

The present state of affairs and nothing

[Environment](#), [Air](#)



The belief in Karma and Samsara form the basis for the Hindu religious worldview.

It has been central to Hinduism for thousands of years, and as a result forms a major part in the philosophical thinking of many Hindus today. The ideas of Karma and Samsara are evident in almost all of the great Hindu scriptures, being touched on in the Vedas, but first properly introduced in the Upanishads. When the idea of Samsara was first introduced it led to a quest for liberation through the practice of austerity or meditation or both. To be released from this life the Hindus needed to wipe out the effects of their past actions or Karma. It is this set of beliefs that formed the background of many of Hindu religious movements and beliefs. Karma is the belief according to which a person's future life is determined by past and present actions.

Every action, bodily, intellectual or ethical, good or bad, big or small will have its effect. Nothing other than the effects of earlier actions has determined the present state of affairs and nothing other than the present actions will determine the future circumstances. The law of Karma allows no room for chance or divine intervention as everything is inevitably determined by it. The Brhardaranyaka Upanisad simply states By good actions one becomes good, by bad actions one becomes bad(4. 4. 5) (Koller 1982: 59). Intertwined with belief in Karma is the idea of Samsara, which is the cycle of repeated births and deaths that subjects an individual not merely to one death but to innumerable deaths (Koller 1982: 9). Hindus believe that as a person dies the Atman (the unconscious, immaterial part of a human) carries the results of their good and bad actions (Karma) into their next existence.

This previous Karma will determine what sort of position a Hindu will occupy in their new existence, for example, if a person in a low caste has been very good in their past existence they will be born into a higher caste in their next life. The ideas of Karma and Samsara have justified the unequal Caste system, which has been an integral part of Indian society for hundreds of years. At the time of the Rig Veda (the earliest Hindu scriptures around 1000 B. C. E) (Smart 1989: 60) the key concepts of Karma and Samsara had not actually been stated.

However, it does mention that a persons conduct in this world determines his life after death. The brahmins (the religious leaders) stressed the importance of the sacred act of sacrificing which was supposed to have a bearing on mans fate in the next world, and consequently the Satapatha Brahmana 11. 1. 8, 6, states that the Sacrifice becomes the self of the sacrificer in the next world (Stutley 1985: 23). So, even at this early stage of Hinduism, the idea of Karma played an important role in the Hindus worldview. It was not until the Upanishads (the principal ones dating from 800-400 B. C. E) (Smart 1989: 49) that we first meet with the doctrines of Karma and Samsara.

The Upanishads are concerned essentially with the meaning of the sacrificial rites, and come to the conclusion that knowledge in the true reality is the key rather than expertise in rituals like the Rig Vedas were. In the process they introduce profound metaphysical and religious ideas, such as Karma and Samsara. The Chandogya Upanisad sums up the ideas of Karma and Samsara those who are of pleasant conduct here the prospect is indeed that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Kshatriya or the womb

of a Vaisya (high Indian Castes). But those who are of a striking conduct here the prospect is indeed, that, they will enter the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcast(Lipner 1994: 45). The central concept in the Upanishads is that of Brahman. Brahman is the highest truth, the eternal being on which all other beings depend on. Brahman is the same as the atman, in other words, that ultimate being out there, is the same as that eternal something within you. The goal for many Hindus became at this time to gain Moksha (release from Samsara) which meant a persons atman would be released from the cycle of rebirth and therefore become one with the ultimate reality, Brahman, like a drop of water into an ocean.

To understand the Hindus preoccupation with breaking the cycle of Samsara and gaining Moksha one must understand the Hindus view of time and space. For Hindus the world was not created once and for all, nor was there an end to it, for all eternity it has been recreating itself and dissolving back into its unformed and unmanifest condition. These periods of evolution and devolution were called days and nights of Brahma, which convert into Billions and Billions of human years.

The Hindus eternal life becomes a crushing burden in its endless, pointless, senseless repetitiveness and as the twin doctrines of Karma and Samsara developed the revulsion against never ending-life through never ending death in a manifestly imperfect world become more and more extreme (Zaehner 1966: 61). Therefore, the aim is to escape from this continuous rebirth (Samsara) by obtaining Moksha. Since it is Karma that binds one to the cycle of repeated births and deaths, to achieve Moksha a way must be

found so a person will not accumulate any further Karmic forces and will also burn up any Karmic forces already accumulated (Koller 1982: 59) Almost all of India's religious and philosophical thinkers have addressed the way in which this could be done and they came up with several differing ways of how to achieve liberation from Karmic bondage. During the Upanishads it became popular for Hindus to achieve this through asceticism, which required the Hindu to renounce the world and live a world of isolation without the distractions and sufferings of the world hence not forming any Karmic forces.

Through this asceticism Karma was overcome by shifting existence to a deeper level, where the ultimate energy is experienced not as fragmented and limited but as the whole and perfect expression of undivided reality at its deepest level (Koller 1982: 59). Other ways to break Karmic bondage were through yoga, rituals, devotion and through Dharma (fulfilling one's duty/ truthful action). All these techniques enabled the self to break karmic forces and become closer to the ultimate reality. These techniques are all still widely used in Hinduism today. The Bhagavad Gita (probably composed in third or fourth century B. C.

E)(Zaehner 1966: 78) marks a dramatic turning point in Hinduism. The Gita accepts both the Vedic and Upanishad ways and draws some elements from both, but for the first time a totally new element appears in Hindu spirituality, in the love of god for man, and the love of man for God. The Gita personalises Brahman through the god Krishna who is the supreme lord of self, the doer and knower, and stresses the fact that devotion to Krishna is

the best way to break the cycle of Samsara and gain Moksha so as to become part of the divine. Throughout Hinduism's history, Samsara and Karma have been enshrined into various sub-groups of Hinduism that have all tried to escape these forces through alternative paths that best suit the individual. The main solution for all Hindus is to break the cycle of Samsara, which will lead them to results of the ultimate reality and therefore be able to share in the divine presence. BIBLIOGRAPHY Bhaktivedanta, A. C.

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