

Contrary to most other religions, Hinduism has no official founder nor doctrine or unified belief. Hindus generally concur that God is present in all things, living or not in the universe and that He transcends them all, that the essence of each soul is supernal . Finally, An adherent of Hinduism believes that the whole purpose of our existence consists of becoming aware of this divine essence. The various cult practices and meditation we may observe in Hinduism encourages the accomplishment of experiencing one' s self and experiencing God .

The different gods and goddesses of Hinduism all take part in the conception and way of addressing a nameless, shapeless God. The whole purpose is to transcend the material perception of the world and to be conscious of the universality of the Divine Presence.

This belief conducts Hindus to perceive existence and human condition through concepts :

- Humans are exposed to a perpetual cycle of births and rebirths (reincarnations). This cycle is called Samsara. Karma which is the result of all actions determines the successive reincarnations.
- The Path of Desire : The pull towards earthly success is just as transient as it is enticing.
- The Path of Renunciation : Path we attain when we realize the concept Path of Desire. This leads to the joy and belief in higher ideals. This Path demands , requires various forms of discipline and a greater interest in difficult accomplishments needing more time and investment rather than untroubled achievements.
- Four Yogas incorporate the paths towards the divine reality which then leads to wisdom or the true understanding of the real nature of reality.
- The Janana Yoga through its meditative practices lets the intellect (knowledge) understand ultimate reality.

- The Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion to a god, the path of the love of God.
- The Karma Yoga leads to personal renunciation and altruism.
- The Raja Yoga is intended to the body and spirit. It includes the Hatha Yoga which enables the discipline and domination of the body.

The Sacred Books of Hinduism

- The **Vedas** : assembled between the seventeenth and eighteenth century B.C.
- The **Brahmana** : used for rituals by the Hindu priests, these texts were written between the eleventh and eighth century B.C.
- The **Upanishads**, written between the eighth century and the Christian era, the upanishads meant sessions before a master. These masters called rishis lead reflections on the world's ultimate reality and the signification of human existence. For them, life is consisted of perpetual movement where there is no beginning or end, the universe, like a wheel, is in perpetual movement.

As for popular piety, it feeds on innumerable legends and two great Hindu epics : The Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Hinduism plays a major role in the Indian societal organization. There are four great castes :

- **Brahmans**, the highest caste of the Vedas specialized in rituals and where the superior class still dominates India, even today.
- The **Ksatriya** or warrior-nobles whose responsibility is to protect the kingdom and the world. They also offered sacrifices in order to ensure the earth's prosperity.
- The **Vaisyas** or commercial traders had no specific tasks but they were considered the three superior castes' servants.

- The **Untouchables** were last in the caste list.

Although after India's independence in 1947 the new constitution banished this strict social structure, these four castes still impregnated Hindu society.

(Recherche : Claude Marcil)