

An Insider's Perspective

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Defining Hinduism: The Challenge of Transcending Christian Categories of Religion

The study of Hinduism poses several challenges for students approaching it from a Christian background. First, unlike some other religions, Hinduism largely resists definition. It cannot be defined by a historical founder, exclusive creed, or uniform catechism, and Hindus tend not to use religious language or categories of thought that Christians take for granted. For example, many Hindus are caught off guard when asked by Christians to explain what they believe. The centrality of belief, or creed, has defined Christian tradition since 325 CE, when the Council of Nicaea sought to express the meaning of Christ as Savior, an exercise that also helped define Christian orthodoxy. Unlike Christian orthodoxy, Hindu orthodoxy has been historically determined more by highly restricted access to initiation to its sacred texts, theologies, and philosophies than by definition of what is or is not correct belief.

In addition, Hindus are often confused by the Christian evangelical discussion of whether a person is saved. *Saved from what?* The Hindu goal is enlightenment, but this term is not simply a

different word for salvation. The state of enlightenment or liberation promises better life circumstances than the world of suffering and continuous rebirth, but it should be seen more as a correction of ignorance or illusion than an experience of transcendence. Hinduism does not share the Christian belief in a personal God who saves people from the consequences of original sin, which are suffering and eternal death.

A third challenge arises in that Hindus do not identify themselves uniformly. Many traditional Hindus identify themselves more narrowly as Shiva devotees, Vaishnavites, followers of Vedanta, or disciples of Sai Baba or Swami Narayana, for example. These are fluid categories that resist an easy equivalence with a Christian understanding of sects or denominations, which define themselves at least in part by their difference from and rejection of other communities and theological interpretations. These particular Hindu groups do not necessarily reject the interpretations or practices of other groups in the way that many Christian denominations disagree on important interpretations of doctrine.

A reflection that can be drawn from a Hindu perspective on Christian approaches to other religions is that perhaps the definition and uniformity provided by creed, ecclesiastical institution, and clearly articulated boundaries of orthodoxy actually reflect the evangelizing



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This temple in Atlanta, Georgia, has the traditional design of temples in southern India. Unlike traditional temples in India, temples in the diaspora often serve not only as places of worship but also as cultural centers with auditoriums, dining halls, and wedding facilities.

spirit of Christianity. Traditions like Hinduism, which do not seek actively to convert others (even discouraging this in some cases) and interpret their traditions more as a "way of life," are not concerned with clearly articulating religious boundaries. Definitions play a role in labeling *other* people's religions insofar as they differ from one's own and in specifying what is unique about one's tradition over and against others. This is absent from traditional mainstream Hinduism, which has instead been characterized more by its assimilation of rival worldviews (such as Buddhism) than by their definitive exclusion. Exceptions can be found in the missionary zeal of many modern reform movements (such as Arya Samaj, Vedanta Society, and ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) that do seek to define their precise theological outlook against other positions. In addition,

the experience of Indian diaspora (which has grown manifold in the United States following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that reversed prior restrictions and facilitated unprecedented levels of immigration from Asia) will likely lead to greater Hindu self-reflection vis-à-vis other traditions. As an intrinsic part of Indian society and history, Hindus in India have often experienced their religion as an unconsciously accepted way of life. However, as the Indian diaspora grows, Hindus outside India may feel a need to impose clearer definitions upon their religion, as demonstrated by the development in recent decades of Hindu lay education in the United States, for example. Temples built by diasporic communities often serve needs different from traditional temples in India. Beyond being houses of worship presided over by priests, diasporic temples often serve as cultural centers for

instruction in traditional Indian dance, music, and language. Diasporic temples in the United States regularly offer *satsang* groups for adults, which focus on the study of scripture and on meditation, and Bal Vihar youth programs.¹ Through the development of such programs, Hindu communities outside India work both to educate younger generations on ancient traditions and to build new traditions of study and practice outside the home in order to adapt to contemporary spiritual needs. For example, whereas temples in India are most often supervised by male priests, lay men and women share many responsibilities in the operations of diasporic temples. Women have recently become vitally involved in temple building, financing, and operations. Also, unlike Indian temples, which often are dedicated to a single deity, diasporic temples serve as a place of worship for people of varying backgrounds and regions of India. In all of these ways, diasporic Hindu communities are actively redefining traditional patterns of worship in a way that may in time demonstrate greater definition than has been characteristic historically of Indian Hinduism.

Which Hindu Way?

Scholars note the variety of different, even contrary, movements that have coalesced over several millennia into one overarching family of Hindu traditions. While accurate, the scholarly emphasis on variety and difference risks missing the cohesiveness that many Hindus experience in Hindu ways of life rather than shared doctrine.

A perennial Indian story tells of six blind men who encounter an elephant. Each individual feels a different part of the elephant (a leg, the trunk, the belly, or the ear) and thus describes the

animal differently (as a pillar, a snake, a great pot, or a husking basket). Hindus interpret this story as a caution against dogmatic fixation on one's own ideas about the absolute, or God. Likewise, Hinduism itself can appear as different things to different people when it is in fact all of them. For those who read the Upanishads or observe another studying the Upanishads at the feet of a teacher or guru in the traditional manner, Hinduism will appear to be a mystical, speculative philosophy that seeks to apprehend the nature of reality. For those observing pious Hindus, who perform puja daily in their homes, Hinduism will appear to be a devotional path of bhakti, in which one welcomes his or her *Ishta Devata*, or chosen deity, into a consecrated image or sculpture and honors the divine with symbolic gifts of love and devotion. For those encountering very traditional Indian Hindus, who still observe strict caste regulation, Hinduism may appear to be a traditional hierarchical culture governed by an intricate system of social rules and obligations designed to benefit social stability and order by subordinating the individual to the community. For still others familiar with the practice of yoga, Hinduism may be a means of magical self-empowerment by which one performs *tapas*, or discipline, and enjoys a growth in spiritual energy. Each of these provides an accurate description of Hinduism, and each may be found most prominently in one or more of the different texts considered sacred scripture.

Use of Sacred Texts

In the past, the study of religion focused overwhelmingly on the "official" teachings in a tradition and its "philosophical" or intellectual content.

1. The Chinmaya Mission, established in 1953 in India by devotees of the Swami Chinmayananda, is a very popular spiritual renaissance movement. With more than 300 centers worldwide, this community seeks to advance the wisdom of Vedanta philosophy in a modern appropriation of the guru-student model of education and spiritual training both for adults and for children.

This is thought of as different from and as existing in tension with what may be termed "popular," "ritualistic" practice or "mythology," with a prejudice against the validity of the latter. This earlier tendency in the study of different religious traditions is being corrected with greater attention to ritual studies and popular religion. In the spirit of such correction and in the interest of taking seriously what the majority of Hindus think, understand, and practice in their tradition, this discussion of the Hindu sacred texts must begin with the great epics and the Puranas rather than with the Vedas. While the Vedas are considered *shruti*, or revelation simply given to humans at the beginning of the current cycle of creation, the epics are considered *smriti*, or remembered wisdom or tradition. The Mahabharata, one of the two great epics, is often called the fifth Veda because of its importance and value.

So what uniquely do the epics, Puranas, and Dharmasastras (legal texts about dharma, or normative behavior, including the Laws of Manu) bring to the study of Hinduism? First, they represent the spiritual knowledge most widely available to the majority of Hindus throughout history. Access to the Vedas and Upanishads was restricted to high-caste males who were initiated into a lifelong path of study. Most Hindus only encountered Vedic material when hearing the verses sung by a *pujari* (or Hindu priest) during a ritual service. In contrast, Hindus of every walk of life have grown up knowing the epics and mythology in great detail. Traditionally, the epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (especially its most famous section, the Bhagavad Gita)—were recited or performed by traveling artists during frequent festivals that would take over the life of a village for a week or two at a time. Many Indian Hindus today remember

watching the television broadcast of the Mahabharata in the 1980s. This extremely popular weekly series coincided perfectly with the spread of television sets in middle-class Indian homes. The epics are full of heroes and villains, emotional drama, political intrigue, and exemplars of faithfulness, devotion, and inscrutable morality. Therefore, these stories, and their ethical and spiritual lessons, shape Hindu values.²

Likewise, beginning hermeneutically with popular practice, the content of the Puranas, the mythological sources about the many different Hindu deities, is communicated through festival and ritual observance. Each holiday has a special mythological significance, and families may recite a story relevant to the holiday or about the deity being honored. The birthdays of favored deities are celebrated, while other holidays mark some great mythological victory of good over evil. In addition to these annual festivals, devout Hindus may practice *vratas*, or vows, one or several days every week in honor of a specific deity. Many of these *vratas* involve fasting from a particular food or practice, and many also require the recitation of a story that explains the origin and spiritual benefits of its observance. All in all, the many sacred days and the observance of them over time reinforce the mythological tales and the gods and goddesses themselves in the religious imagination of Hindus.

Historical Overview: World-Maintenance and World-Transcendence

Some of the variety and diversity mentioned already stems from the focus on one or more sacred text(s) over others. Another important

2. The traditional mythological stories of the Puranas are today transmitted to younger generations using the form of comic books and animated cartoons. The Amar Chitra Katha series of comic books shares accounts of the many deities and their interactions, the adventures of various heroes mythological and historical, and traditional Hindu values and doctrines. Today, there is a growing corpus of animated video collections that bring these stories to life, available on television and the Internet.

factor in this variety is the tension between the two poles of world-affirmation or world-maintenance, on the one hand, and world-denial or world-transcendence, on the other. The ancient Vedas and their ritual instructions, for example, affirm and maintain the world in its harmony. Performing the fire sacrifice was, in the Vedic world (1500–500 BCE), the primary means of religious worship. One made a sacrifice and offered grains, milk, or animal flesh. As it burned away in the fire, the gift would rise up to the heavenly abode of the gods. One offered these gifts to the gods and carried out all the requisite rituals that would make the gift pleasing to the gods in order to guarantee the well-being of one's family and community.

The later focus in classical Hinduism on dharma (sacred duty, determined traditionally by age, gender, and caste) likewise provides an example of world-maintenance, because it supports the responsibilities of all members of society to each other. As long as everyone properly observes dharma, the world will run harmoniously. When the rules of dharma are not observed, resulting in social or political chaos in the world, divine intervention becomes necessary, and Vishnu, the deity of preservation, becomes incarnate in the world to correct the imbalance or chaos and restore the harmonious rule of dharma.

A third example of world-maintenance is found in the doctrine of karma.³ The teaching of karma, that all actions have their appropriate consequences, supports the rule of dharmic responsibility. Ethically good actions result in desirable consequences and ethically bad actions result in

undesirable consequences. These should not be considered rewards or punishments because they are not granted by a divine authority. Rather they should be thought of as a law of moral nature that functions even above the power of the gods. Because the law of karma holds that good actions will result in benefits in one's current life as well as in future births, it helps support the ethical norms that constitute worldly harmony and well-being.

This need to maintain the world of human experience must be seen in relation to the need to transcend this world. The Vedic Aranyakas, also known as forest treatises, are a collection of esoteric texts that explore the deeper spiritual meaning of Vedic rituals. Although originally intended for ascetics living in the forest, the ascetic life and spiritual techniques described there represent an attempt to transcend the suffering and change of worldly life. The ascetic path requires a withdrawal from society, from social and family relationships and responsibilities that define worldly life.

Another example of world-transcendence is found in the Upanishadic path of mysticism. In direct contrast to the efforts of Vedic sacrifice, the path of mysticism requires initiation into disciplined study before a guru. Unlike the Vedic world of the gods who seem very close to the natural world, the speculative philosophy of the Upanishads teaches that what is truly real, or Brahman, lies beyond what can be seen. Here one finds both a metaphysical transcendence (Brahman, the absolute reality, transcends ordinary worldly reality) and an epistemological transcendence (true knowledge or spiritual wisdom

3. The doctrine of karma is common to several other Indian religious traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as well, although there are differences among them. Because all actions carry consequences, karma both explains the present as a result of the past and predicts the future based on present actions. Insofar as it helps explain why things are the way they currently are, it serves at least in part as a theodicy. Insofar as it places responsibility on the individual, it echoes the teaching of free will. However, traditionally, women and lower-caste men are taught that the only way to improve their future lot is to patiently serve others in this life. Instead of compelling transformative action, then, the doctrine of karma justifies and rationalizes the social order.

requires transcendence of ordinary knowledge). The mystical path advocated in the Upanishads requires one to transcend both sense perception and intellectual understanding, because the truth of Brahman cannot be known through discursive reason, but must be experienced by the faculty of intuition.

In addition, whereas the doctrine of karma supports world-maintenance, the operation of karma itself is something to be ultimately transcended. The ultimate spiritual goal of life does not consist simply of continually improving one's birth, but of freeing oneself completely from the cycle of rebirth, known as *samsara*. *Moksha*, or liberation from *samsara*, itself transcends the karmic worldview, in which one does good to achieve good, and instead seeks to avoid accruing karma at all. The Bhagavad Gita's teaching of the four *margas*,⁴ or paths, to achieve *moksha* recount the three paths of transcendence noted here (*raja yoga*, *jnana yoga*, and *karma yoga*) as well as a fourth path of *bhakti yoga*. Just as *karma yoga* teaches one to act according to one's duty without clinging to the fruits of that action, *bhakti yoga* teaches one to devote oneself fully and without remainder to one's chosen deity, or *Ishta Devata*. Both paths lead toward ultimate transcendence both of self and world.

Conceptions of the Sacred

The varied Hindu descriptions of the sacred reflect a remarkable fluidity. What is divine and where is it to be found? The answer may be Brahman, the absolute reality, described in the Upanishads. It may be *Nirguna* Brahman (the absolute without attributes, suggesting an apophatic or negative theology) or *Saguna* Brahman

(the absolute described with attributes). It may be the Trimurti (sometimes described as a Hindu Trinity) of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. It may be Lakshmi or Kali or Durga. It may be Ganesh, the remover of obstacles. In fact, Hindus have long held that there are 330 million gods, suggesting that there are as many gods as there are living beings. They may recognize the sacred in natural places like mountains, rivers, or trees, which may be divine personifications, or in a human guru, or teacher. Because of the Hindu sense of fluidity of spirit, the sacred may be found anywhere. Because of its ultimacy, the divine cannot be delimited from any particular location or image.

This raises the question of the ultimate reality of each of the gods, as well as their visual representation in paintings, stone carvings, and so on. Hindus often say that the many gods are dynamic representations of an absolute reality that transcends all representation. Where Jews and Muslims, for example, have forbidden image-making to preserve the transcendence of God and caution against a human tendency to worship what is seen, Hindus have justified the proliferation of image-making to maintain divine transcendence and recognize the limitations of and need for human visualization. Because no single image can capture the infinite and transcendent deity, Hindus use multiple images and forms. Each personification expresses a particular and partial quality or attribute of the sacred that serves the specific needs of worship. These images or statues focus the worshipper's mind during *puja* and serve as dynamic representations of something that inevitably transcends human understanding. Because of this transcendence, the divine needs to be theologically represented in some tangible way. It is fair to say that the very

4. The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on the four *margas* is often cited as support for the Hindu view that there are many paths to salvation or enlightenment. Today, it serves as a traditional theological motif for affirming the value of different religious traditions and teachings for different cultures and different individual temperaments.



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Many temples, including those dedicated to one primary deity, include many smaller shrines to other deities. Worshippers typically enter a temple and visit each shrine in turn, although they may choose to offer a special prayer or offering to a particular deity.

plethora of Hindu beliefs about and images of the divine shares a similar function with Jewish and Muslim refusal to image the divine—that is, Hinduism makes clear the transcendence of the absolute beyond all human categories and conceptualizations, while at the same time embracing the need to represent this transcendent absolute in tangible and meaningful ways.

The Role of Human Beings

Discussing the role of human beings in Hindu religion involves examining two correlated trajectories. The first addresses the relationship between humanity and the divine, and the second addresses human responsibility and religious ethics. The relationship between human and divine can be described variously, depending

on one's particular philosophical orientation. According to eighth-century Shankara's nondualistic philosophy, Advaita Vedanta, the human soul, or *atman*, is not truly separate or different from Brahman but experiences such differentiation as part of the condition of *maya*. According to eleventh-century Ramanuja's modified Advaita, the individual *atman* is distinct from Brahman, but its purpose is reunification with Brahman. In the dualism of thirteenth-century Madhva, Brahman alone possesses all perfection and directs the world, and the individual *atman* depends upon Brahman and seeks fulfillment in the worship of Brahman.

The modified nondualism of Ramanuja and the dualism of Madhva roughly resemble the theological anthropology of Christian orthodoxy, in that the individual soul seeks its rest in a loving relationship with God. Shankara's

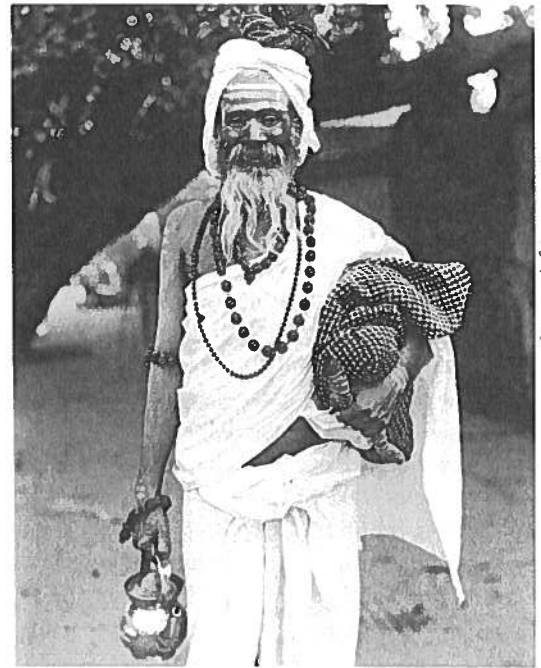
nondualism resembles a monistic or panentheistic worldview that Christian orthodoxy may criticize for confusing the divine nature and the world. However, within the Hindu tradition's theological and philosophical flexibility and fluidity of spirit is the suggestion that all of life carries much weight. It marries particularly well with the teachings of karma yoga and bhakti yoga taught in the Bhagavad Gita, which so pervasively influence classical Hinduism. Both karma yoga and bhakti yoga implement a self-discipline intended to transcend egoism and selfishness and instead identify with duty, or dharma, and with God. Shankara himself recommended the path of bhakti, or love and devotion, as a means of lifelong spiritual discipline.

The other trajectory in discussing the role of human beings in the world consists of religious ethics, expressed in Hinduism as dharma, or duty. It does not unfairly simplify things to call Hinduism a religion of dharma. Duties define a person's identity and responsibilities in different circumstances just as creedal formulas about one's acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord express Christian identity. The rules of dharma are communicated in the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Laws of Manu.

According to these texts, performing one's duties (traditionally prescribed by gender, caste, age, occupation, and contextual relationships to others) results in the accumulation of good karma, while failure to fulfill these duties results in the accumulation of negative karma. While the law of karma functions to encourage normative behavior by promising consequences that will be borne out in the life conditions of future births, karma is not the last word in terms of religious ethics, because the goal of life is not simply to be reborn in more and more pleasant circumstances, but to be liberated from this cycle of rebirth altogether (moksha).

Hindu tradition teaches that there are four goals in human life. In addition to dharma,

humans should pursue *kama* (desire or sensual and aesthetic pleasure), *artha* (material well-being, wealth, and prosperity), and *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of rebirth). Moksha is the ultimate spiritual goal of human life. While dharma, kama, and artha represent serious ethical goods, they are but penultimate spiritual goals when compared to moksha. Traditionally, only Brahmin males were considered eligible to pursue the goal of moksha, because it was presumed that they had gained enough spiritual maturity and discipline through numerous births to reach this goal of liberation. In light of the themes of world-maintenance and world-transcendence, the goals of dharma, kama, and artha all support the maintenance of harmony and well-being in the world and in one's present life, while the



Sadhus, or sannyasins (male) or sannyasinis (female), give up the worldly relationships and responsibilities of dharma to live an austere life and pursue the ultimate spiritual freedom of *moksha*. Many join an ashram community, while others live as hermits.

goal of moksha represents the transcendence of worldly life.

Hindu tradition codifies social expectations, creating a sense of orthopraxy, or correct practice, rather than the correct belief that defines Christian orthodoxy. Because religion has so pervasively marked every aspect of life, creating what is often noted as more of a Hindu "way of life" than a "religion," the function of normative ethics can be narrowly defined and restrictive. Hindu tradition, like other extant religious traditions, has developed in a patriarchal culture, and many traditional cultural and social gender norms reflect this patriarchal culture. These include a woman's presumed inability to pursue Vedic study; a woman's subordination to her father, husband, and son; and a mythologically supported cult of true womanhood that glorifies a woman's unending self-sacrifice.

The caste system also prominently reflects these deeply codified norms of responsibility, which strictly define a person's place in society. The caste system is rooted in the hierarchical order common to traditional societies around the world; it most closely resembles, for example, the medieval European feudal society. While caste no longer functions as a hereditary division of labor, it continues to operate quite centrally in Indian and Hindu society. The caste system often receives criticism from Hindus and non-Hindus alike because it can enable social prejudices against those deemed lower-caste. Caste discrimination is illegal in India, and the government has undertaken aggressive measures to tear down these traditional social restrictions, which have excluded many from institutions of power like education and government. Caste today continues to perpetuate a painful reality for many, especially when defended by some in the name of social tradition. In addition, its influence

sometimes is underestimated or even denied outright by progressive Hindus who find it a backward institution and an embarrassment to their modern values of the dignity of every person and the individual's freedom to determine their own destiny. To the degree that its influence is denied in contemporary Hindu society, caste prejudice poses a similar challenge to that posed by racism in American society, because it must be recognized before people can work to right the injustices that result from it.

Identifying Ritual Practices

The *samskaras*, festivals, and puja make the spiritual goals of life an absolutely pervasive aspect of the daily lives of Hindus. The Hindu *samskaras* share some resemblance to a Christian notion of sacraments in that they are seen as religiously necessary acts, but the Hindu *samskaras* comprehensively honor the many stages of life. The common list of sixteen *samskaras* includes, for example, the moment of conception, a prenatal blessing, the naming of a child, a child's first solid food, first haircut, initiation into formal study of the Vedas, marriage, and last rites. They represent opportunities to consecrate the natural stages of life and precarious transitions from one stage to another. The numerous festivals mark sacred time throughout the year and bring to life the mythological life of the sacred and one's devotional relationship to one's god or gods. Puja, or ritual worship, especially pronounces the dynamic character of devotion.⁵ Homes often have a puja room or an altar. Men and women may perform puja alone, as a family, or in groups. Devout women often set up an altar in the corner of the kitchen as well and begin each day by bathing, lighting incense, and honoring

5. The performance of puja, while a pervasive element of Hindu practice, varies widely by interest, piety, and family and regional tradition. Some perform puja daily, whether brief or lengthy, while others perform puja only on major holy days.



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Several samskaras represent key moments of childhood development. During the Annaprasana, a baby is fed her or his first solid food, traditionally a sweet rice. Parents often invite family and friends to celebrate, and play a "game" of placing the child before several different symbolic objects, each representing a particular destiny, for the child to crawl towards.

one's chosen deity. In the puja, the worshipper approaches the divine through a particular concrete image or symbol and offers symbolic gifts of devotion. A common description of puja is that the worshipper invites God into one's home and treats God as an honored guest, offering food, water, flowers, clothing (the best of what a family has available), and then sharing the consecrated or blessed food, or prasada, among the worshipers. The puja rituals provide a dynamic and personal way to interact with a transcendent deity in tangible ways. Like religious practitioners in other

traditions, Hindus also participate in pilgrimage, visiting famous temples and holy sites that may be of particular significance in the mythology of one particular deity or modern-day guru.

Christian-Hindu Encounters

It is important to acknowledge the clouded history of encounters between Christians and Hindus. Hindus continue to find themselves explaining and defending their rich iconography to Christians, some of whom condemn what they interpret as idolatry. Hindus continue to resent Christian efforts to evangelize them, particularly in India where Christian missionary work is seen as part and parcel of European imperialism, from which India freed itself only two generations ago. This suspicion of Christian missionary work has led in recent years to serious episodes of violence perpetrated by Hindu nationalists against Christian nuns and other groups, which clearly defies the common perception of the great tolerance of Hinduism. Just as Christians vary on whether members of other religious communities can attain salvation, Hindus of varying temperaments differ on whether other religious paths are all equally valid or just partial attempts to relate to the sacred that ultimately fall within the larger canopy of religious possibility captured in Hindu theological diversity. Some may even think of non-Hindu religions as completely untrue paths for those not fortunate enough to merit birth in India to Hindu parents.

While many pioneers from the Christian tradition have engaged in their own immersive dialogue with Hindu tradition and texts, far fewer Hindus have immersed themselves thoroughly in dialogue with Christian tradition and texts. Until recently, much of the initial Christian dialogue with Hindu tradition emerged out of missionary efforts to better understand Hindu religion in order to preach the superiority

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of Christian religion. In contrast, Hindus have traditionally not shared this sense of evangelism that led Christians to look beyond their own religious communities. Hindu belief in dharma supports the notion of many diverse paths to spiritual liberation as well as the idea that one person's path is not necessarily the best for another. Beliefs in karma and samsara support the sense that an individual must work out his or her own enlightenment in a series of births that is unique to their identity. Together, these beliefs shape a worldview that does not seek to impose religious or doctrinal uniformity on other communities. Despite the clouded history

of Christian evangelism and Hindu isolation, there is great promise of more fruitful and constructive encounters between Christians and Hindus. The work of "Hindu missions" begun by Swami Vivekananda (not attempting to convert Christians to Hinduism, but to explain and defend Hindu wisdom to culturally Western Christians) set up a process of religious apologetics that continues. However, this work of Hindu apologetics requires genuine dialogue among Hindus and Christians as well as greater Hindu study of Christian tradition, texts, and theology, especially as Hindus immerse themselves in the lives of Christian communities.