



126472 - A brief look at Hinduism

the question

Can you tell me a few facts about Hinduism?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

1. Definition

Hinduism, which is also called Brahmanism, is an idolatrous religion that is followed by most of the inhabitants of India. It is a set of beliefs, customs and traditions that took shape over a long time from the fifteenth century BCE until the present day. In the fifteenth century BCE, the original dark-skinned inhabitants of India had some primitive ideas and beliefs. Then the Aryan invaders came passing, by the Iranians on their way, and the Aryans' beliefs were influenced by the lands they passed through. When they settled in India, there was a mixing of the beliefs of different groups that produced Hinduism as a religion of primitive ideas that promoted worship of nature, ancestors and cows in particular. In the eighth century BCE, Hinduism developed further and the Brahman sect emerged, which promoted the worship of Brahma.

Hinduism has no specific founder, and no specific authors are known for most of their scriptures. The religion developed and its scriptures were written over a long period of time.

2. Ideas and beliefs

We can understand Hinduism from its scriptures, the way they speak of the divine, their beliefs and their castes, alongside other intellectual and ideological issues.

a) Their scriptures



The Hindus have a huge number of scriptures that are difficult to understand and are written in obscure language. Many other books were written to comment on and explain them and other books were written to summarize these commentaries. All of them are sacred to them. The most significant of them are:

i) The Vedas

Veda is a Sanskrit word meaning wisdom and knowledge. The Vedas depict the life of the Aryans, and the steps for developing intellectual life from naïveté to philosophy. They also contain prayers which express doubt and confusion, and claim divinity for everything to the point of wahdat al-wujud (oneness of existence). There are four Vedas.

ii) The Mahabharata

This is an Indian epic, like the Iliad and Odyssey of the Greeks. Its author is Vyasa, the son of the sage Parasara who wrote it in 950 BCE. It describes a war between princes from royal families, in which the gods also participated.

b) The Hindu concept of gods

- Monotheism

There is no monotheism in the precise sense. Rather, when they turn to one of their gods, they give him all their attention and focus, to the point that they disregard all other gods, and they address that one as “lord of lords” and “god of gods.”

- Polytheism

They say that for every natural phenomenon, beneficial or harmful, there is a god to be worshipped, such as water, air, rivers, mountains... There are many gods to which they seek to draw close by worshipping them and making offerings.

- Trinity (Trimurti)



In the ninth century BCE, the priests combined the gods into one god, who brought forth the universe from his essence. This is the one whom they call: 1. Brahma (the creator god); 2. Vishnu (the preserver god); and 3. Shiva (the destroyer god). Whoever worships one of the three gods is worshipping all of them, or is worshipping the one supreme god, as there is no difference between them. Thus they opened the door for the Christians to come up with their belief in the Trinity.

-All Hindus are agreed on regarding as holy the cow, certain types of reptiles, such as snakes, and certain types of animals, such as monkeys, but out of all of these, the cow is venerated above all others. There are statues of cows in temples, houses and public squares, and cows have the right to go anywhere. It is not permissible for a Hindu to harm a cow or slaughter it, and if a cow dies, it is buried with religious rituals.

-The Hindus believe that their gods were incarnated in a human called Krishna, and that in him, man and god met, or that the divine dwelt in the human. They talk about Krishna as the Christians talk about Christ. Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahrah (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote a comparison between the two religions, showing an amazing resemblance; rather they are identical. At the end of this comparison, he said: Christians should research the origins of their religion.

c) The caste system in Indian society

-From the time the Aryans reached India, they formed castes which still exist up till now, and there is no way to abolish them, because they are eternal categories created by God, as they believe.

-The castes are mentioned in the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), as follows:

1) Brahmins: they are the ones whom the god Brahma created from his mouth. They are teachers, priests and judges, and everyone turns to them to perform rituals for marriage and death. It is not permissible to offer sacrifices except in their presence.

2) Kshatriyas: they are the ones whom the god created from his forearms. They acquire knowledge, make offerings and carry weapons for defence.



3) Vaishyas: They are the ones whom the god created from his thigh. They are farmers and traders; they accumulate wealth and spend it on religious institutions.

4) Shudras: they are the ones whom the god created from his feet. They, along with the dark-skinned indigenous people, are the Dalits (“untouchables”) whose work is limited to serving the other three honourable castes, and they do menial and dirty jobs.

-All Hindus are agreed on accepting this caste system for religious reasons.

-It is permissible for a man to marry from a higher caste, and it is permissible to marry from a lower caste, on condition that the wife is not from the fourth caste, the Shudras. It is not permissible for a man from the Shudra caste to marry a woman from any other caste under any circumstances.

-The Brahmins are the elite, and they are thought to be gods. They have the right to take the property of their Shudra slaves whenever they want.

-The Brahmin who writes the holy book is a man who is forgiven, even if he destroys the three worlds with his sins.

-It is not permissible for the king – no matter what the circumstances – to collect taxes from a Brahmin.

-If a Brahmin commits a capital offence, it is not permissible for the ruler to do anything but shave his head. If anyone else commits a capital offence, he is to be executed.

-A ten-year-old Brahmin is superior to a one-hundred-year old Shudra, as a father is superior to his son.

-It is not appropriate for a Brahmin to die of starvation in his land.

-The Dalits (“untouchables”) are inferior to animals and lower than dogs according to the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu).



-It is good luck for Dalits (“untouchables”) to serve the Brahmins, and they are not entitled to any wage or reward.

-If a Dalit raises his hand or a stick to strike a Brahmin, his hand is to be cut off, and if he kicks him, his foot is to be cut off.

-If a Dalit even thinks of sitting with a Brahmin, the king must brand his buttocks and banish him from the land.

-If a Dalit claims that he is teaching a Brahmin, he is to be forced to drink boiling oil.

-The penalty for killing a dog, cat, frog, lizard, crow, owl or Dalit man is the same.

-Recently there have been some small improvements in the conditions of the Dalits, for fear of others taking advantage of their situation and converting them to other religions, especially Christianity, which is making inroads among them, or communism, which attracts them through the idea of class warfare. And many Dalits have found dignity and equality in Islam, and have embraced the faith.

d) Their beliefs

Their beliefs may be summed up as Karma, reincarnation, moksha (nirvana) and wahdat al-wujud (oneness of existence).

1) Karma is the law of requital; that is, the divine system of the universe is based on pure justice, and this justice will inevitably take place, either in this life or in the next life, and requital for one life may take place in another life. This earth is a realm of trial, and is also a realm of punishment and reward.

2) Reincarnation: when a person dies, his body dies and his soul moves on to enter another body, according to his deeds in his previous life, and the soul begins a new cycle.

3) Moksha (nirvana – liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth): good and bad deeds lead to another cycle of life in which the soul will be rewarded or punished according to what it did



in the previous cycle.

-The one who does not desire anything and will never desire anything, is freed from servitude to whims and desires and feels at ease with himself, will not be returned to another body; rather his soul moves on and is united with Brahma.

4) Wahdat al-wujud (oneness of existence): for the Hindus, their philosophical abstraction reached such a point that man can create ideas, systems and institutions, just as he can preserve them or destroy them. Thus man becomes one with the gods, and his soul becomes the essence of creating power.

a) The soul, like the gods, exists from eternity to eternity, is continuous and is not created.

b) The connection between a man and the gods is like the connection between the spark of fire and the fire itself, and like the connection between the seed and the tree.

c) This universe is nothing but a manifestation of true existence, and the human soul is part of the sublime soul.

d) Other ideas and beliefs:

-Bodies are to be cremated after death, because this allows the soul to ascend vertically, to reach the upper realms in the shortest time. Cremation also releases the soul from the container of the body in a complete way.

-When the soul is released and ascends, there are three realms in front of it:

i) The upper realm; ii) The realm of the angels; iii) The realm of humans, where humans are reincarnated. As for the realm of hell, it is for those who commit sins.

-There is not only one hell; rather for each particular sin there is a hell for those who commit that sin.

-Resurrection in the afterlife is only for souls, not bodies.



-A woman whose husband dies cannot marry again after his death; rather she lives in perpetual misery and is subjected to humiliation and abuse; her status is lower than that of a servant. Hence a woman may burn herself after her husband's death in order to avoid the suffering that she expects to live through. The law has forbidden this practice in modern India.

3. Where Hinduism prevails

The Hindu religion ruled the Indian subcontinent and spread throughout it despite the differences in demographics. But there is a huge difference between Muslims and Hindus in the way they see the universe and life, and in the way they view the cow, which Hindus worship whilst Muslims slaughter it and eat its meat. This was the cause of Partition, when the establishment of the state of Pakistan, with its eastern and western parts, most of whose inhabitants are Muslims, was announced. And there remained the Indian state, most of whose inhabitants are Hindus, and Muslims form a large minority in India.

These definitions are taken from *Al-Mawsu'at al-Muyassarah fil-Adyan wal-Ahzab al-Mu'asirah*, 2/724-731, with some alterations.

And Allah knows best.