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Argumentative Essay: What is Hinduism?

**Introduction**

A cultural and historical outlook combined with linguistic analysis of Hinduism’s key concepts, and a comparative examination with other mainstream religions indicate that it is a synthesis of shared concepts, mystical rituals, and cultural traditions of the Indian subcontinent that is variable and decentralized in nature, that aims to deepen an Individual’s understanding of truth and reality in order to enrich their lifestyle.

Through the course of this paper, the main essence of Hinduism will be discussed by first identifying key philosophies and practices that characterize the various beliefs associated with Hinduism. The formation and roots of the religion will be traced back and a constant contrast with mainstream Abrahamic religions will be presented. The Karma and Prushna concepts will be subsequently explored as one of the characteristic factors alongside the shared idea of a Supreme Deity among nearly all variants, to guide the construction of a definition

**Discussion**

An attempt to define Hinduism initially requires tracing the roots of its emergence. The term Hindu is believed to have originated from the river complex of the northwest, Sindhu, which now exists in modern-day Pakistan. The actual word Hindu, however, does not go back before the 15th and the 16th century, and so far no founding figure has so far known to exist. This leads many researchers to believe that the origination of the term Hindu is political, cultural and geographical. Moreover, the origins of the Hindu religion sharply contrasts the emergence of mainstream Abrahamic religions such as Christianity and Islam. Both religions have a codified book with very particular guidelines that their believers must follow. For instance, the word Christian itself means a devotee of Christ, and thus, if a Christian does not believe in Jesus Christ, he/she cannot be called a follower of Christianity (Lloyd-Moffett). These are the certain basics that all the followers of the religions have to believe to become of the faith. Yet, that is not the case with Hinduism.

The density and variation within Hindu beliefs make it difficult for Scholars to describe the religion, since an individual with even the slightest different notion may unknowingly fall into one out of the numerous sects within it. There are no official, specific, or fundamental views to Hinduism, in fact, there are hardly any which are carried by the Hindus. The Indian religion is known by the name of ‘Dharma’, which roughly translates to a way of life (Lloyd-Moffett). One of the most interesting facts of Hinduism is that there are various sects within the religion, and all those groups of people have conflicting beliefs, and yet consider themselves Hindus. It is therefore more of a traditional lifestyle than a formalized religion, and hence, it rarely discusses the ordeal with non-believers. There are little perceived boundaries between a Hindu and a non-Hindu, unless the other Individual explicitly self-identifies as a non-Hindu member of another religion. These non-existing boundaries further complicate the construction of a definition of the Hindu religion since the definition itself would not try to distinguish a believer from a non-believer (Lloyd-Moffett). The definition will sharply contrast that of Islam wherein any rejecter of God and strict monotheism is considered a non-believer. In the absence of a clear boundary, the definition will therefore have to be more inclusive.

A further consideration in the construction of a definition of Hinduism would be the fact that it does not see itself to be a religion. This is evident from the fact that there is no word within Hindu texts or scriptures that can be said to be equivalent to religion. This fact and a lack of formalized beliefs indicate that it is at the very most, Hinduism can be defined as a way of life or a lifestyle. In fact, there is no religion that has a comparable word to Dharna. Another distinctive characteristic of the Hindu religion is Karma, which can help shed light on what it entails. This feature explains the birth and death cycle, and helps create an incentive for social morality on the basis that what goes around comes around. Further, Hinduism believes that an individual should look inside of themselves through the help of meditation. The idea is to look into the soul and understand it. Thus any form of cultural or mystical ritual is acceptable as long as it helps an individual look inside to discover the truth. This lies in sharp contrast to mainstream Abrahamic religions that preach that an individual should look outside to guide or correct themselves (Lloyd-Moffett). For Muslims, it is the Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad PBUH that they take as muse to correct themselves and strengthen their faith. A similar case is with Christianity, the believers follow the Bible and Jesus Christ for corrections and guidance if they feel lost.

Despite a lack of formalized codes, beliefs, and boundaries, there are still certain aims that a follower of Hinduism would aspire to achieve. One of the main defining factors of Hinduism is the fact that they believe there are two “Purushas” in the world, one being “Kshara Purusha” and the second being “Akshara.” Akshara is defined as something that does not change and Kshara means to change continually. In accordance with Hinduism, the objective of all living beings is to turn into “Akshara Purusha.” It explains why they believe that there is no point of trying to convert anyone to their dharma as the energies of all living beings are naturally spent in releasing the soul and turn into an “atman.” Additionally, it also explains the motive for following the Hindu way of life, as becoming an ‘atman’ means discovering the truth or the reality of the world, which in turn would guide an individual to live a fulfilling and enriched lifestyle. On the contrary, the subcultures that are present in other religions are on the basis of beliefs. There are also around nine ways in Hinduism through which worship can be done, they are known as “Nava Vidha Bhakti” (Lloyd-Moffett). While other religions might restrict different worshipping methods, Hinduism gives its followers the freedom to worship the way they want.

A lack of formalized beliefs, rituals, and tenets does not indicate a complete absence of shared belief. In accordance with the Hindu Vedic religion, there is the presence of only one Supreme Deity or God. The Supreme God exists on two diverse levels of reality. The names that have been given by the Vedas are “Parabrahma,” “Paramatma,” and “Brahman.” The Hindus believe in worshipping this Supreme God on both impersonal and personal levels. The true reality and original nature of God from the absolute point of view Brahman is mostly mentioned impersonally by the Vedas. On the other hand, “Puranas” like to mention “Trimurti” which is basically three manifestations of Brahman. The Tri in Trimutri indicates three. Further, there are a total of three denominations in Hinduism which are “Lord Vishnu,” he is considered the Supreme Brahman. Then there is “Shaivism”; the Hindus who follow Shiva believe that he is the Supreme Brahman (Lloyd-Moffett). Further, “Shaktism”; the individuals who follow Shaktism worship the goddess Mother Shakti. Mother Shakti is not just the Supreme Brahman but also “Prakriti” which means illusive energy. Lastly, there is “Smartism”; the Samrtisms treat all the divinities as similar. Thus, nearly all variations within Hinduism share some form of belief in the Supreme Deity but beliefs about whom can vary and even contradict, and that is not seen as a problem in the religion.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Hinduism, with all the diversity, is still one of the Major Religions in the world, however, trying to define Hinduism is much more difficult than delineating other religions. A thorough cultural and historical exploration of the origins of various beliefs, practices, and ideas associated with Hinduism along with a linguistic analysis of these notions can guide us towards developing a comprehensive definition of Hinduism. In doing so, a comparative examination indicate that it almost always contrasts with mainstream Abrahamic religions and thus needs to be defined differently. Hence, Hinduism can be explained as a synthesis of shared concepts, and mystical and cultural rituals and traditions of the Indian subcontinent that are variable and decentralized in nature, which aims to deepen its followers’ understanding of truth and reality, which can enrich their lives.

**Work Cited**

Lloyd-Moffett, Stephen Robinson. *Asceticism and the common life: Basil of Caesarea, Vedic India, and the social formation of religion*. University of California, Santa Barbara, 2005.