

**A Traveler's
Guide**

LU Serve



**WISDOM
SERIES**





LJ | SERVE

Chapter 01

INTRODUCTION

If you travel to the land of India, you will encounter a people and culture vastly unlike most places in the world. Today, India is the most populous country, surpassing China in 2023. With 1.5 billion people and a growing economy, India is expected to rise as a major player on the world stage. Alongside India's rise comes also a renewed focus on the ancient religion that has shaped the culture of the Indus valley for thousands of years: Hinduism.

Hinduism is sometimes described as one religion and a family of religions. At its core, Hinduism is pantheistic, polytheistic, and syncretistic. It holds to belief in many gods and goddesses, but each one is, in essence, a manifestation of the one ultimate divine reality that permeates all things. Because Hinduism sees all religions and gods as part of one whole, its general disposition toward other religions is accommodation and assimilation, holding out tolerance and acceptance as core virtues within its teachings.

Over 80% of India's population identifies as Hindu, and roughly half of the Indian immigrants to the US identify as Hindu. Since 1990, Hindu immigrants to the US have grown from a total of 600,000 to 3.2 million, marking one of the sharpest rises in a religious minority population.¹

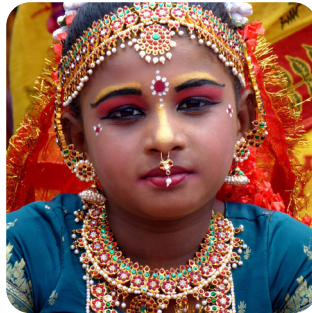
It might seem strange that a religion like Hinduism, which seems so closely aligned with modern sensibilities of pluralism and tolerance, does not have more influence and expansion throughout the world. This may be partly due to the concepts of karma, reincarnation, and the caste system, three core concepts within Hinduism that are deeply informed by Indian culture and society. Also, Hinduism does not have an intrinsic missionary impulse like Christianity or Islam, for what counts in Hinduism is not theological beliefs but outward deeds, which are rewarded with good and bad karma in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Despite its deep ties to Indian culture and ethnicity, Hinduism's prevalence throughout the world is growing as Indian families migrate outside of their homeland for work. The US alone now has more than 1,400 Hindu temples, and the largest one was recently built in New Jersey in 2023.² Hinduism's expansion through migration and population growth means that Christians will likely encounter Hindus in work, school, politics, and everyday life. The intersection of faiths in these public spheres offers unique opportunities for Christians to engage Hindus with the light and hope of the gospel.

1.1 What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is considered by many to be one of the oldest religions in the world and is known for having the largest number of deities within a polytheistic framework, reportedly as many as 330 million. However, Hinduism does not have a fixed set of core doctrines or a unified belief system; it is more like a vast collection of cultural and religious traditions. Many religious beliefs originating in India can be regarded as part of Hinduism. To be recognized as a branch of Hinduism, a religious group must gain acceptance from religious authorities and align with traditional Indian culture. Although personal beliefs are largely unrestricted, to meet the criteria of Hinduism, the following three conditions must be satisfied:

1. Regard the Vedas (the earliest sacred texts of India) as divine revelations and acknowledge their authority.
2. Accept the caste system, a social structure that has historically had a profound impact on Hindu traditions.
3. Respect the veneration of various deities and spirits, including the protection of cows, as cows are considered sacred symbols in Hindu culture.³



1.2 Statistics: Regions and Adherents

Because India is the most populated country on earth, and over 80% of India's population identifies as Hindu, the religion of Hinduism is the third largest in the world behind Christianity and Islam. With just over one million adherents worldwide, Hindus comprise approximately 13.5% of the global population. Even though most Hindus live in India, there are significant portions living in Nepal (23 million), Bangladesh (13.5 million), and Indonesia (4 million)⁴

Quick Facts:

Religion: Hinduism

Adherents: Hindus

Population: >1 billion

Founder: No single founder

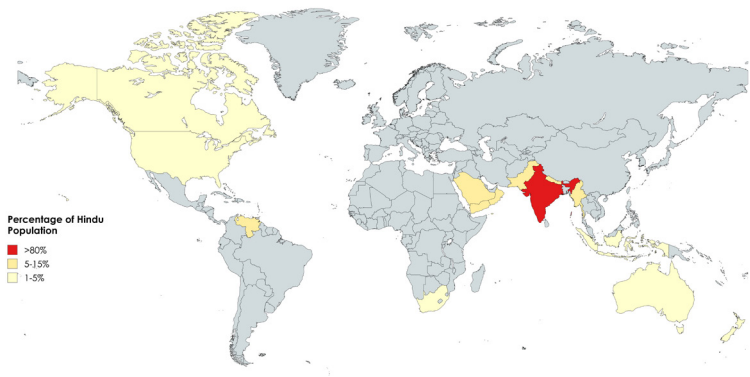
Began: Circa 3,000 - 2,500 BC

Type: Polytheistic

Main Deities: Brahman, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva

Primary text: The Vedas

Primary sects: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Smartism



Chapter 02

THE HISTORY OF HINDUISM

The origin and development of Hinduism differs from many other religions in that it was not created by a single founder, nor was there a clear founding event. Instead, it evolved over a long period of time, gradually incorporating elements of several cultures, beliefs, and philosophical ideas from the Indian subcontinent to form what is now known as Hinduism. The Vedas, the classics of Hinduism, did not create these teachings but rather recorded the “eternal wisdom” believed to have existed since ancient times. This wisdom is known as Shruti, which means “what is heard.”⁵

Even though there is no particular date for the origin of Hinduism, scholars have discovered that early forms of Hinduism can be traced back to around 4000 BC. Archaeological discoveries indicate that a highly prosperous civilization existed in the region long before the arrival of the Aryans, a nomadic group from Central Asia that migrated to the Indian subcontinent around 2000 BC. The architecture and other remains suggest that this civilization, unlike the nomadic Aryans, had a well-developed agricultural system.



Scholars long believed that the Aryans destroyed the Indus Valley civilization through invasion and introduced the Vedic religion and language, which served as the foundation for Hindu beliefs and practices. However, further research has revealed that this decline actually resulted from two simultaneous events. The primary cause was the drying up of many smaller rivers, forcing inhabitants to abandon their cities. Around the same time, the Aryans, who were primarily pastoralists rather than farmers, migrated to India and settled in these deserted areas.

Nevertheless, the Aryans brought with them their religious traditions, including the Vedas, the foundational scriptures of Hinduism, and incorporated local deities such as Shiva into their beliefs. This cultural integration went through a number of important stages, from nature worship during the Indus civilization, to sacrificial rituals during the Vedic period, to the idea of reincarnation during the epic and scriptural periods, to the development of multiple sects during the Middle Ages, and ultimately to the global spread and reform of modern Hinduism.⁶

Chapter 03

MAJOR BRANCHES

I 3.1 Vaishnavism

Vaishnavites worship Vishnu and his incarnations, such as Rama and Krishna. They believe that Vishnu is the supreme deity and the preserver of the universe, responsible for maintaining cosmic order (Dharma) and protecting beings from evil. Through devoted worship and devotion (Bhakti), one can receive Vishnu's grace and ultimately attain liberation (Moksha), escaping the cycle of rebirth (Samsara). Many branches of Vaishnavism emphasize a close personal relationship with the deity, encouraging devotees to chant sacred names (such as Hare Krishna), go on pilgrimages (such as to Tirupati or Varanasi), and study scriptures to deepen their faith. Their important scriptures include the Bhagavad Gita and the Vishnu Purana.⁷

I 3.2 Shaivism

Shaivites believe that Shiva is the supreme deity of the universe, both a destroyer and a regenerator, which symbolizes the cyclical nature of existence. Shiva is not only associated with destruction but is also revered as the supreme yogi, meditation master, and ascetic (Mahadeva), guiding his devotees toward spiritual liberation. Shaivites often practice yoga, asceticism (Tapas), and chant "Om Namah Shivaya" as acts of devotion, believing that Shiva's third eye represents supreme wisdom and spiritual insight. Their important scriptures include the Shiva Purana and the Agamas.



■ 3.3 Shaktism

Shaktites worship the goddess (Devi), particularly the Durga, Kali, and Lakshmi avatars. They believe that the goddess is the ultimate source of all power (Shakti) in the universe, both its creator and sustaining force. She represents both maternal compassion and fierce destruction of evil, as seen in deities like Durga and Kali. Devotees seek her blessings through elaborate rituals, sacrifices, and meditation, believing that she grants wisdom, prosperity, and protection. In some Tantric traditions, Shaktism emphasizes the awakening of mystical energy within the human body, particularly through Kundalini practices, to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Their important scriptures include the Devi Purana and the Tantras.

■ 3.4 Smartism

Smartas worship multiple deities, including Vishnu, Shiva, the Goddess, Ganesha, and Surya. They believe that all deities are different manifestations of the same ultimate reality (Brahman), allowing them to worship any deity of their choice rather than being restricted to one. This sect emphasizes philosophical inquiry, drawing heavily from Vedantic thought, and teaches that liberation is attained through self-knowledge (Jnana) and inner realization rather than mere external rituals. Smartism encourages devotees to study the Upanishads, practice meditation, and understand the oneness of Atman (the individual soul) and Brahman (the universal consciousness), while also respecting different spiritual paths such as devotion (Bhakti), action (Karma), and meditation (Dhyana). Their important scriptures include the Upanishads and the Vedanta Sutras.

Chapter 04

MAJOR TEACHINGS AND BELIEFS

The central idea of Hinduism or Vedanta holds that the nature of human beings is not limited to the physical body or the mind but that there is a spiritual being beyond these dimensions, a divine spark.⁸ This spirituality is present not only in every human being but also in all things. This spirituality is not only present in every man but is also the deepest essence of all things. This pure and divine spirituality is always united with the supreme divinity and is marked by peace, joy, and wisdom.⁹

I 4.1 Creation

Hindu scriptures provide multiple accounts of the universe's origin. The earliest account, recorded in the Rig Veda, tells that the universe and life originated from "Purusha," a primordial cosmic being whose body was divided to form all things. Another popular creation story tells of the universe emerging from Vishnu. When the world was yet unformed, Vishnu floated on the cosmic ocean on Ananta Shesha, a multi-headed cosmic serpent. A giant lotus grew from Vishnu's navel, and Brahma, the creator god, sat within the lotus. Brahma then divided the lotus into heaven, earth, and sky and created all life on earth, including plants, creatures, and humans.

The creation myths of Hinduism are not meant to be taken literally as though they are historical accounts of the universe's origin. Rather, they are meant to teach something about the gods, the world, and humanity's place in it. They are theological, philosophical, and educational in essence, not historical or scientific.

I 4.2 Deity

Hinduism believes that all creation is part of Brahman, the ultimate source and supreme power of the universe, considered pure intelligence and ultimate reality. Brahman is an impersonal force that permeates all things and is the foundational concept of Hindu pantheism. Since Brahman is difficult to comprehend, people often approach and worship it through various deities (manifestations). The Hindu Trimurti consists of three main gods: Vishnu (the protector), Shiva (the destroyer), and Brahma (the creator).

However, not all Hindu traditions accept the concept of the Trimurti. Some sects exclusively worship Vishnu or Shiva, considering them manifestations of the

ultimate reality rather than part of a trinity.¹⁰ Besides the Trimurti, there are millions of other gods and avatars within Hinduism, which are also manifestations of Brahman, the ultimate impersonal force or reality.

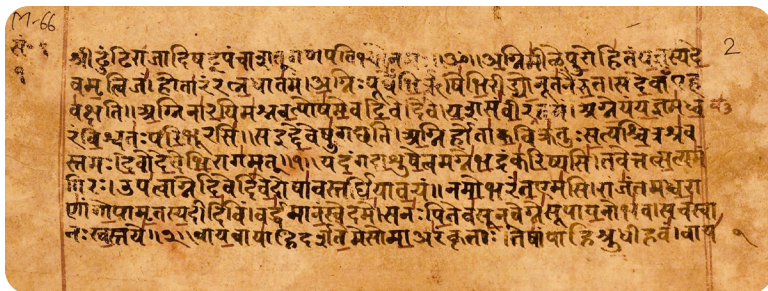


■ 4.3 Ahimsa

Ahimsa (non-violence) is one of the core moral principles of Hinduism, emphasizing respect and compassion for all life. This principle stems from the belief in karma and samsara, where one's actions affect future states of existence. Therefore, avoiding harm to any living being is not only a moral duty but also helps a Hindu to accumulate good karma. The concept of non-violence is very similar in Buddhism and Jainism and is reflected in practices such as vegetarianism.

■ 4.4 Scripture

Hinduism does not have a single holy book but rather multiple texts considered divine revelations. The Vedas are the most important and oldest Hindu scriptures, consisting of 1,028 hymns primarily used in rituals and ceremonies. Another sacred text, the Upanishads, focuses more on philosophy and exploring the relationship between the soul (Ātman) and the cosmic source (Brahman). Other important texts include the Mahabharata, the world's longest epic, which contains the Bhagavad Gita, a dialogue on the meaning of life and the path to liberation.



■ 4.5 Karma

Karma is one of the core beliefs of Hinduism, referring to the system of cause and effect based on one's actions. Every action produces corresponding consequences; good deeds result in good karma, promoting a better state of existence in the next life, while bad deeds lead to unfavorable rebirths. The effects of karma extend beyond the current life, determining the soul's circumstances in future reincarnations. By accumulating good karma, one hopes to attain a higher state of being in the next life and ultimately break free from the cycle of rebirth.

■ 4.6 Moksha (Liberation)

The ultimate goal pursued by Hindus is Moksha: complete liberation from the endless cycle of reincarnation (Samsara). Through spiritual practices such as devotion (Bhakti), meditation (Dhyana), wisdom (Jnana), and righteous action (Karma Yoga), believers gradually purify their minds, freeing themselves from desires and the bondage of karma. Upon attaining Moksha, the soul unites with the supreme truth of the universe (Brahman), achieving eternal peace and freedom. This process leads to the highest state of spiritual growth and thus requires long-term spiritual practice and self-transcendence.

■ 4.7 Ātman (The Soul)

In Hinduism, the soul (Ātman) is considered eternal and indestructible, while the body is merely a temporary dwelling for it. The soul undergoes continuous reincarnation, and its state is determined by past actions (karma). Good deeds lead to better rebirths, while bad actions may result in suffering or reincarnation

into lower life forms. The ultimate goal of the soul is to break free from the cycle of rebirth and achieve union with the universal truth. This doctrine emphasizes the importance of moral conduct and encourages individuals to pursue spiritual growth.



4.8 Afterlife

Hinduism views life as a cyclical process, where death is merely a transition for the soul from one body to another. Karma determines the soul's fate in the next life, which could be rebirth as a human, an animal, or another form of existence. This belief encourages individuals to accumulate good karma in their present life to attain a better state in the next. At the same time, it reminds people that the ultimate goal is to transcend the cycle of rebirth and attain liberation (Moksha).

4.9 The End of Time

Hinduism perceives time as an infinite cycle where the universe undergoes continuous creation, preservation, and destruction. Shiva, the god of destruction and regeneration, symbolizes the power of this cycle. Cosmic time is divided into four ages (Yugas), each representing a gradual decline in morality and spirituality. At the end of the final age (Kali Yuga), the world will undergo great destruction, followed by the beginning of a new cycle of creation. This belief serves as a reminder that everything is in constant change, and only spiritual pursuit can transcend the constraints of time.

■ 4.10 Worship

Hindu worship takes diverse forms, including personal daily prayers and offerings (Puja) at home as well as collective celebrations in temples. Although temples play a significant role in Hinduism, personal connection with the divine is highly emphasized. Many devotees establish shrines in their homes, where they express reverence to deities through meditation, chanting, and floral offerings. This flexible approach to worship allows believers to engage in spiritual practice according to their needs and depth of faith.



■ 4.11 Sin

In many religious systems, especially monotheistic beliefs, “sin” is often defined as alienation, disobedience or rebellion against God. For example, in Christianity and Islam, sin is seen as a deviation from God’s divine command. In the Hindu context, however, the concept of sin has a very different connotation. Instead of understanding sin simply as rebellion against God’s commands, Hinduism gives it a deeper philosophical meaning through the Sanskrit word Papa. In Hinduism, “papa” usually refers to actions that result in negative karma, which not only conflict with the moral order of the universe (dharma) but also may violate one’s duties and obligations (svadharma). As a result, sin is viewed in Hinduism more as a disruption of individual spiritual growth and cosmic harmony than as a direct offense against a supreme God. This understanding has led to a Hindu view of sin that focuses more on the internal and social consequences of the behavior than on the moral essence of the act or external judgment from a deity.

Chapter 05

COMMON PRACTICES AND CUSTOMS

The life of a Hindu is filled with various religious practices, including meditation, studying sacred texts, devout prayers, yoga practice, acts of charity, and various religious rituals. Each activity has its unique form and meaning, reflecting Hinduism's profound philosophical ideas and its pursuit of spiritual elevation. Every seemingly independent religious act shares a common goal: ultimately achieving union with Brahman (the ultimate existence of the universe) through careful practice and devotion. Hindus believe these practices ultimately transcend worldly constraints and lead to the deep integration of the soul with cosmic truth, liberation, and eternal peace.¹²

I 5.1 Priests



Worship and activities in temples are among the most important religious rituals in a Hindu's life. At the heart of Hindu worship is the Puja ceremony. This form of worship aims to serve temple deities through devout rituals such as changing the deity's attire, bathing the idol, offering sacrifices and tributes, and chanting hymns of praise. These diverse practices are all meant to express the devotee's reverence and admiration for the deity. However, not all Hindus are eligible to participate in this ritual. The role of officiating a Puja is usually reserved for the Brahmin priest class, a privilege rooted in the strict caste system of Hinduism. Priests are seen as the sacred guardians and executors of rituals, responsible for communicating with the gods on behalf of the devotees. Therefore, the Puja ceremony is not only a religious activity but also reflects the social and spiritual order of the caste system.



5.2 Family Shrines

In addition to the gods worshipped in temples, most Hindus also set up shrines in their homes. Shrines are considered the dwelling places of gods on earth. Since Hinduism believes that everything is a manifestation of the divine, the spirits venerated in a home shrine may be one of the three main gods in Hinduism or any other deity the Hindu reveres. Family shrines provide Hindus with a sacred space for meditation and prayer, serving as a bridge for communication with the divine. Devotees often offer tributes, including food, flowers, and incense, to express their devotion and respect. This ritual helps believers feel awe for the divine in their daily lives and offers them spiritual peace and protection.



■ 5.3 Mantras

Mantras are sacred prayers in Hinduism that are often used with the help of chants to connect the devotee with divine power and facilitate meditation. These mantras are typically extracted from ancient Vedic scriptures and can range from long Sanskrit verses to simple monosyllabic words like “Om.” As a sacred sound and religious symbol, “Om” represents the ultimate reality of the universe and the essence of the soul, and it is the opening syllable in many hymns and rituals. By repeatedly chanting these mantras, devotees can enter a meditative state and reach deeper spiritual levels, achieving purification of the soul and spiritual elevation.



■ 5.4 Marriage

Marriage is very important in Hindu culture, typically accompanied by grand celebrations, although customs may vary by region and family. Most weddings feature a key ritual where the bride’s father hands her over to the groom, symbolizing the transfer of her life and responsibilities. The newlywed couple then exchanges vows by the sacred fire and walks around the fire seven times, a ritual called “Saptapadi” or “Seven Steps.” This practice lies at the heart of the wedding ceremony and symbolizes the couple’s mutual commitment to their future life together. Although arranged marriages are still common in India and Hindu culture, the rapid modernization of traditional cultures has decreased the frequency of such unions, as more young people are choosing to independently seek a partner.



5.5 Sacred Animals

Hindus see many animals as sacred. Because Hinduism teaches that Brahman permeates all of life and that the cycle of reincarnation could involve being reborn as an animal, many Hindus refrain from harming living creatures or eating meat.

1. Cows: Hindus believe the god Krishna once manifested as a cow herder and is now the protector of cows. Consequently, cows are considered sacred animals in India. They are usually allowed to roam free, even in crowded cities, and they enjoy legal rights as well. If a cow is harmed, even by accident, the offending person could be subject to fines and imprisonment. This veneration of bovines is where Western cultures derive the phrases “holy cow” and “sacred cow.”
2. Rats: Similarly, rats are also considered sacred because many Hindus believe they are either gods or the reincarnation of holy men. If a person kills a rat, they could face legal punishment.
3. Dogs: Dogs are also highly venerated as possible deities and are typically allowed to roam free in the cities. It is not unusual for cows, dogs, rats, and other animals to cohabitate in densely populated urban areas.
4. Tigers: Tigers are highly venerated as a vehicle of deities and a symbol of strength and royalty. The god Shiva is sometimes depicted with tigers, as is the goddess Durga.
5. Elephants: Perhaps the most sacred animal of all is the elephant. Elephants are symbolic of the god Ganesha and are an important symbol in Indian culture. It is common to find idols of Ganesha throughout India. Tourists may observe many souvenirs in shops and markets with elephant iconography; although these may look like innocent elephant figurines, they may be idols depicting Ganesha.

■ 5.6 Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is very common among Hindus (though not universal) and is especially practiced by members of higher castes. Although vegetarianism is not universal among Hindus, it is very common, especially among the high castes. Since Hinduism teaches that all life is sacred and that animals may be reincarnated people or the vehicles of gods, many Hindus adopt a vegetarian diet. Vegan and tofu dishes are very common in India, whereas beef is very hard to find in Hindu-dominated regions. In southern India, where much of the Christian population resides, animal meats and western style meals are much easier to find.



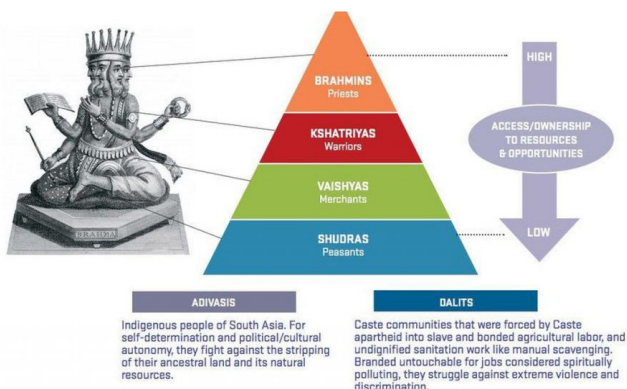
Chapter 06

HINDUISM'S INFLUENCE ON INDIA



For thousands of years, Hinduism has been the dominant religion in India and is currently practiced by about 80% of Indians. In India, Hinduism is not only seen as a religious system but the heart of the national culture. It profoundly influences every aspect of family, culture, and philosophy. The principles, rituals, and practices of Hinduism are deeply embedded in all levels of Indian society, shaping the nation's worldview, social structure, arts, festivals, and values. Even in modern times, the influence of Hinduism remains far-reaching and continues to play an important role in Indian society.¹³

I 6.1 The Caste System



One prominent relic of Hindu influence on Indian society is the caste system, which consists of historically constructed social hierarchies based on varna (class) and jati (sub-caste). Rooted in Hindu scriptures, the caste system divides individuals into four broad categories: brahmins (priests), kshatriyas (warriors), vaishyas (traders), and shudras (laborers), with dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”) excluded from this framework. Although caste discrimination

has been legally abolished in modern India, its effects are still visible in social interactions, marriage practices, and economic structures.¹⁴

■ 6.2 Karma

The Hindu concept of karma is also deeply embedded within Indian culture, influencing the moral behavior, social attitudes, and personal choices of Indians. According to Karma, everyone's actions – good or bad – have consequences that affect the future, both in this life and the next. This is why cows, dogs, rats, and other common animals are honored in India, as they could be anyone's ancestors. Disrespect for life can lead to karma in one's next life.

■ 6.3 The Ganges River



Running through northern India into Bangladesh, the Ganges River is one of the holiest places in all of Hinduism and is considered the embodiment of the god Gange. Every year, millions of Hindus make a pilgrimage to the river to bathe at its shores as a purification ritual. They believe the river possesses powers to heal, grant forgiveness of sins, improve one's chances at a better reincarnation, or escape the cycle altogether. Hindus will also scatter the ashes of dead loved ones in the river in the hope that the deceased will reach liberation sooner. Although the water is highly contaminated with bacteria from animals and human waste, devout Hindus may even drink the water in the hope of escaping reincarnation. Every year thousands of Indians die of water-born illnesses from the Ganges River.¹⁵

I 6.4 Yoga and the West

Yoga is an ancient mind-body practice dating to 800-400 BC that combines breathing, meditation, and body postures. The term yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning “union” or “yoke.” The aim of yoga is to bring the body into union with universal consciousness.



Historically, Hinduism has not been an evangelistic religion, but there is a significant group of Hindus who do engage in missionary outreach to the West. The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the world's largest missionary organization and a notable faction of Hinduism. The VHP's stated goal is to evangelize the West by promoting Hindu practices in forms Westerners are likely to accept. One way has been through popularizing Hindu tantric practices such as transcendental meditation and yoga.

Today, millions of Americans have embraced yoga as a benign form of exercise, but yoga is much more than harmless exercise. At its roots, yoga is a mystical religious practice that cannot be completely separated from its Hindu foundations. Yoga's purpose is to align the body in certain ways to connect or “yoke” the soul and mind to the spiritual world. Yoga is designed to connect the human person with the “serpent power,” kundalini. Yoga body poses (called “asanas”) are designed to mimic connection with “the universe” or “universal consciousness” — in essence, to connect with “God” and to move through experience cycles of birth and rebirth on a transcendental plane. These practices are inescapably spiritual, and although the intended result is “liberation” from the physical plane of existence, it is an open door to the spiritual world and spiritual beings.

Fortunately, neither Hinduism nor Yoga owns the human body, exercises, or all stretching techniques. Christians must remember that yoga is a system of stretching, breathing, meditation, and prayer. A person who exercises and stretches in ways like yoga is not necessarily practicing yoga. However, activities such as “Christian Yoga,” which adopt aspects of yoga (e.g., stretching, breathing, or meditation) while rejecting its Hindu connections, are much more problematic. Despite good intentions, “Christian Yoga” and similar practices represent forms of syncretism which confuse important theological differences between Christianity and Hinduism and minimize the serious dangers of yogic spirituality. These practices create opportunities for spiritual compromise and demonic influence.



Chapter 07

BARRIERS TO THE GOSPEL

I 7.1 Monotheism and Polytheism



One of the greatest challenges in sharing the Gospel with Hindus is overcoming their deep commitment to polytheism. For many Hindus, “accepting” Jesus or even praying to Him is not a difficult concept, as their tradition embraces millions of deities as paths leading to the ultimate divine reality. Adding another god to their worship is not seen as contradictory but rather as an expansion of their spiritual practice. In response to this challenge, Christians must stand firm in proclaiming that Jesus is not merely one among many gods but the only way to salvation. The Gospel message is clear: redemption comes exclusively through Jesus Christ, who is the one true God and Savior.¹⁶



However, the exclusivity of the gospel can be quite offensive to Hindus. Keep in mind that sin in the Hindu worldview is doing things that go against the moral order of the universe or that upset social harmony. It is scandalous for a Hindu to convert to Christianity because this entails forsaking all other gods, which can be interpreted as rejecting sacred duties to one’s family and community. Christians in India often face heavy persecution due to the nature of evangelism and its implications on the political, social, economic, and religious realms. Many converts to Christianity risk losing their property, family ties, and even their lives.

I 7.2 The Relationship Between God and Man

Christianity and Hinduism have fundamentally different understandings of the relationship between humans and the divine. In Hinduism, Brahman is considered the ultimate reality and the source of all existence, while everything else in the universe embodies some aspect of divinity. As a result, humans as well as natural elements – rivers, mountains, and even animals – are regarded as sacred. This belief system has contributed to Hinduism's polytheistic tradition, where divinity can be found in various manifestations and worshiped accordingly.

Christianity, however, presents a contrasting worldview. While Christians also believe that humans are created in the image of God, they emphasize a fundamental distinction between God and humanity. Due to sin, the divine image in humans has been broken, making it impossible for people to restore their relationship with God through their own efforts. Christianity teaches that only through Jesus Christ can salvation be attained, allowing humanity to be reconciled with God.

Hinduism and Tolerance

Although in theory, Hinduism teaches non-violence, in practice, Hinduism has militant factions that persecute religious minorities within India on an almost daily basis. Christians are one of the most persecuted groups in India. In regions where Hinduism has a stronghold, hundreds of churches have been burned and thousands of Christians have been assaulted, harassed, or martyred for their faith. The Indian government takes an official position of religious toleration toward all religions. Still, widespread incidents of religious persecution and harassment, even from some government officials, have revealed a much starker reality for Christians living in India.

Because Hindus generally view all things as divine, while Christianity asserts that only God is truly divine, evangelizing to Hindus requires a strong emphasis on Christ's uniqueness and the necessity of His redemption – rather than merely presenting Him as one among many gods. It also requires a reorientation of the concept of sin. Sin is not just an action that goes against social expectations or upsets social harmony; rather, sin fundamentally involves a moral act of opposition or disobedience to God's commands. Christians affirm that God's commands are recorded in the Bible but also in creation, as the individual's conscience bears witness to God's moral law written on their hearts. Hence, all human beings intuitively understand they have sinned against God in their hearts and thus need forgiveness and reconciliation with Him. God alone can overcome the consequences of our sin, and He has done so through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 08

BRIDGES TO THE GOSPEL

I 8.1 The Sufficiency of Christ's Grace Over Self-Achievement

One of the key entry points for sharing the gospel with Hindus is the grace of Jesus Christ. Hinduism teaches that salvation (moksha) is achieved through personal efforts such as good deeds, spiritual disciplines, and devotion to various deities. While Hinduism acknowledges enlightened sages and divine figures, none of them guarantee salvation but only guide individuals to strive toward it. However, human effort is inherently insufficient to attain ultimate liberation. In contrast, Christianity presents Jesus Christ as the only Savior who fully provides salvation through His grace, not by human merit. This assurance of redemption through faith in Christ is a profound contrast to the uncertainty of Hindu salvation, offering hope to those burdened by endless cycles of karma and self-striving.¹⁷



I 8.2 Breaking the Chains of the Caste System Through God's Love

The rigid caste system in India often leaves those in the lower castes feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty, discrimination, and social rejection. Many Dalits and other marginalized communities are taught that their low status is a result of past-life karma, leaving them with little hope for change. Christianity, however, proclaims that every person is created in the image of God and has inherent worth regardless of social standing. Jesus' ministry was marked by love for the outcasts, and His followers are called to do the same. By engaging in acts of kindness, mercy, and selfless service, Christians can reflect God's love in a tangible way, showing Hindu communities that true dignity and restoration do not come through caste-based identity but through a personal relationship with a God who values all people equally.



■ 8.3 Freedom From Fear Through the Love of Christ

Many Hindus live in fear – fear of displeasing their gods, fear of bad karma, and fear of an uncertain afterlife. The capricious nature of Hindu deities, who often require elaborate rituals and sacrifices, can leave followers feeling spiritually exhausted and anxious. Additionally, the belief in endless reincarnation fosters uncertainty about one's fate in the next life. Christianity offers a liberating message: in Christ, there is no fear, because perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Jesus does not demand endless rituals or uncertain striving – He offers unconditional love and a secure eternity with God. By presenting Christ as the answer to fear and insecurity, Christians can show Hindus that they do not have to live under the weight of uncertainty but can instead find peace and assurance in the love of Jesus.



Appendix

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I Books and Articles

1. Berg, Chris. *The New Age Trojan Horse: What Christians Should Know About Yoga And The Enneagram*. New York: Beyond Publishing, 2021.
2. Boyett, Jason. *Twelve Major World Religions: The Beliefs, Rituals, Traditions of Humanity's Most Influential Faiths*. Naperville, IL: Callisto Publishing, 2016.
3. Corduan, Winfried. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012.
4. Hindson, Ed and Ergun Caner. *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
5. Muck, Terry C., Harold A. Netland, and Gerald R. McDermott, eds. *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings, and Practices*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014.
6. Ravi, N. S. R. K. "Hinduism." NAMB Apologetics. Accessed: April 1, 2025. <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/hinduism/>.
7. Rosario, Mikel Del. "Respectfully Engaging with Hindus." Apologetics Guy. Accessed: April 1, 2025. <https://apologeticsguy.com/2018/08/engaging-with-hindus/>.
8. "Share the Gospel with People of Hinduism." GEM Ministries. Accessed: April 1, 2025, <https://gems-ministries.com/share-the-gospel/hinduism/>.
9. Studebaker, John A. David Cashin, and Chris Gnanakan. *The Quest of World Religions: An Introduction and Anthology*. San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2022.

References

- ¹ C Soutik Biswas, "Illegal and unseen: Nine surprising facts about Indians in the US," BBC News, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8r56vr40jvo>.
- ² BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham opened in 2023 after eight years of construction. It is the largest Hindu temple in the United States. BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham, accessed March 7 2025, <https://usa.akshardham.org/>.
- ³ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 267-268.
- ⁴ Jason Boyett, *Twelve Major World Religions: The Beliefs, Rituals, Traditions of Humanity's Most Influential Faiths* (Naperville, IL: Calisto Publishing, 2016), 100.
- ⁵ Joshua J. Mark "Hinduism," *World History Encyclopedia*, accessed February 17, 2025, <https://www.worldhistory.org/hinduism/>.
- ⁶ Corduan, *Neighboring Faith*, 268-270.
- ⁷ Boyett, *Major World Religions*, 105-106.
- ⁸ Boyett, *Major World Religions*, 103-105.
- ⁹ "Hinduism: Basic Beliefs," *United Religions Initiative*, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://www.uri.org/kids/world-religions/hindu-beliefs>.
- ¹⁰ "Quick Guide to Hindu Deities," *Culture Bridge*, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://learn.artsbma.org/resource/quick-guide-to-hindu-deities/>.
- ¹¹ Image depicting reincarnation. Accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/brahmakumaris/27773036031>
- ¹² Boyett, *Major World Religions*, 111-114.
- ¹³ 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: India. U.S. Department of State, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/india/>.
- ¹⁴ Syama Allard, "Why India's Caste System Isn't What You Think It Is," *Hindu American*, accessed March 7, 2025, <https://www.hindu-american.org/blog/why-indias-caste-system-isnt-what-you-think-it-is>.
- ¹⁵ Cameron Conaway, "The Ganges River Is Dying Under the Weight of Modern India," accessed March 7, 2025, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/ganges-river-dying-under-weight-modern-india>.
- ¹⁶ Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 308-309.
- ¹⁷ Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, 309-310.

**Want to learn about other religions? Ask LU Serve for a
Traveler's Guide to any of these religions:**

Christianity

Judaism

Islam

Hinduism

Buddhism

Sikhism

Confucianism and Taoism

Shinto

Indigenous Religions

Baha'i

**Each guidebook will teach you about (1) a religion's
history, demographics, and regions of the world, (2) its
major beliefs, customs, and practices, and (3) how to
share your faith with adherents. Contact LU Serve at
luserve@liberty.edu for more information.**

Series Contributors: Tim Yonts, Ph.D., Emma Payne, Kellie Van Vessen,
Hanping "Josh" Bao, Juliana Sarmiento, Kaylee Sommers



LU | SERVE