

# **QUESTION**

*EXPLAIN HOW OUR EVERYDAY WORLD LOOKS TO A HINDU*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Hindu religion, which is also known as Hinduism is closely, intertwines with tradition about the land of India, its social system and its history. It is a family or religions, which has evolved over 4000 years on the Indian subcontinent. In the late 20th century it was estimated to be the world's third largest religious grouping. All but 36 million of an estimated 583 million Hindus lived in India where they made up 79 percent of the population (1980). The most prominent and characteristic institution of Hinduism is Caste. Traditionally each has its own function in the society and it's recognised role. The traditional Caste are (I) the Brahman or priestly and scholarly Caste; (ii) the Kshatriya, the warrior or soldier Caste; (iii) the Vaisya, the mercantile Caste; (iv) the Sudra, the farming and peasant Caste. The rest of the population forms the fifth and the lowest stratum. Those of this section are outcastes-outside the four main varnas of traditional Hindu society.

For many ritual purposes women are treated on a par with the fourth varna, the Sudra. The highest varna is that of the fairskinned Brahman, whereas to the lowest varna (which literally means colour) belong Sudras who are darkskinned. The Brahmins refrain from consuming meat and liquor, whereas the outcastes partake of them. The outcastes have historically been regarded as "untouchables," although that distinction is now illegal under Indian law.

Indeed, it is easier to define Hinduism as the religion and way of life of all Indians who belong to no other faith than to define the precise beliefs and practices, which bind Hindus as coreligionists. The three aims of life were Dharma, the acquisition of religious merit through right living, Artha, the lawful making of wealth, and Kama, the satisfaction of desires: thus embracing the major aspects of human life. Only later we have Moksha, the quest for liberation, added as the fourth. Right living in this world, Dharma, had displace Moksha, liberation from this world, at the very

centre of Hinduism. But Moksha was never ignored. In this account, I would try to explain the worldview of Hindus through the various components of Hinduism.

## BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Every individual who has any claim to the Hindu name is a member of one of the innumerable castes mentioned above, and by his membership is pledged to keep its rules. Each Caste has its own traditions, its own way of living, and these lay their iron hand on every part of the life of man and woman-on what they wear and what they eat, on the words they use, the gods they worship, and the manner in which they order their social relationship. Every man knows exactly what his place is in society, and unless he flagrantly breaks the rules. Thus Hinduism separates man from man.

A Hindu is accustomed to the fact that every man has to find his way to God in splendid isolation. Ultimately he has to be responsible for his own salvation. According to Hindus, God is one, but has many names and characters. They refer to God as female as well as male. Hindus see God existing in all life; in fact God is the life in all animals and plants. So there is Hanuman, the monkey, Agni the fire, Indra the storm and Ganga the river Ganges. Sometimes when Hindus pray they will call on Ambaji, the Divine Mother, or Ganesha, who is elephant-headed. Among their other gods are Indra, the warrior, another was Varuna, universal monarch who is believed to have fixed the laws of universe such as gravity, directed the rivers and planets. He was also known to be concerned about human behaviour and morality.

Hindu believes that within all living things-animals and plants as well as humans-there exists an indestructible eternal Atman, a soul, for want of a better word. Some Hindus consider this Atman to be part of Brahman (it is believed that in Brahman are to be found pure being - Sat; pure intelligence - Cit; and pure delight - Ananda). That is God in the same way that a drop of water is part of the sea. Some Hindus think that the Atman has some kind of separate existence, like the planets going around the sun. All tend to agree that man's problem is that he is not aware of this true nature as a spiritual being and instead thinks that it is the body that is eternal. Consequently he spends his time feeding it, dressing it, and trying to amass wealth to make it comfortable. He seems to fail to realise that one day the body will perish. It is therefore the belief of Hindus that men need to recognise their true nature through enlightenment so that the soul may be freed from its body-prison, otherwise the soul will have to return again into another body and keep on doing so until finally it gain its freedom.

Common to most forms of Hinduism is the idea of reincarnation or transmigration. Therefore the term Samsara refers to the process of birth and rebirth, continuing for life after life. The particular forms and condition (pleasant or unpleasant) of rebirth is the result of Karma, the law by which the consequences of actions within one life are carried over into the next and influence its character. Thus ultimate spiritual goal of Hindus is Moksha, or release from the cycle of Samsara. Most Hindus believe that the soul is divine and eternal. Therefore the Sikh Gurus and a man of Gandhi's spiritual stature can be placed among the gods.

Pilgrimages one of the very important components of Hinduism. The reasons for it vary from

person to person. Some pilgrims seek the feeling of satisfaction that is achieved when a promise has been fulfilled or a kindness done especially if it has entailed some cost in the form of effort or self-sacrifice. Such a person is sure that the experience will have a lasting value, in this life and beyond. He may express this belief in phrases like 'acquiring merit', or gaining good Karma, that is building up a balance of good actions to weigh against bad deeds that have been committed by him or his ancestors.

There are three categories of worship: temple, domestic, and congregational. Private devotion also includes fasting on certain days in the month. It can also be expressed in ritual worship to a particular deity. The typical prayer room has a shelf or table standing against one of the walls. On the table will be one or more statues of the deities, perhaps pictures of others, maybe a bottle containing water from the Ganges and a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. The contents of the shrine may vary from temple to temple. The statues will have a canopy above them or a symbolic representation, a pyramidiacal shape outlined on the wall in cloth or coloured paper. However, it is worth noting that the devotional aspirations of Hindus can vary from hopes of worldly success to liberation (Moksha) from the cycle of transmigration (Samsara).

Everywhere in the Hindu world there is the all-pervading sense of the invisible and the supernatural. In this sense India is still a profoundly religious country. But some qualification of this statement is needed. The villager is well aware that he is surrounded by unseen powers; but only in rare instances does he regard these powers as beneficent. They are more likely to be cruel, capricious and vengeful. The idea of the great God is not wholly absent-but he is far away, and unlikely to concern himself about such insignificant creatures as the poor dwellers in Indian villages. This is the view of the majority of the villagers who are just simple, unlettered folks who continuously struggling for their livelihood in the face of poverty, disease, climatic uncertainty and many other kinds of threats and difficulties.

Rules of pollution and purity have a strong influence among the Hindus, especially in rural India. Some objects such as gold and silk cannot be polluted. Objects such as a dead body pollute other objects that come into contact with it. A person touching a polluted object becomes polluted, and can pollute another person by touch. There are detailed rules about the degrees of pollution and the remedies for removing each. Fire and running water can remove pollution. A pious Hindu's morning bathing is not simply a wash, but a ritual purification to bring him to the state of purity considered necessary in Hinduism before approaching a deity. This of course is one of Hindu worldviews.

A festival is an occasion when a community celebrates something which is important and meaningful to it. The occasion may be a religious festival occurring monthly, annually or as the case may be. There is almost no end to the festivals of Hinduism, and most of which are reflections of how they look at the world. One of these numerous festivals is Dussehra or Vijaya Dashami. On this day the Spirit of God departs from the statue of Durga which has been made by the villagers. The statue is taken to the river in a joyful procession and put into the water. As it sinks beneath the water the people rejoice, believing that it has carried away with it all unhappiness and ill fortune. There is this other one called Raksha Bandan during which sisters tie rakhis on their brothers' wrists, and a Hindu girl may put one on any man's hand to claim him as her personal 'protector'.

## THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN CIVILISATION

Intensive contact with western ideas about education, science and technology, and with Christian missionary activity, led to a reformation of ideas and practices of Hinduism. In 1828, Rammohun Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj a strictly monotheistic group, which rejected image worship and many social customs such as the tradition of Sati or Suttee, in which a widow would mount her deceased husband's funeral pyre. He introduced religious services on a Christian model. The Brahmo Samaj was rather rationalist outlook and much influenced by Unitarian theology. It deeply influenced the modern Hindus' worldview though it did not have popular appeal because of its intellectualism.

The Arya Samaj founded on 1875 by Dayananda Sarasvati, like the Brahmo Samaj, promoted the reform of Hinduism, particularly rejecting image-worship in favour of a strict monotheism and promoting social reform such as the rejection of child marriage. The Arya Samaj became associated with Indian nationalism and Dayananda Sarasvati promoted Hindi as a national language.

The nineteenth-century reforms of Hinduism provided the necessary spiritual resources for a vigorous Hindu nationalism which inspired the political independence movement. Mahatma Gandhi always saw himself as an orthodox Hindu, yet he was one of the most vigorous reformers of modern Hinduism, criticising Caste distinctions, untouchability and ritual pollution. He emphasised the oneness of God or Truth and humanity and his Satyagraha movement, which, in contrast to some other nationalist movements, emphasised the quality of non-violence (Ahimsa), was instrumental in gaining India's independence.

Other internationally best known Indian figures of the twentieth century are probably the poet Rabindranath Tagore who received the Nobel prize for literature for his religious poem Gitanjali; the philosopher-mystic Sri Aurobindo Ghose who reinterpreted Hinduism in the light of modern evolution and founded an influential Ashram in Pondicherry. In the final analysis, we observe that Hinduism in its modern setting is meeting tremendous secularising influences leading to crisis of belief and practice. It is therefore difficult to say what the future of Hinduism will be, but so far, this is how our everyday world looks to Hindus.

