

The God Project: Hinduism as Open-Source Faith

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Trying to explain the core beliefs of "Hinduism" to an interested observer can be challenging to say the least. Its often stated that the word "Hinduism" itself is a total misnomer, as it basically refers to the sum total of spiritual and religious thought and practice that has taken place on the Indian sub-continent over the past 5,000 years. And lets just say it's been a busy 5,000 years.

The sheer volume of spiritual literature and doctrine, the number of distinct gods worshiped (over 30 million, according to some sources), the breadth of distinct philosophies and practices that have emerged, and the total transformation over time of many of the core Indic teachings and beliefs can be disconcerting to those raised in monotheistic cultures, as we are used to each faith bringing with it a defined set of beliefs that -- with the exception of some denominational rifts over the centuries -- stay pretty much consistent over time.

However, the key point of differentiation between Hinduism and these other faiths is not polytheism vs. monotheism. The key differentiation is that "Hinduism" is Open Source and most other faiths are Closed Source.

"Open source is an approach to the design, development, and distribution of software, offering practical accessibility to a software's source code."

If we consider god, the concept of god, the practices that lead one to god, and the ideas, thoughts and philosophies around the nature of the human mind the source code, then India has been the place where the doors have been thrown wide open and the coders have been given free reign to craft, invent, reinvent, refine, imagine, and re-imagine to the point that literally every variety of the spiritual and cognitive experience has been explored, celebrated, and documented.

Atheists and goddess worshipers, heretics who've sought god through booze, sex, and meat, ash covered hermits, dualists and non-dualists, nihilists and hedonists, poets and singers, students and saints, children and outcasts ... all have contributed their lines of code to the Hindu string.

The results of India's God Project -- as I like to refer to Hinduism -- have been absolutely staggering. The body of knowledge -- scientific, faith-based, and experience-based -- that has been accrued on the nature of mind, consciousness, and human behavior, and the number of practical methods that have been specifically identified to work with ones own mind are without compare. The Sanskrit language itself contains a massive lexicon of words -- far more than any other historic or modern language -- that deal specifically with states of mental cognition, perception, awareness, and behavioral psychology.

At the heart of the Indic source code are the Vedas, which immediately establish the primacy of inquiry in Indic thought. In the Rig Veda, the oldest of all Hindu texts (and

possibly the oldest of all spiritual texts on the planet), God, or Prajapati, is summarized as one big mysterious question and we the people are basically invited to answer it.

"Who really knows?

Who will here proclaim it?

Whence was it produced?

Whence is this creation?

The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe.

Who then knows whence it has arisen?"

While the god of the Old Testament was shouting command(ments, Prajapati was asking: "Who am I?"

Since opening the floodgates on the divine question, Indic thought has followed a glorious evolutionary arc from shamanism, nature worship and sacrifice through sublime and complex theories on mental cognition, the nature of consciousness, and quantum physics.

Through tracing the subcontinents relationship with the deities of the Vedas, we can trace the course of Indic thought over the centuries. One of the first things we notice is that not only does the people's relationship to god change over the centuries, the gods themselves change. Shiva, for example, appears in the vedas as Rudra, the howler, god of storms, still something of a lesser deity. Reappearing over the centuries as Bhairava -- he who inspires fear -- Pashupati, lord of beasts, the god of yogis, and the destroyer, Shiva finally, by the 9th century, achieves status in Kashmir as the fundamental energetic building block of the entire universe. Neat trick.

But as much as the gods change and the evolution of Indic thought leads us to increasingly modern and post-modern

views of the nature of reality, the old Vedic codes still remain front and center. One of Hinduism's defining factors is that the historic view of god, the nature worship and shamanism, never went away, so that god as currently worshiped exists simultaneously as symbol and archetype as well as literal embodiment. That Shiva, for instance, could simultaneously be the light of ultimate consciousness and an ash-smeared madman who frequents cremation grounds is a delight to us spiritual anarchists, while mind numbing to most western Theologists.

Western and Middle Eastern monotheistic faiths have simply not allowed such liberal interpretation of their God. They continue to exist as closed source systems.

"Generally, [closed source] means only the binaries of a computer program are distributed and the license provides no access to the program's source code. The source code of such programs might be regarded as a trade secret of the company."

One of the defining facts of Christian history is that access to God has been viewed -- as in most closed source systems -- as a trade secret. The ability to reinterpret the bible, or the teachings of Christ, or the Old Testament, or to challenge the basic fundamental authority of the church has been nonexistent for most of the church's history. Those who dared to do so were quite often killed.

In Indic thought, there is no trade secret. The foundation of yoga is that the key to god, or the macrocosm, or the absolute ... lies within the individual and can be accessed through a certain set of practices. It's a beautifully simple but ultimately profound concept that has been allowed to flourish unchecked for millennia. The process of discovering

and re-imagining the divine is in your hands. The God Project.



Josh Schrei 02:16 PM on 3/05/2010

As I say in the article, "Hinduism" is a misnomer. When you refer to Hinduism, you're really referring to tens of thousands of different schools of belief, many of whom have nothing to do with one another. Are there fundamentalists within India who are intolerant? Certainly. But it is still a very different paradigm than faiths where there is no access and no ability to interpret and redefine scripture. That's the point of this article. Very specifically that Hindus (for lack of a better word) have been in the unique position of having free interpretation over their own religious code, which means the breadth of views on the subject is vast and borderline anarchic. In a good way :)



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