

# Comparison of the jain and hindu traditions



In this paper I will be comparing and contrasting the Jain and Hindu traditions, and the ways that these two traditions compare to the ancient Vedic tradition. While there are various common fundamental components, beliefs, and practices that are held constant in both traditions, each tradition has unique elements. In order to fully understand each faith, it is essential to examine the themes of liberation and karma; and how these themes contribute to the comparison of these traditions with Vedic tradition.

## **JAIN TRADITION**

The Jain tradition is currently practiced by five to eight million people worldwide. Primarily practiced in India, the Jain tradition “confronts us with a simple yet extraordinary message: the path to happiness, truth, and self-realization is the path of restraint” (Oxtoby, 149). To follow this path, means the renunciation of the world- “not just from its sorrows but also from its ephemeral joys, from family and community, from desires and pride, even from one’s own body” (Oxtoby, 150), and being an exemplar for non-violence.

*The founders/leaders of the tradition:* Known as “Tirthankaras”, the leaders of this tradition are those who have accomplished enlightenment and serve as a teacher. These “ford-makers” are present in all time cycles, have souls (like all humans), and are considered role models for humanity.

*The divisions of Jains:* There are two classes of Jains- the Svetambara and the Digambara. This division occurred as a result of the death of Mahavira (the most recent ascetic-prophet, known as the Great Hero), as well as differences in practices and beliefs. For example, while both sects agree the

woman's body is inferior to a male, the Svetambara allow women to be initiated, whereas, the Digambaras argue that asceticism must be reserved for only an "adamantine" body (Oxtoby, 157). In addition to their differences in regard to women, they also differ in their views on omniscience, and clothing.

*The core beliefs of the tradition:* Though there are divisions of classes within the tradition, there is fundamental ideology common to all sects:

(1) karma(action); (2) samsara (a cyclical view of time due to a cycle of birth and rebirth); (3) moksha (liberation/nirvana); (4) jiva (living things), and (5) ahimsa (non-harm).

In addition to these beliefs, the entirety of the Jain tradition does not believe in one or many gods; but rather that enlightened beings will help them to reach moksha (liberation).

*The primary practices of Jain tradition:* The Jain tradition preaches the importance of practice and reflects a higher understanding of the world. In Jainism, there are three jewels: right beliefs, right knowledge, and right conduct. These three jewels align with the five abstinences: non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, non-acquisition, celibacy and chaste living. In addition to the three jewels and the five abstinences; Jain practice can be showcased through "ascetic discipline, dietary restrictions, fasting, samayika (state of equanimity), pratikramana (repentance of sins), sallekhana (fast to death), even Jina puja (worship of the Jinas)" (Oxtoby, 162). Together, these practices aim to purify the soul.

## **HINDU TRADITION**

The Hindu tradition is currently practiced by 950 million to 1 billion people, with eighty percent residing in India (IVCVedasUpanishads, 1). While specific teachings may vary depending on the geographical location, the Hindu tradition believes “ the human soul is immortal when it is freed from the shackles of karma and rebirth” (Oxtoby, 28).

*The origins of the tradition:* The origins of this tradition have been debated; however, the most common view is that the tradition “[grew] from a fusion of the indigenous religions of the Indus Valley with the faith of the Aryans” (Oxtoby, 31).

*The core beliefs of the tradition:* There are different types of Hindu devotion (bhakti), however there are some fundamental truths for the tradition:

(1) belief of three deities (Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu); (2) there are ten incarnations of Vishnu (the two most important-Rama and Krishna); (3) there are four stages of life (student hood, repaying debts to society, householders, and the renunciation of the world altogether); (4) and the primary goal is moksha.

*The primary practices of Hindu tradition:* As many modern-day Hindus have very minimal knowledge in regard to the texts, beliefs, and philosophies of this tradition, they believe that “ Hinduism is not a religion, it is a way of life” (Oxtoby, 69). It is because of this lack of knowledge that Hindu practice is essential. Practicing this tradition can be done through temple worship, where the deities are honored by a priest offering on behalf of the devotees and then it is considered to be blessed. As there are many different

traditions within Hinduism, the practice of temple worship can be varied. In addition to worship in the temple, there is domestic worship, known as Puja. “ The rituals performed in the home are simplified versions of temple rituals” (Oxtoby, 77). Another important part of Hindu way of life is the performing arts, which are how the epics and Puranas are taught and remembered.

## **THEMES: KARMA AND LIBERATION**

Two themes that are essential in both traditions; are karma and liberation. In the Jain tradition, Jains believe that they are already enlightened beings and must reach liberation. In order to be liberated, you must eliminate karma by performing good actions, remain aware of the effect your actions have on others, and burn off bad karma by participating in bodily restraints (as showcased in the five abstinences). On the other hand, in the Hindu tradition, it is believed that karma, is a system of rewards and punishments that is attached to various actions and can span over various lifetimes. The quest for liberation is through the samsara (birth/death cycle) and comes only when the Hindu has obtained supreme knowledge, attaining immortality. In the Hindu tradition, there are three ways to liberation- action (through unselfish duty), knowledge (scriptural), and devotion (the forgiveness of sins if devout).

## **COMPARISON TO THE ANCIENT VEDIC TRADITION**

The ancient Vedic tradition refers to that of the Indo-European people and their practices and beliefs. In this tradition, the Vedas are the earliest compositions. Written in Sanskrit, there are four ancient scriptures- the Rig Vedas, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and the Artharva Veda. Each Veda is composed of four parts: the Samhita, Aryankas, Brahmanas, and the <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-the-jain-and-hindu-traditions/>

Upanishads. The purpose of the Vedas was to acquire material wealth and were dominated by the Yajna (the fire sacrifice). While the Vedas are described as the Hindus most sacred text, most Hindus would have a difficult time describing their contents. However, the ancient Vedic traditions has certainly shaped the practices of the modern-day eastern traditions. For example, it is in the Upanishads that the earliest concepts of karma, moksha, and samsara appeared.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are some overlaps that have emerged as traditions have spread and adapted overtime. Yet, while there are many similarities, both to each other and to the ancient Vedic tradition, each tradition is unique and practiced differently.

## Works Cited

- Mamtora, Bhakti. *IVCVedasUpanishads* . Powerpoint.
- Oxtoby, Willard G. *World Religions: Eastern Traditions* . Oxford University Press, 2002.