

Origins of hinduism essay sample

Religion



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion. According to historians, the origin of Hinduism dates back to 5, 000 BCE or more years. The word "Hindu" is derived from the name of the Indus River, which flows through northwestern India, (Origin of Hindu, 2008). In ancient times the river was called the "Sindhu", but the Persians who migrated to India called the river "Hindu," and the land "Stan." They called India "Hindustan" and its inhabitants "Hindus". Thus the daily life practices evolved as the religion followed by the Hindus came to be known as "Hinduism." The term generally denotes the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to the Indian subcontinent. The religion had previously been known as Sanatana dharma (the eternal law) Vaidika dharma (law of the Vedas), Arya dharma (the noble religion), or Manava dharma (the religion of mankind). Eventually the word "Hindu" came into common use among Hindus themselves and was adopted into Greek as "Indos" and "Indikos" ("Indian"), into Latin as Indianus and into Sanskrit, as Hindu (replacing "Aryan"). Later, it was also adopted in English as "Indus".

Origin of the world's oldest religion

The classical theory of the origins of Hinduism traces the religion's roots to the Indus valley civilization circa 4000 to 2200 BCE. According to this theory, the development of Hinduism was influenced by many invasions over thousands of years. The major influences occurred when light-skinned, nomadic "Aryan" Indo-European tribes invaded Northern India (circa 1500 BCE) from the steppes of Russia and Central Asia. They brought with them their religion of Vedism. These beliefs mingled with the indigenous Indian native beliefs, often called the "Indus valley culture" or "Indus valley

civilization”. This theory was initially proposed by Christian scholars in the 19th century. Their timeline was biased by their pre-existing belief in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). The Book of Genesis, which they interpreted literally, appears to place the creation of the earth at circa 4, 000 BCE, and the Noachian flood at circa 2, 500 BCE. But these dates put severe constraints on the date of the “ Aryan invasion,” and the development of the four Vedas and Upanishad Hindu religious texts.

A second factor supporting their theory was their lack of appreciation of the sophisticated nature of Vedic culture; they had discounted it as primitive. The classical theory is now being rejected by increasing numbers of archaeologists and religious historians. In the emerging theory, the Aryan Invasion view of ancient Indian history has been challenged in recent years by new conclusions based on more recent findings in archaeology, cultural analysis, astronomical references, and literary analysis. Archaeologists, including Jim Schaffer and David Frawley, have established convincing arguments for this new interpretation. Archaeological digs have revealed that the Indus Valley culture lasted from about 3500 to 1800 BCE. It was not “ destroyed by outside invasion, but it was destroyed due to internal and natural causes and, most likely, floods,” (Frawley, 2008).

The “ dark age” that was believed to have followed the Aryan invasion may never have happened. A series of cities (Mohenjo-daro and Harappa) in India have been studied by archaeologists and shown to have a level of civilization between that of the Indus culture and later more highly developed Indian culture, as visited by the Greeks. Finally, Indus Valley excavations have uncovered many remains of fire altars, animal bones, potsherds, shell

<https://assignbuster.com/origins-of-hinduism-essay-sample/>

jewelry and other evidences of Vedic rituals. “ In other words there is no racial evidence of any such Indo-Aryan invasion of India but only of a continuity of the same group of people who traditionally considered themselves to be Aryans...The Indo-Aryan invasion as an academic concept in 18th and 19th century Europe reflected the cultural milieu of the period. Linguistic data were used to validate the concept that in turn was used to interpret archeological and anthropological data. There was no invasion by anyone,” (Frawley, 2008).

Hinduism is a religion with various gods and goddesses. According to Hinduism, three Lords rule the world. Brahma: The Creator; Vishnu: The Preserver and Shiva: The Destroyer. Lord Vishnu did his job of preserving the world by incarnating himself in different forms at times of crisis. The three Lords that rule the world have consorts and they are goddesses. The consort of Brahma is Sarasvati, the goddess of learning. Vishnu’s consort is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Shiva’s consort is Parvati (also worshipped as Kali or Durga), the Mother Goddess. There are 330 millions deities and all of them work according to the wishes of the three Lords. Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic. They recognize a single deity, and view other Gods and Goddesses as manifestations or aspects of that supreme God. Henotheistic and polytheistic religions have traditionally been among the world’s most religiously tolerant faiths. Hinduism differs from Christianity and other Western religions in that it does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, a single system of morality, or a central religious organization. It consists of “ thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 1500 BCE,” (Frawley, 1991). Scriptures

According to Hinduism, Lord Brahma, the Creator, imparted the divine knowledge to the Rishis of Yore. The Rishis disseminated the knowledge. The Vedic Rishis were great people who had direct intuitive perception of Brahman or “ the Truth”. They were inspired writers. They built a simple yet grand system of religion and philosophy from which the founders and teachers of all other religions have drawn their inspiration.

There are four “ Vedas”, the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda and the Atharva-Veda. The Vedas are the oldest books in the library of man. “ The truths contained in all religions are derived from the Vedas and are ultimately traceable to the Vedas,” (Sacred Scripts, 1999). To many religious scholars, the Vedas are the fountainhead of religion. To Hindus, the Vedas are the ultimate source to which all religious knowledge can be traced. The Vedas are eternal because it is a source of knowledge and knowledge cannot be destroyed. In that sense, the “ Vedas” are eternal. They are without beginning and end, (Sacred Texts: Hinduism, 2000). Furthermore, in olden times, the common man could not comprehend the highly abstract philosophy of the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras. Hence, the sages Valmiki and Vyasa wrote the history for the benefit of common people, in the form of the two well-known epics “ Ramayana” and “ Mahabharata”. They are two very popular and useful holy books of the Hindus. The Ramayana was written by the sage Valmiki, and the Mahabharata by Vyasa, (Sacred Scripts, 1999). Philosophy of Karma and Moksha

Hinduism is a religion that sees human life as a cycle. The cycle consists of birth, life, death and rebirth. Rebirth is known as “ Samsara”. “ Samsara” is mainly about how the deeds a person does in their lifetime dictate that

<https://assignbuster.com/origins-of-hinduism-essay-sample/>

person's next life and what they will go through. There is positive and negative karma that people have to deal with. The positive and negative karma determines how people will turn out or the consequences based on their actions. It also can determine what kind of species a person will be in the next life, (BBC, 2008).

Hinduism taught a way of organizing society, like most religions. In Hinduism, it is called the caste system. In the caste system, people are put into certain groups or categories based on heredity or social restrictions. The four major castes are Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Karma can be very important to the caste system because it can show what person is right for a specific stage of each level. Not only is Karma important, but there is something called Dharma, which is very important in the Hindu religion and is referred to as "the moral law". Dharma is said to guide Hindus in a way to make themselves better people. Key virtues that Dharma relates with are forgiveness, charity, wisdom, truthfulness, etc. It is even referred to as a personal duty or something that is a must in this religion. What is very interesting about Dharma is it also accepted the teachings of Buddha and Mahavir, so this draws Hinduism together with Buddhism and Jainism, respectively. This law enables teachings of reality, and is a concept to draw out a person's path, (BBC, 2008).

Having good karma and following dharma are not the only goals of Hinduism. High hopes of embracing a stage in which a person gets past the point of Samsara is a focus that all Hindus work on. There is a lot to be done to break Samsara. The person trying to break Samsara must put their past and ego behind them. That is very hard work because it is hard to put aside things

<https://assignbuster.com/origins-of-hinduism-essay-sample/>

that mean a lot to you or were a huge impact in your life. After letting go of the past and even your ego, the person must then be dedicated to practice. Practices of Hinduism occur in many forms. One form is called ‘ Gyana Marga’: the study and meditation on the aspect of Brahman. Another form of practice is karma marga: which works on selfless and righteous actions. The last form of practice is bhakti marga: deep thought and time put into finding your own identity and making yourself one with Brahman. These practices all lead to the division and detachment of yourself to where you are at a certain standing with no negative or positive karma, (Levinson, 1998).

All the practices and meditation lead to moksha. Moksha is freedom from the ordinary world. It also means you are broken away from the cycle of Samsara. You are in a peaceful state of mind where you are pushed away from the ordinary world and regular experiences you would go through. All this is reached by meditation, (Levinson, 1998).

In a meeting of Hindu religious leaders, Lokamanya Tilak, a prominent scholar said: “ A Hindu is he who believes that the Vedas contain self-evident and axiomatic truths,” (The Graduate Center of the CUNY, 2001).

Shankaracharya (Highest Religious Authority or Guru) defined a Hindu as “ He who has perfect faith in the Law of Karma, the law of reincarnation, ancestor worship, the Vedas and the existence of God, he who practices the instructions given in the Vedas with faith and earnestness, he who worships the Avatars and studies the Vedas, is a Hindu,” (Origin of Hindu, 2008).

Hinduism has grown to become the world’s third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. It claims about 837 million followers – 13% of the

world's population. It is the dominant religion in India, Nepal, and among the Tamils in Sri Lanka. According to the one survey, there are about 1. 1 million Hindus in the U. S., (Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1999). The “ American Religious Identification Survey” is believed to be more accurate, (The Graduate Center of the CUNY, 2001). They estimated a smaller number: 766, 000 Hindus in 2001. Still, this is a very significant increase from 227, 000 in 1990. Statistics Canada estimates that there are about 157, 015 Hindus in Canada.

Conclusion

Shri Krishna said to Arjuna in the Hindu holy book, the Bhagavad-Gita that, “ the paths to Truth are many”. This quote summarizes what the Hindu religion is mainly about. It does not discount other philosophies that may show a different path. Thus the tolerance of Hindus for other religions is unique. It is a religion that is inclusive, respectful of other religious thoughts and philosophy. It is truly incredible that Hinduism, which appears to be a combination of many religions tied together, has stayed as one religion. From the Vedic sacrificial religion to the current day bhakti cult, they appear to be at two ends of the spectrum. However, the sanctity of Vedas and a willingness to be reformed as well as an extraordinary tolerance of other religions has made Hinduism remarkable. No wonder it is called Sanatana Dharma, a religion without a beginning or ending.

References

BBC, (2008). Religion and Ethics-Hinduism. Retrieved 6/15/09 from:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism>
<https://assignbuster.com/origins-of-hinduism-essay-sample/>

Frawley, David, (1991). Gods, Sages and Kings. Morson Publishing.

Frawley, David (2005). The Myth of the Aryan invasion of India. Retrieved 6/21/09 from: [http://www. hindunet. org/](http://www.hindunet.org/)

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2001). American Religious Identification Survey. Retrieved 6/15/09 from: [http://www. gc. cuny. edu/studies](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies)

Levinson, David, (1998). Religion: A Cross-Cultural Dictionary. Oxford University Press.

Origin of ‘ Hindu’ (2008). Retrieved 06/21/09 from: [http://www. hindunet. org](http://www.hindunet.org)

Rajaram, N. S. (2006). Aryan Invasion – History or Politics? Retrieved 6/25/09 from: [http://www. archaeologyonline. net/artifacts/aryan-invasion- history. html](http://www.archaeologyonline.net/artifacts/aryan-invasion-history.html)

Sacred Scripts (1999). Retrieved 6/24/09 from: [http://www. sacredscripts. org](http://www.sacredscripts.org)

Sacred Texts: Hinduism (2000). Retrieved 6/15/09 from: [http://www. sacredtexts. com/](http://www.sacredtexts.com/)

Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches, (1999). Published by The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.