

HINDUISM AND THE RELIGIOUS MAKE-UP OF INDIA

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There are close to 1 billion Hindus in the world; they make up about 80% of the population of India. It comprises a multiplicity of cults and sects more or less closely affiliated with a common tradition. Hinduism is not based on the teachings of a founder such as Buddha or Muhammad. It has evolved over centuries, and is a mixture of the simple worship of natural forces and sophisticated metaphysical thought. It has elements of polytheism, pantheism and monotheism. One branch of Hinduism can be highly critical of other branches, and within this "one" religion one can find many contradictions.

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPEMENT OF HINDUISM

VEDIC PERIOD 1500 - 500 BC

Somewhere between 1500 and 1200 BC the Aryan tribes invaded and settled in northern India. They composed hymns which make up the Rig Veda. ("Veda" sanskrit for "truth, thought" comp. Eng. "wit." Hymns are composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit, using lots of metaphors. Vedic hymns are dense, profound, very poetic.)

4 Samhitas (volumes):

Rig Veda ("Veda of Laudatory Stanzas") comprises about one thousand poems. Most quoted of the 4 Samhitas.)

Sama Veda - chanting

Yajur Veda - manual of sacrificial operations

Atharva-Veda - magical texts, spells and incantations.

Brahmanas (800-600BC)- liturgical instructions, information on symbolism and rites, links to mythology, can be considered a commentary on Vedic poems

Upanishads (600-300 BC) - appendices to the Brahamana. Also know as the Vedanta. (which means "end of the Veda")

There is a great difference between the Veda and Biblical revelation as we understand it. The Veda is said to be a text out of time that exists of itself and reveals itself by itself. Strictly speaking the Veda has no author. The Veda is primarily sound-oriented, the power comes from the vibrations of the sound-waves. Even after the texts were written and translated, the Vedas are learned by listening to a master and repeating the words in the original sanskrit. This idea of Vedism is carried over into modern Hinduism by the use of the *mantra* in worship and meditation. The sound vibrations made by the repeating of the correct *mantra* assigned to the devotee by a guru will have a powerful effect on the gods and natural forces.

Vedic religion relied heavily on the idea of sacrifices. The gods depend on these sacrifices to lift them up. The right order of things in the world, prosperity and salvation in the after life can be achieved by correct execution of rites and not by any divine favor. The gods' main function was to receive sacrifices; the brahmins (those who understood the Brahman) were needed to teach and explain the proper ritual. The sacrifice aspect of Vedism has been replaced by devotion to images of gods as though they were living persons. They believe that the gods are present, alive and active in the images that represent them. To this day the images of the gods are treated with garlands, baths, fans, movement to summer homes in hot weather.¹

Many gods (*devas*) of the Vedas are personified natural forces. Indra (a war-god, god of thunder and lightning); Varuna [Ahura Mazda of Zoroastrianism(wind), Mitra [Mithras] (sun); Soma (Moon); Agni (Fire - an extremely important god that served as the "mouth" of the deities through which the gods received (ate) the sacrifices that were offered.) Some of the Vedic gods survive into Hinduism, some disappear, and others move from a secondary role to center stage. Vishnu and Shiva (Rudra of the Veda) are minor gods in the Veda, but have become extremely important in later Hindu writings and tradition.

Various gods of the Vedic pantheon have a double aspect. Agni is the god of fire to whom prayers are addressed, but agni is also the name for the flame itself. Soma is a god but also the juice of a plant that is considered the drink of immortality.²

The last 300 years of the Vedic period produced the Upanishads, also known as the Vedanta "the end of the Veda". These berate the ancient texts and practices and favor others. Cremation replaces burial as the better way of disposing of the dead. Cows are protected as sacred instead of being sacrificed to the gods. Three basic doctrines of importance to later Hinduism are found: *Samsara*, *karma*, and *moksha (nirvana)* the escape from the weary cycle of death, rebirth, redeath.

BUDDHISM and JAINISM - Ancient critiques of polytheistic and ritualistic Vedism. Both Buddhism and Jainism reject *varnas*, and give a higher place to women.

- * Buddhism is elevation of self out of painful struggles of life by recognizing the oneness of all things, fatalistically accept what is, stop fighting it, and become one with it. Gautama Siddhartha grew up in the foothills of the Himalayas. He was deeply troubled by the suffering and apparent hopelessness of human existence. after spending some time with religious ascetics. He then went off on his own and became "enlightened" after meditating and achieved *nirvana* - a transcendental state where one

¹One image of Vishnu is moved each year by placing it on a large, heavy cart, and then hundreds push the cart as fast as they can. People at times commit suicide by throwing themselves before this "unstoppable" cart. That's believed to be a very auspicious way to leave this life, crushed by "Vishnu Juggarnata".

² Some believe that this is identical to the present day *ban* (cannabis juice) which is used in religious and festive occasions.

has become completely detached from this world and its pain, absorbed into the One. "To understand the Buddha's doctrine, you must practice it." Beginners to the faith are introduced to "Four Holy Truths" (evil in the world, human response, cessation of desire, the way or path by which to achieve this pure state of being). The path is described as three-fold (morality, meditation, and wisdom, practiced simultaneously) Buddhism had a strong influence on Hinduism for many centuries, but its greatest success has been in other Asian countries.³

* Jainism is based on the great principle of "*ahimsa*"⁴ - do no harm. Jains reject the concept of world being created; there is neither creator nor creation, but universe is endless and indestructible. Jains seek a higher plane of existence, but do not believe in Nirvana.

Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism co-existed in the subcontinent with very little friction between them. Ashoka (300 BC) patronized both Jains and Buddhists, and adopted policies that would not be offensive to any of the religions. At the division of India in 1947, the Jains were counted as Hindus, the Buddhists were granted their independent state of Sri Lanka.

2. HINDUISM 500 BC - PRESENT

For all their obvious differences and even contradictions, there wasn't a deliberate break or effort at radical reform of Vedism to produce Hinduism. Vedism is still considered the source of Hinduism in many circles and its ultimate authority. The Vedic hymns are still chanted at special events. Dayananda's slogan in 1875 was "back to the Veda!"

ADVAITA:

In response to Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism built on ideas of the Upanishads. The Advaita school of Hinduism developed pantheism or monism, and began to think and philosophize about the "impersonal Atman" or self. Vedanta is the most important Hindu philosophical tradition. Its greatest expositor was Shankara (788-820) who crystalized the monistic tendency of the Upanishads into a system which treats the soul as an aspect of the impersonal Absolute (Brahman) and the world as illusion or trickery (*maya* - Eng. "magic"). By acquiring knowledge

³ The Buddhists and Jains are responsible for almost all of the ancient religious buildings and temples in India. Ancient Hindu temples are almost non-existent. The propaganda connected to the destruction of the Muslim mosque in Ayodhya stated that it had previously been the site of a Hindu temple dedicated to Ram. It actually had been a Buddhist *stupa*.

⁴ This principle is found in Ghandi's philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience. Strict Jains will wear masks and filter drinking water to avoid ingesting insects, and carefully brush off seats before sitting down. Even killing plants is harmful so some who are close to death will refuse all food.

of this truth, the soul may realize its identity with the Absolute.⁵

CASTES:

The concept of *varnas* (caste) dates back to the Rig Veda and the creation story. Purutha, the Cosmic Spirit offered up himself as sacrifice.

"When they devided him, in how many different portions did they arrange him? What became of his mouth, what of his two arms? What were his two thighs and his two feet called?

His mouth became *brahmin*; his two arms were made into the *rajana* [*kshatriya*]; his two thighs, the *vaishiya*; and from his two feet the *shudra* was born."

His mouth becomes the *brahmin* varna who serve as priests, intercessors, teachers; the *kshatriya* varna serve as princes, kings, and warriors; the *vaishya* varna are the merchants, skilled labor who produce the wealth; the *shudra* varna are the lowliest, and perform service for the three superior varnas. The top three varnas use an initiation ceremony which includes the giving of the sacred thread to wear, putting even more distance between them and the lowly *shudras*. These are called twice-born.⁶

The varna system is defended with this zoological metaphor: "You cannot train a tiger to nibble grass. You cannot train a goat to hunt." Thus the difference between the castes are seen as natural and genetic. When society is properly ordered, and everyone performs his duty, and when everyone performs his duty (specific to his varna) then society is properly ordered.

An individual cannot enjoy greater purity than that ordained for his varna, but he can suffer greater pollution. Pollution is understood to be contagious, most often through prepared food and water. A vegetarian diet is considered less polluting for *brahmins* and *vaishiyas*. Meat and alcoholic beverages are seen as an appropriate diet for *kshatriyas*. Rules about eating and drinking affirm the separateness of the varnas and the hierarchy among them.

To avoid polluting the higher castes with food and drink served at restaurants, *brahmins* are often hired as cooks. But other things that might seem to be polluting in nature, such as the clothing of the dead, is often donated for *brahmins* to wear, thinking that this contact with the priestly man will be of some benefit to the deceased.

EPICO-PURANIC WRITINGS

PURANAS 3rd to 6th Centuries AD Compendia of creation myths, kin lists, legends and religious doctrines. (Puranas means "Antiquities") Hindu art pictures the gods and goddesses in their various incarnations and struggles with demons as told in these

⁵ Brahman (neuter) and Brahma (masculine) are not to be confused with each other. The former refers to the transcendent and immanent Absolute; the latter is an anthropomorphic personfication of the Creator. Brahma (the Creator) is generally pictured with four heads.

⁶ Southern India (Dravidians) are almost exclusively of the brahmin and the shudra castes. Even princes and kings came from the Shudra caste. This is also the caste of the "untouchables" - those who have jobs that expose them to continual pollution such as sweepers, latrine cleaners, barbers.

myths. (See addendum for an example) Puranas are long winded, jumbled, loosely expressed.

RAMAYANA (1st to 3rd Century AD)

Stories and myths about the gods, incarnations, adventures, especially Ram, one of the avatars of Vishnu. Stories with ethical morals and lessons. Genealogies of gods and men, dissertations on cosmology, ritual, social organizations, summaries of various sciences, descriptions of places of pilgrimages.⁷

MAHABHARATA (4th-6th Century AD)⁸

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a fragment of this epic. This poem is a dialogue between Arjuna and his chariot driver who is Krishna. Arjuna is troubled because he is about to do battle with family members and he sees no good that can come from killing them. Krishna's teaches Arjuna to detach himself from personal involvement and devote himself to his *dharma* without concern for earthly or personal results. Krishna's answers indicate that killing does not really harm the killer or the one killed, because the soul is eternal, and goes on to another incarnation. The Bhagavad Gita is called the "New Testament" of Hinduism. Three different schools of thought cite passages from this literature that support their point of view.

HINDU "THEOLOGY AND WAY OF LIFE":

Laws of Manu⁹ (Dharma Shastras *dharma* = righteous living, sacred duty)

Four stages of life: (about 25 yrs. each, for males only)

1. Student (*Brahmacarya*) - celibate, abstain from meat, honey, etc.
2. Householder - (*Grastha* - wealth) sexually active, procreation, earning money, running household (cf. Kama Sutra)
3. Semi-retired (*Vanaprastha*) from world's pleasures and attractions
4. Retired (*Sanyasin*) from earthly cares, desires.

⁷ Author: Valmiki. Prince Rama of Ayodhya, has his wife, Sita, kidnapped by a demon named Ravana. He takes her to Lanka. Rama together with his brother Lakshmana and with the help of Hanuman, the monkey god, rescue her. Tradition says that you can still see the remnants of the bridge built by the monkeys between India and the island of Sri Lanka

⁸ The original was composed in Sanskrit, over 5,000 pages. The whole nation of India watched as the Mahabharata was made into a mini-series for Sunday night TV. Two years worth of programs were produced. It is the tale of a feud between two branches of a single Indian ruling family, the Kurus and the Pandavas, that takes place near Delhi.

⁹ Manu is the equivalent of Noah - the one who survives the great deluge.

ASTROLOGY - Brahmin priests stay involved in many aspects of daily life, marriage, funeral, by teaching and practicing astrology. Vedic hymns are still chanted at births, weddings, funerals, initiation ceremonies.

BHAKTI - Ramanuja (11th Century) rejected the idea of a completely impersonal Supreme Soul. He finds justification for a qualified monism. Through devotion of love to personal god(s), one returns to the bosom of God, yet the soul retains its separate identity. A 13th Century brahmin named Madhva taught that God and his creation are completely distinct. God saves whom he pleases, though he pleases to save only the pure. The wicked are destined for outer darkness. The ordinary (not saved, not destined for outer darkness) are destined to eternal *samsara*. Bhakti devotion centers on two main deities: (Vaishnava and Shaiva)

Vishnu: Of his 10 Avatars¹⁰ only three have followings today. Ram, Krishna and Buddha. His wife is Lakshmi. Brahma is pictured as coming from a lotus that grows from Vishnu's navel.

Shiva also has several incarnations, some of which are female in nature - Parvati, who is benevolent and Kali who is a blood-thirsty killer)¹¹ Shiva has two sons who are worshiped: Ganesha, the elephant headed son, who removes obstacles, and Skanda (god of war created by Shiva to deliver the gods from a demon) who is very popular in Tamil Nadu. The bronze statue of Shiva's dance from Southern India is quite famous. It represents his sustaining of creation.

Bhakti does not see God(s) as a mindless being as the Advaitans do. The Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON) that moved out of India into Europe and the Americas in the 1960's is part of this school of thought.

KARMA The laws of karma are immutable and inescapable. They are like laws of nature that even the gods are subject to. The gods cannot spare anyone bad karma or

¹⁰ 1. The fish who saved Manu and the Veda from the great flood; 2. The tortoise whose back sustained the mountains after the flood; 3. The boar who rescued the earth from the cosmic ocean into which the demon had thrown her; 4. The man-lion (see addendum); 5. The Dwarf (Vamana) who covers earth, air and sky in three steps; 6. Rama of the Axe who defended the brahmins vs. the kshatriyas 21 times; 7. Rama, prince of Ayodhya (*Ramayana*); 8. Krishna; 9. Buddha; and 10 Kalkin - the incarnation of the future variously described as a hourse, a horse-headed man or a man seated on a white horse with a flaming sword in hand. He will bring judgment to earth and restore the golden age.

¹¹All the Hindu gods appear to have a male and female side; many of them have incarnations as goddesses. This female side of the gods' powers is called *Shakti*. Reproductive power and destructive power go hand in hand.

reward anyone with good karma; it is completely dependent on one's own performance. *Karma* (good and bad) can be carried over into several succeeding lifetimes.

"MODERN" HINDUISM

As early Hinduism was influenced by Buddhism and Jainism, later Hinduism was influenced by Islam, Sikhism and Christianity with the increased trade and colonization by the Europeans.¹²

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA:

Tradition has it that St. Thomas evangelized southern India and is buried in Madras. Lutheran efforts in India started in Portuguese colony by Danish missionaries and then German mission societies in 1800's. Lutheran efforts this century? (That could/should be subject of a separate investigation and essay. Perhaps this would make a good Church History assignment for our students in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.)

MUSLIMS:

The strong presence of Muslims in NW India from 11th Century on resulted in Hindu apologetics and polemics. Hinduism during this period developed mostly along the line of *bhakti*. Muslim holy men often had Hindu disciples and vice versa. Some of the gurus or sufis (fakirs) were recognized by both religions. Hindus and Muslims lived in relative peace with each other up until the closing years of the British Raj when they were competing for political power.

SIKHS:

The founder of the Sikh movement was Nanak (1469-1539). Nanak emphasized the "Word of God" - "listening to the Word one becomes equal to the gods", "Listening to the Word of God is better than bathing in the holiest water." There were eight Sikh leaders. Their sacred writings are called the *Agi Granth*. Sikhs were a majority in Punjab state. In 1947 they voted to become part of India and to be considered Hindus. They later regretted that decision, and they became more and more militant against the Hindus in their area. In 1984 Indira Gandhi ordered the destruction of the "Golden Temple" of the Sikhs at Amritsa.

Sikhs always wear turbans, do not shave, and all wear loose clothing and a concealed dagger. They all are named Singh (lion).

¹² 1510 Albuquerque of Portugal takes Goa from the Moghals. They tried to forcibly convert Hindus to Christianity. 1612 the Dutch East India Company was formed, trading primarily with Bengal and Madras. 1601 English East India Company establishes first factory at Surat. 1664 French East India Company formed, establishing factories at Surat, and Pondicherry. These rival trading companies combined trade with conquest. The Portuguese and Dutch were pushed out quite easily.

HINDU REFORM MOVEMENTS - 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Both the Muslims and the Sikhs criticized the Hindu mistreatment and oppression of women, as well as the caste system. Modern Hindu apologists have also tried to reform in this area. The practice of *Sati* (the widow throws herself on the pyre of her dead husband) was discontinued and outlawed by the British at the request of a highly respected Hindu - Raja Ram Mohan Roy.¹³

Dayanandas Saraswathi (born 1824) strongly criticized the "idolatry" of the bhakti movement. He condemned the subjugation of women and wanted to reform the caste system. He was concerned and critical of how much influence Islam and Christianity were having among the Hindus. He debated with Muslims, Christians and traditional Hindus. In 1883 he was poisoned.

Vedanta Society (Swami Vivekananda 1862-1902) [1. nature of human beings is divine/Brahman; 2. purpose of human life is to realize this divine nature; 3. all religious movements essentially agree and lead to the goal of liberation. (cf. Advaita above) He attended the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and strongly criticized American religion. He said Americans worship the almighty dollar; religion is either hypocritical or fanatical, and the average Indian is more moral than the average American.

Theosophical Society (Madam Blavatsky) brought foreign support and encouragement to Hindu nationalism.

THREE GREAT HINDU LEADERS OF 20TH CENTURY COMPARED:

MOHANDAS GHANDI (1869-1948) (*satyagraha*) Non-violent (*cf. ahimsa* of the Jains) disobedience and the suffering of its consequences becomes a spiritual act through which one achieves self-realization. "In my humble opinion, effort is necessary for one's growth. It has to be irrespective of results. *Ramanama* or some equivalent is not necessary for the sake of of repetition but for the sake of purification as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is therefore never a substitute for effort. Self realization I hold to be impossible without the service of and identification with the poorest." [Ghandi was assassinated in 1948 by a member of the Maratha Party of Hindu nationalists.]

SRI RAMANA BHAGAVAN MAHARISHI (1879-1950) (*Advaita*)

Disciple: How can I attain self-realization?

Master: Realization is not something to be gained afresh, it is already there. all that is necessary is to get rid of the thought, "I have not realized."

D: Does my Realization help others?

¹³ Ram Mohan Roy started the Brahma Samaj in 1828. This built on the similarities between Hinduism and the Unitarian beliefs in the West.

M: Yes, and it is the best help you can possible render to others. Those who have discovered great truths have done so in the still depths of the Self. But really there are no others to be helped. For the realized being sees only the Self (Atman - the Holy Impersonal Power of the Universe) just as the goldsmith sees only the gold while valuing it in various jewels made of gold. The Realized One does not see the world different from himself.

D: Wouldn't it be better if the "saints" mix with others?

M: There are no "others" to mix with. The SELF is the only Reality.

D: Should I try to help others in the world?

M: The Power that created you has created the world as well. If IT can take care of you, IT can similarly take care of the world also. If God created the world, it is His business to look after it, not yours."

BHAKTIVEDANTA SWAMI PRABHUPADA (1896-1977) (*Krishna Bhakti*- ISKCON)
"Fundamentalist Krishnaism"

	<u>MALADY</u>	<u>GOD</u>	<u>SOLUTION</u>
Ghandi (activism)	greed, selfishness	Principle	be active as social being
Bhagavan Maharishi (knowledge)	ignorance	law of karma Brahman	Self
Prabhupada (devotion)	indifference	Krishna	Kr. consciousness

INDIA AS A HOLY LAND

The mountain tops¹⁴ (especially Mount Meru, the centre of the universe) of the Himalayas are holy, and the rivers that flow down from them are therefore holy. The great rivers are great goddesses, and their water gives life. To drink of their water is to receive spiritual life - this is especially true of the Ganges (Ganga-devi) that has the purest and holiest water on earth. Blessings can be also acquired by bathing in the water, but nothing is more likely to gain blessing than to die by the river and have your body or ashes deposited in its waters. The rivers also have served as avenues of transport and sources of food over the centuries.

RURAL HINDUISM

"The young woman who goes with an offering of milk for the cobra who lives in the anthill under the banyan tree where the Naga (snake) stones are, is not seeking release from the wheel of birth and rebirth. She is asking for a speedy conception and a safe pregnancy." (Shaw p.16)

For the great majority of peasants the metaphysical, other-worldly nature of Hinduism as it

¹⁴ The temple architecture of India reminds one of Mount Meru. The tower rises up with tiers with all kinds of creatures and all sorts of people who have their niches on the building. The whole of creation is there.

is described in most books does not describe their daily worship life. Hinduism has been most often described and interpreted by the brahmins who have knowledge of the Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. For the villager the most important deity is not Vishnu or Shiva, but the village goddess (gramadevata) who presides over fertility of vegetable and animal life, over pestilence and disease, and the worship of snakes and tree spirits. This "country Hinduism" is thought to have been practiced before the arrival of the Aryans, and has not been "brahmanized".

The daily "puja" is done in the home. The average village woman is probably not seeking self-realization or moksha, or some reward in the afterlife, but is looking for some blessing today: the birth of a son, the protection of her children, the healing of someone who is sick, a blessing on the newly seeded field. Is this the mindset that makes people line up with prayer requests for the visiting missionaries?

One of the most venerated of the gods, especially in southern India, is Ganesha, the remover of obstacles - his can be found on the dashboard of most taxis and in almost every rickshaw. He is consulted before any kind of project is undertaken.

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT

The Indian sub-continent is very religious. Temples, shrines, religious art and images are seen everywhere - but to most the true God remains as unknown as He was in Athens. Hinduism as it is expounded by its swamis and gurus has the sound of and carries the reputation of "wisdom" but the many contradictions with itself and with the Truth named Jesus Christ show that wisdom to be in conflict with the "foolishness" of God.

Hinduism's hopeless view of the world and the after-life should make India fertile soil for the seed of the Gospel. May the Lord help us and bless us as we try to communicate God's saving love in Christ.

GLOSSARY

Dharma - goodness, righteousness - duty, faithfulness to one's calling, especially your calling according to your caste. What is righteous living for one caste may not be for another. "Better is one's own *dharmā* though imperfect, than the *dharmā* of another well performed." (*The Bhagavad Gita*)

Guru - religious teacher, counselor, master - sometimes a god or avatar. Sufis and Fakirs were gurus that were recognized by both Hindus and Muslims.

Jati - an endogamous subgroup of castes or varnas - people of similar socio-economic status, frequently sharing same occupations. There are only 4 varnas but thousands of jatis. Christians, Muslims, Jains, Jews form their own jatis. Two of the poorest groups in India are the "Untouchable" Christians and Muslims.

Lingam- a phallic image associated with Shiva, representing his generative power.

Mantra - name of a god, or word of praise of a god that is repeated to bring worshiper into proximity and oneness with God

Maya - The *maya* of the gods is their power to assume diverse shapes by displaying various aspects of their subtle essence. The gods themselves are products of a greater *maya*, which produces the gods and the universe in which they operate.

Puja = worship, usually not done as congregation, but as individual, at altar in home, roadside, temple, shrine, performed daily. Involves bringing some offering for the god (fire, food, drink) Festivals: priests give special treatment to statues of gods (wakened, washed, dressed and fed) decorations of statues, shrines, including cows. Not a weekly holy day, every day worship, but periodic festivals.

Shakti Puja - orgy-like ceremony, eating meat (beef), drinking alcoholic beverages, terminating in uninhibited group sex

Samsara - Reincarnation, transmigration of the soul, the endless cycle of souls, the world, even the gods, as things are repeated again and again through 100 Brahma years. (see Yuga)N.B. Origen's speculation of "pre-existence of the soul", rejected by Council of Constantinople, has led some to claim that christianity at one time taught reincarnation, but that it was removed from the Bible and the church's teachings later on. Actually Origen himself rejected "reincarnation", believing in a single "incarnation" of the pre-existent soul.

Sanyasin - a holy man who has withdrawn from the world. Frequently they wander about in white loin cloth and simple shirt (cf. Ghandi)

Untouchables - Lowest caste people who have occupations that make them ritually unclean. These have formed political alliances in recent years. The untouchables call themselves Dalits (oppressed) - Ghandi called them Harijans (God's children).

Varna - the sanskrit word for caste. There is a difference of opinion about the etymology of the word. Some think it has to do with color or race, and that the earliest varna system was to distinguish between the Aryans and the Dravidians.

Yoga = discipline, practice, action Yogi = one who has mastered certain discipline, teacher
Jhana Yoga = path of insight; Bhakti Yoga = path of devotion e.g. Hare Krishna chanting; Karma Yoga = path of action, e.g. Ghandi; Raja Yoga = path of integration of self.

Hatha Yoga = body and breath training with spiritual overtones (mantras, e.g.) TM

Yuga - A "world cycle" is made up of four *yugas* or world ages. The first cycle (1,728,000 years) stands on all four legs, stability -men and women are born virtuous. The second cycle (1,296,000 years) (Treta Yuga, "3 legs") has only 3/4 virtue. In the next cycle (864,000 years) (Dvapara Yuga, 2) the world is in delicate balance between darkness and light; the sacred cow is standing on two legs, human beings grow mean and acquisitive and averse to sacred duty. The last cycle is Kali Yuga, (432,000 years) the dark age, only 25% of full dharma, man and his world are at their worst. The full cycle (The Great Yuga) is 4,320,000, 10 times a Kali Yuga cycle. 1,000 Great Yugas are one *kalpa*. (4.3 billion yrs.) Each kalpa is marked by events that recur again and again in an unchanging process. After 100 Brahma years, everything dissolves and is reabsorbed for 100 Brahma years, then everything begins anew (every 311,040,000,000,000 human years).

"When society reaches a stage where property confers rank, wealth becomes the only source of virtue, passion the sole bond of union between husband and wife, falsehood the source of success in life, sex the only means of enjoyment, and when outer trappings are confused with inner religion. ." (Vishnu Purana) then we are in the *Kali Yuga*. This is calculated to have begun in 3102 BC. That is the date of the battle described in the *Mahabharata*.

RELIGIOUS / POLITICAL MAKE-UP OF INDIA

Population: 1990 - 853 million. Estimate 1995 - 946 million; 2000 - 1.04 billion. (these figures from Barrett and Johnson, *"Our Globe and How to Reach It"* New Hope, 1990)

3.5% Christian (Heaviest concentration of christians in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh)

80-83% Hindu;

12% (105 million) Muslims; Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists 6.5%

Dalit Panthers Maharashtra (1972)

The Arya Samaj (1875) condemned untouchability, as does the Vishva Hindu Parishad (world Hindu assoc.). Ghandi condemned it as a corruption of the Hindu faith and philosophy. The government has a four step program to abolish untouchability:

- 1.) the constitution abolishes it
- 2.) affirmative action (15% of parliament and assembly seats reserved for "untouchables")
- 3.) financial assistance
- 4.) government tolerated and encouraged political action groups

Brahmins comprise only 3% of population but 53% of govt. officials and bureaucrats

Secular govt. with growing religious influence (Nehru, Indira Ghandi - agnostics who kep the government policies secular. Indira Ghandi, however, did stir up religious factions when she ordered the attack against the Golden Temple of the Sikhs.

Bharatiya Janata Party (Bharat = India , Janata = people)

BJP's first legislative act upon assuming power: "Protection of cows act"

India has different civil laws for Hindus, Muslims and Christians. e.g. civil law requires monogamy for christians and Muslims - allows polygamy for hindus (up to 4 wives).

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1. The Gayatri Hymn from the Vedas; 2. The Upanishads; 3. Gautama Buddha; 4. Jainism;
 5. Upanishads affirmation of "self" vs. buddhism 6. Advaita - Brahman; 7. Varnas;
 8. Swami Vivekananda evaluating America and its religion(s)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Hinduism has been fertile soil for other religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism) that criticized its idolatry, the caste system and the oppression of women. How can Christian missions take advantage of these "weaknesses" in Hinduism?
2. What kind of communication difficulties can we expect as we witness to people with a world view of *samsara* and *karma*? Why is it important to distinguish between karma and God's justice?
3. What misunderstandings about Jesus Christ will a Hindu be likely to have?
4. What misunderstandings about Baptism will a Hindu be likely to have?
5. Why is it important to distinguish between reincarnation and resurrection?
6. What is the proper way to deal with the villagers prayer requests for healing (esp. that the visiting missionary say the prayer)?

When death caught up

WHEN people make contracts or agreements they write down all kinds of conditions to protect their interests. A man who buys an expensive electronic appliance wants a written guarantee that it will work for at least a few years. The seller on his part lays down his own conditions saying the guarantee will not hold good if the appliance is dropped or carelessly handled.

A builder who promises to build a house for a particular amount lays down "escalation" clause in case the price of cement or brick goes up. Even the Government employs legal minds to frame tax laws while members of the public on their part employ lawyers to interpret and find loopholes in the law.

Hiranyakashipu was a 'daiya' (son of Diti) who entered into a contract with Brahma about the terms and conditions of his death. He was furious that Vishnu in his boar incarnation had killed his



brother Hiranyaksha. So he performed very severe tapasya to get the boon of immortality from Brahma. He went to the Mandara hills and stood resting his entire body on the big toe of one foot, his arms stretched upwards towards the sky. He ate and drank nothing. His body became emaciated and covered with dust, his hair got matted but he did not bother at all. As time went on, so much heat was generated by the power of his concentration that earth and heaven began to get scorched.

Fear and discomfort drove everyone to the abode of Brahma. They prayed to

Hiranyakashipu's head. Then he noticed a shape all covered with ants. Even Brahma was impressed by the rigour of Hiranyakashipu's tapasya. "Blessings on you, son", he said, "I have never seen such will power and concentration. Tell me what you want". With that he sprinkled holy water on Hiranyakashipu and restored him to youthful vigour.

Hiranyakashipu folded his hands in salutation to Brahma. He sang his praise as the creator of everything, as the all-knowing, as the soul-within-the-soul, as the master of all rituals and said "If you are really pleased with me, then grant me the boon that nobody created by you, whether man or beast, living or

dead, daiya or naga or deva should cause my death. I should not die inside or outside in day time or at night time, on earth or in the sky and through no weapon". Brahma granted the boon and departed.

Soon enough, Hiranyakashipu started misusing his power. Earth and heaven quaked in fear. Everyone acknowledged his supremacy and carried out his bidding. He was a law unto himself. The one person who would not acknowledge him as the greatest was his son Prahlada. What was the secret behind this? When Hiranyakashipu was doing his tapasya his pregnant wife had taken refuge in the ashram of sage Narada. She and her unborn son listened to the teachings of Narada, which of course revolved round the stories of Vishnu.

Hiranyakashipu tried to persuade the boy to stop praising Vishnu. Then he scolded him. Then he threatened him. When nothing worked, he tried to get Prahlada killed. He asked his soldiers to attack him with weapons, he made elephants trample on him, he had poisonous snakes thrown at him, he made a demoness carry him into blazing fire, he had him fling from a cliff top, he had him locked up in a dark cell without food or water. But nothing worked.

In fury, he decided to kill his son himself. He taunted him and asked him where his protector Vishnu was. Prahlada quietly replied "Everywhere". "Is he in that pillar?" said

Hiranyakashipu as he gave it a violent kick. Out of it emerged a strange being — half-man and half-lion. It was the Nrisimha Avtar of Vishnu. He fought with Hiranyakashipu till evening. Then he picked him up and carried him to the threshold. He put Hiranyakashipu on his thigh and tore him to bits with his nails. He was not a man or a beast. He was not created by Brahma. He used no weapon. It was neither day time nor night time. The threshold was neither inside nor outside and his thigh was neither the earth nor the sky.

Hiranyakashipu's cleverly worded contract did not save him from his deserved death.

PADMA SESHADRI