for does not religion cater for our dreads and sorrows and keenest hopes?" (*The Long Search* – Ninian Smart).

THE GODS and RITUAL

“Often a god will be tended from dawn to dusk by priests, his image roused in the morning, bathed, given food as if for breakfast and so on throughout the day. Images may be paraded through the streets and fields at festivals. Rituals, fervours and visits to temples and shrines and pilgrimages to famous gods are seemingly never ending, in a teeming pious land”. (The Long Search – Ninian Smart).

2. A SPECIAL WAY OF LIVING

FOUR LAYER SOCIAL SYSTEM

For nearly 3000 years **HINDUISM** has believed in a four-layer social system as a divinely ordered feature of the cosmos and its priests have given full religious sanction to the four classes. The doctrine of the four classes goes back to the writings in the **Rig Veda Hymn Book** describing the primeval sacrifices from which the world was supposedly created. “From the head of the primeval man appeared the Brahman (the all-pervading, self-existent power, the cosmic unity), from his arms the warrior (Kshatriya), from his trunk the class of merchants and craftsmen (Vaishya) and from his feet the menial (Shudra). Thus the fourfold society is an essential part of the structure of the world, and it must be preserved in order that as many people as possible may achieve salvation”. (Encyclopaedia Britannica – p 511). These four classes (today in 1991) are seen in the following divisions:-

The priests (Brahmins)
The nobles (kshatriyas)
The merchants and peasants (vaishyas)
The manual labourers (shudras)

Tradition meant that for many, many years that one class did not mix with another socially. They certainly would not have entertained the idea of sharing a meal together. Nowadays however, at least theoretically, such distinctions have been abolished.

FOUR STAGES OF LIFE

A man of the three upper classes goes through four stages in his life. There is the stage of the celibate student, the householder, the hermit and the homeless religious beggar. The first stage is entered into at the time of initiation; from then on the man will wear the ‘sacred’ thread which passes over his left shoulder and under his right arm. Marriage is important and the wedding ceremony one of the most solemn and complicated rites in **HINDUISM** because it not only ensures the continuity of the family but also the welfare of its dead, members in the other world.

Only a son can perform the funeral rites which provide the soul of his dead father with a new spiritual body with which to pass to the next life. For many years the widow would be requested to join her dead husband on the funeral pyre to guarantee his salvation. This practice has since ceased by law.

RELIGIOUS LIFE AT HOME

Religious activity is chiefly centred in the home. Every orthodox home has at least one sacred image, picture or emblem, before which worship (puja) is directed. This will be in the form of prayers, hymn singing, the offering of flowers and the burning of incense, especially by the women of the house.

In richer houses there is usually a family shrine room or chapel. Much time is spent in listening to religious literature read aloud or recited. The worshipper anoints the god while reciting the texts. Then he sits down in front of the icon to meditate.

(Cecil – immediately after the end of the text of this booklet I will give the link to a short video that shows the ‘conversion’ of a former Anglican rectory into a private HINDU shrine and you will see much of what has just been described)

Rites requiring the help of a trained Brahman are performed by a puohita, or chaplain, serving a family or families.

i. CONCEPTION

The personal ceremonies begin with the conception of the child; rites are performed with the participation of the pregnant mother to ensure the safe arrival of a male child. The birth ceremony (Jatakarma) should take place before the cutting of the umbilical cord. Ten days after birth the ritual impurity of mother and child takes place and the child is named. Various minor rites take place in infancy; more important is the rite of upanyana, originally performed among the three higher classes but now largely confined to Brahmans, celebrated about the time of puberty.

At this ceremony a boy is invested with the sacred thread (upavita or yajnopavita), which he should wear throughout his life over the left shoulder. He is taught the Savitri or Gayatri verse of the **Riga Veda** (Scripture) which is repeated at all religious rites and ceremonies, and he is then qualified to study the **Vedas** and has the status of an Aryan.

ii. MARRIAGE

I have briefly alluded to marriage already but at this point I would like to say a little more. The **HINDU** marriage ceremony is lengthy and complicated. The kernel of the rite is the threefold circumambulation of the sacred domestic fire by the couple and their taking seven steps with their garments knotted together.

iii. DEATH

HINDU funerals normally involve cremation. The corpse is burned as soon as possible after death and the bones are thrown into a river, especially the Ganges or another sacred stream.

For ten or more days the family is ritually impure and the relatives with shaven heads confine themselves as far as possible to the family home, performing ceremonies for the welfare of the soul of the dead man; without these rites a rebirth (i.e. reincarnation) is believed impossible. These rites consist of pouring water before the family gods and offering rice balls (pinda) and milk to the departed spirit.

On the tenth day it is believed that the soul acquires a wise body and reaps the fruits of its former deeds, whether good or evil. Following the death, ceremonies are repeated at periodic intervals for the continued welfare of the dead man and for the welfare of other departed members of the family.

3. CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

“Congregational worship hardly exists, though it has been introduced by some reformed sects such as Arya Samaj. The temple is the house of god as the palace is the house of the king.

That is to say there are no large temples. There are places set apart for religious instruction and at one time they did run schools”. (Encyclopaedia Britannica – p 511-512).

4. HINDU RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

All kinds of festivals abound in India.

i. TEMPLE FESTIVALS

At least once a year the temple image is taken from its ‘home’ and carried in procession with much elaborate festivity.

ii. THE HOLI FESTIVAL

This is held at the beginning of spring in February/March. The festival has its roots in an ancient fertility ritual. The crowds sing songs, carry phallic symbols and delight in squirting each other with coloured water and powder.

iii. THE DASERA FESTIVAL

A popular ten-day event held in September/October to honour the goddess **Durga**. Its origins go back to **Rama's** victory over **Ravana**, as told in the Ramayana. Great effigies of **Ravana** filled with fire crackers are paraded through the streets, later to be set alight by **Rama's** fiery arrows.

iv. THE DIVALI FESTIVAL

The four-day New Year Festival; this is associated with **RAMA**, spirits of the dead, and **VISHNU** and his wife **Lakshmi**, goddess of wealth and prosperity. Oil lamps are lit and houses cleaned to welcome **Lakshmi** and fireworks explode to send away evil spirits. Business people especially celebrate **Diwali**, opening new account books with prayers to **Lakshmi** for success in the New Year. Great care is taken of the icons throughout the year. In some of the larger temples where there are many attendants, the god is 'awakened' at dawn and taken from his bedroom where he has been 'sleeping' with his wife. In the shrine room he is washed and dried, dressed, offered sacrifices and 'fed'. He is believed to eat the immaterial part of his food and the remainder is distributed either to the worshipper or the poor.

5. REBIRTH

(a) KARMA

A pervasive belief among **Hindus** is rebirth or reincarnation. According to this teaching all are in a continuing flux of births, passing from one life to another. An animal which dies is reborn into another form and may even become a man, just as man may take another form and become a spirit or an animal after his death. The only way to terminate this otherwise endless series of lives is by attaining what is known as liberation. In the Indian tradition, liberation means escaping the round of rebirth and obtaining a transcending bliss beyond this material world.

Reincarnation provides a framework for progress in man's moral, spiritual and material condition. The murderer will suffer in gruesome purgatory, or later, in another human life, through his sufferings and poverty. The ant will rise to be the god **Indra**. The sick man may have gone astray before he was born.

Rebirth is also seen to be a series of 'threads' binding together the levels of life. The **Hindu** sees man as merely on one of many levels of life, from the lowest spirits and insects right through to the gods and beyond.

The moral law which dictates the rising and falling onto different levels is called **Karma** – literally meaning 'action', for it is through our deeds that our futures are formed. This is seen by **Hindus** as the way in which God brings them through tribulations to ultimate salvation and heavenly bliss.

(b) MOKSHA

Moksha, also known as 'mukti', is the **Hindu** term used for the liberation of the soul from the wheel of **Karma**. For the **Hindu** this is his chief aim for his existence, to be free from this binding life-cycle of births, deaths and rebirths. When the **Hindu** has achieved this liberation he enters into a state of fullness and completion.

Moksha can be achieved in three ways:

1. Knowledge or jnana
2. Devotion or bhakti
3. Ritual works or karma.

One who achieves **moksha** before death is known as **jvanmukta**.

These are the three ways of salvation for the **Hindu** to pursue. The way of knowledge, the way of devotion or the way of works.

The Way of Works:

The way of works is through religious duties and performing religious rites. The **Hindu** believes that by doing these things he can add favourable karma to his merits. Moreover if he does these religious duties to a very high degree he could even become a Brahmin (a member of the highest most noble class).

Although he may attain to such a high position he must never be thinking that his actions are for gain but must be done unselfishly.

The Way of Knowledge:

The basic premise behind the way of knowledge is the cause of human suffering based upon ignorance. This error in man's thinking is that he considers himself a separate entity whereas he is part of a whole. Life passing through man, nature and the heavenly bodies. One life force known as **Brahman**.

Selfhood is an illusion. As long as man continues seeing himself as a separate reality he will be chained to the wheel of birth, death and rebirth. He must be saved from this wrong belief by the proper understanding that he has no independent self. This knowledge is not merely intellectual but experiential, for the individual reaches a state of consciousness where the law of karma is of no effect. This experience comes after much self-discipline and meditation. To sit for hours and hours on end does not appeal to the masses but it is one way to release the chains of karma. This meditation is a form of **yoga** which is also common among Buddhists and other eastern religions.

The Way of Devotion:

The way of devotion (**bhakti marga**) is chronologically the last of the three ways of salvation. It is that devotion to a deity which may be reflected in acts of worship, both public and private. This devotion is based on love for the deity. It will also be carried out in human relationships; i.e. love of family, love of master etc. This devotion can lead to ultimate salvation.

6. HINDUISM and CHRISTIANITY

A comparison between **Hinduism** and Christianity shows a wide divergence between the two faiths.

(a) GOD

On the subject of **GOD**, **HINDUISM'S** supreme being is the indefinable, impersonal **BRAHMAN**, a philosophical absolute.

Christianity, through the Bible teaches that there is a Supreme Being Who can be known. An infinite-personal Creator who creates us to be in fellowship with Him and to glorify Him. He is known to be holy, loving and extremely interested in the affairs of mankind. **“Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).**

(b) MAN

The **HINDU** view of man is that he is part of a whole structure without individual self or self-worth (**Pantheism**).

Christianity, through the Bible teaches that man was made in the image of God with a personality and the ability to both give and receive love. Although the image of man has been ‘ruined by the fall’, man is still of infinite value to God. This is clearly seen in that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in order that man might be redeemed. He did this when man was still in rebellion against God. The Bible says **“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8; see also 2 Corinthians 5:19-21).**

(c) SIN

In **HINDUISM** there is no sin against God. Acts of wrongdoing are not done against any God but are the result of ignorance. These evils can be overcome by following one of the prescribed ways of salvation.

Christianity, through the Bible teaches that sin is very real and is a rebellion against a holy and perfect God. We have all sinned and in so doing have gone against God. **“Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:4; see also Romans 3:23).**

(d) **SALVATION**

Salvation can be gained in three ways in **HINDUISM**. (I have previously described these three ways in detail). Generally they could all be summed up by one word **‘WORKS’**. In **HINDUISM** effort and devotion bring the reward of salvation.

Christianity, through the Bible teaches that we cannot earn our way to eternal bliss. Rather salvation is freely given by a gracious God to all who will receive it. The Bible teaches **“For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-10).** **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).**

These then are the major differences between **HINDUISM** and Christianity. As they stand, it is impossible that the two faiths could ever be reconciled. The basic concepts are totally opposite. As a Christian I am thankful that I can have assurance of salvation. The Word of God makes it abundantly clear that GOD has achieved salvation for His people. Our part is to **“repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).** **“But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).**

VIDEO RESOURCES

Earlier I wrote in the text of the booklet by Jim Allis

(Cecil – immediately after the end of the text of this booklet I will give the link to a short video that shows the ‘conversion’ of a former Anglican rectory into a private HINDU shrine and you will see much of what has just been described)

This link will take you to that video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIPYzqqv0ss>

Following on from that video, a good example of the outworking of **HINDUISM** in the everyday life of a village in India was shown in a video broadcast some years ago by the Open University. Many aspects of what Jim Allis wrote about in his booklet 'surface' in that documentary and you can view it by going to this link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbK7dCPHDek>

In that video of village-life, reference was made to a pilgrimage to a Temple beside the Ganges where pilgrims bathe in the 'sacred waters'. The biggest of all such pilgrimages is known as **Kumbh Mela** and many years ago I recorded a documentary about the 1989 celebration of that event. You can view it by going to this link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXa9kzZ5AmM>

In the **Kumbh Mela** video, two particular statements or claims struck me forcibly – the first is at **27.34** where it is claimed by a guru that '**The Ganges washes away sins and Holy Men bless you**' and then at **24.11** a devotee prays '**Goddess Ganges who takes away the sins of the world, be pleased**'.

If you have watched this and the earlier 2 videos I think there is only one conclusion that you can arrive at and that is that **HINDUISM** is a product of "**seducing spirits**".

Pastor John MacArthur gave a talk on '**understanding the seducing spirit**' and whilst he doesn't specifically address **HINDUISM** he does highlight principles and methods used by "**seducing spirits**" to deceive people. In particular he makes reference to '**asceticism**' – practising self-denial as a means of/to salvation – something that is often advocated by 'gurus/holy men'. Pastor MacArthur's talk can be heard on –

<http://www.gty.org.uk/MediaPlayer/archive/7284>

Today many people generally regard **HINDUISM** as a benign, non-threatening religion. Certainly that would be the impression conveyed by the short documentary video on how that **Hindu** couple turned the former Anglican Rectory into a **Hindu** shrine/temple.

However, the sad reality is that there are militant and violent devotees to be found within the ranks of **HINDUISM** as this short article published in the British Church Newspaper of 4 September 2015 illustrates –

'In the Northwest of India, 10 Christian families have fled their village after intolerant HINDUS harassed them and threatened to put them to death. Since the threats were issued the church has been unable to come together for worship and its members have been threatened with death if they even mention the name of Christ. The pastor, Pratap Singh, was found in hiding by the extremist HINDU sect. He and his family were forced to worship an idol of HANUMAN, a HINDU god, and forced to sign a paper that contained the words "I am a Hindu".

In another village in the same area, 50 Christians were forcibly converted and threatened with being killed and cut in pieces if they ever go back to church.

On India's west coast, HINDU extremists have gathered to prevent Christians gathering to worship. Pastor Benjamin Gomes of New Life Grace Ministries reported "Every Sunday for more than a month now, 100 HINDU extremists gathered near where we are conducting Sunday meetings and threatened to harm some of our church members if they continue to attend the prayer meetings. The police have now provided some protection for the church to meet. However, as recently as Sunday 23rd August the extremists sent women to disrupt the service, but the Pastor reiterated "... we still managed to continue our prayer meetings under pressure".

(Source: Morning Star News)

BOOK RESOURCES

In closing, for those who wish to study **HINDUISM** in more depth, the following books that I personally have my own copy of, might prove to be helpful –

'DEATH of a GURU'

Rabindranath R Maharaj

THE SPIRIT of HINDUISM

David Burnett

A BOOK of BELIEFS

John Allan: John Butterworth: Myrtle Langley

THE TIMES: WORLD RELIGIONS

Editor: Martin Palmer