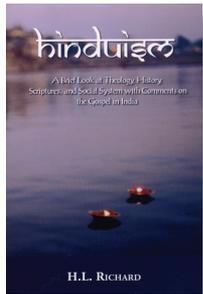


Excerpts from *Hinduism: A Brief Look at Theology, History, Scriptures, and Social System with Comments on the Gospel in India* by H. L. Richard (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2007)

From the Introduction



The name Hinduism is, in fact, not rooted in India, but was born in efforts made by outsiders to define and understand the complex phenomena of religious life in

India. In scholarly circles a great debate continues on what the word Hinduism really refers to, including suggestions that the term should never be used at all. Hinduism is an evolved ensemble of faiths and practices, and the evolution has not by any means ceased. Hinduism today continues to change, most notably due to urbanization and globalization and in relation to the growth of militant politicized Hinduism. An understanding of the flow of Hindu history, including the development and themes of the scriptures of Hinduism, is essential for a balanced understanding. Yet historical understanding cannot be a substitute for knowing Hinduism as lived by adherents today. The diversity of Hindu beliefs and practices, however, makes a simple summary of practical Hinduism almost impossible.

The Hindu View of God

The standard Hindu view of God is perhaps best described as a fluid monotheism. Vishnu has many manifestations, and who will dare to say what form God might not appear in? The Hindu is certain that God's ways are higher than ours, and so He is beyond our grasp. Jesus is easily accepted as a manifestation of God, as are various Muslim saints, numerous Hindu gurus, and many mythological gods. The average Hindu is not concerned to reconcile the worship of many such figures with belief in one supreme God.

It should also be noted that Hinduism contains schools of thought that militantly oppose the idol worship that

accompanies popular Hindu devotion. There is also a philosophical position that grants the validity of idol worship as a lower form of devotion that more enlightened people move beyond.

In the midst of a practical polytheism, the foundational viewpoint of most Hindus is that there is a single supreme God who interacts with this world in various ways. It is to our advantage in this life to please God, and in God alone final salvation can be found.

Vernacular Poets

The *bhakti* movements flourished under the charismatic influence of gifted poets and singers. Some themes in the *bhakti* poets are closely in line with biblical teaching, although in other topics the differences remain great. There is often a strong criticism of idolatry and caste, yet there has been little practical outworking of this teaching of these brilliant poets.

I am a mass of sin;
Thou art all purity;
Yet thou must take me as I am
And bear my load for me.
Me Death has all consumed
In thee all power abides.
All else forsaking, at thy feet
Thy servant Tuka hides.

(by Tukaram (1608-1649), trans. from Marathi, from *Psalms of Maratha Saints*, Nicol Macnicol, Association Press, Calcutta, 1919, pg 65.)

The Status of the Gospel among Hindus

Despite the outstanding work of numerous missionaries and Indian Christians, meaningful communication of Jesus Christ to high caste Hindus is mostly noteworthy for its absence. Hindus are now living all across the globe, often in suburban neighborhoods in close proximity to churches. But "church" is understood as part of an alien civilization that is undermining many of the basic spiritual and familial values of

Hindu civilization, and few Hindus will listen to a message coming from a church. Individual disciples of Christ need to make an effort to befriend Hindus if the gospel is ever to become meaningful in the Hindu world.

Recommended Reading On Hinduism

A Survey of Hinduism by Klaus K. Klostermaier (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989) gives a masterful overview touching every aspect of the classical Hindu tradition, with frequent illustrations related to present day situations as well.

Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices by Julius Lipner (Routledge, New York, 1992) gives a carefully balanced presentation, full of information yet aiming to give a feel for Hindu perspectives rather than merely a set of facts.

The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India by C. J. Fuller (Princeton University Press, 1992) helpfully surveys Hinduism in its more practical aspects, such as worship, rituals, festivals, and pilgrimage. Here one gets a true taste of Hindu life.

Understanding Hinduism by Dayanand Bharati (Munshiram Manoharlal, 2005). A general introduction to all aspects of Hinduism, but with a focus on the average Hindu practitioner and his/her perspectives and problems.

Editor's Note: The above is a partial list of recommended readings from the book. Most of the other recommended books on Christ in the Hindu world are advertised on pp. 114 and 146.