

# Hinduism research paper

Religion



“Hinduism and Modernity” The writings on Hinduism and modernity by David Smith are an interesting read due to the juxtaposition of two opposite (per the author) concepts filled with examples that are traditional and modern with a spirit of understanding that is the hallmark of modern times. The opening examples of the Ganesha idols drinking milk being ridiculed by a modern day press in India serves well to remind us that our thinking or “theorisation” has become rigidly scientific and we have developed a sceptical bias towards what we cannot understand or explain.

For me, the process of reading this section and sorting the confusion of thoughts thereafter enough to write about, involved several attempts to reading, writing and letting it go. As I read through this section with much anticipation, I found myself struggling to capture the essence of the writings of Kant, Weber, Marx, Hegel and others. After numerous readings, I realised that I was reading about modernity through the perspective of western philosophical writers and social thinkers. My eastern heritage and western education had somehow missed adequate information on both Hinduism and a balanced approach to modernity.

As I read the writings of Smith, shortly after the first page, the expectation of deepening my understanding of Hinduism was pushed to the back burner and I received an education on western philosophical and social thought. That was disappointing because I had hoped to learn more about Hinduism and its place in the modern day. My expectation was that somehow the author would reconcile so called rational theorisations (that I too am very attached to) and the in-explainable Hindu concepts that I was familiar with.

Unfortunately, other than seeing shadows of faith based thinking in Hegel, the section on Hinduism and modernity abruptly ends with little or no understanding on Hinduism and the assortment of modern day theorists do not bridge the intellectual divide between the two concepts. A couple of days after reading this section and failing to write any thoughts, I suddenly realised another obstacle in my thinking. When I lived in India, amidst the Indian culture, I had come to accept Hinduism as the “ modern” religion as opposed to Christianity or Islam.

The basis of this label was that Hinduism lacked a book or structured definitions and paid no attention to conversion of others to Hinduism. As an organised religion, it was wonderfully ambiguous, largely spiritual and open to individual expression. It was okay to discard rituals or practices that did not my approval. That essence of Hinduism that I carried from my stay in India was a sharp contrast to the author’s perspective of Hinduism being the example of a “ traditional” religion, and perhaps a far cry from modernity.

My personal thought is that Hinduism, like philosophical or social theory has over the last 2000 plus years been defined by male dominated patriarchal societies. Like the cream on homemade Indian yogurt, that layer needs to be peeled away to study the essence of Hinduism or modernity and understand the closeness they share. European Discovery of Hinduism from “ Hinduism and Modernity” The European discovery of Hinduism ps a period from the 15th century when the ports of Goa opened up for the Portuguese traders to the 18th century when the British begin to live in India and acculturate themselves with some of the Indian traditions.

In these three hundred years, India seemed to change from an isolated country hidden from the world, to a country that could no longer hide its spices, its riches and its culture. Sadly though, the discovery of Hinduism for non Indians did not have a clear theoretical base, and was dependant on a largely oral and abstractly written sparse Hindu religious/cultural history, during a time when the Indian society was not open to sharing with the outside world.

As a result, the accounts of Hinduism written by visitors depicted the Hindu religion as grotesque or insipid, by European writers who travelled to India and experienced the culture from their biblical eyes. The practice of sati, the deification of kings, the extreme deprivation of Brahmans and the overly sexualised art altogether presented a confusing picture that could not be corrected, because the language of India was not understood by the Europeans. To their sensibilities, the ways of the Indians were horrifying to say the least.

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The Europeans in India, who could have had the opportunity to experience the Hindu culture first hand, also were kept at the fringes by the Indians, as per the writings of Bentinck in 1807. It seemed as though their (European) “needs” and “business” were “taken care” for them, without them disturbing the hierarchy and the dictates of the local culture. At this point, it seems as though the hierarchical society in India was interchangeably used to represent the Hindu religion. There seemed to be very little understanding of the Hindu religion apart from the social structure, with the teachings of he

religion being a closely guarded secret, by the priests and the wealthy. The fact that that Indians were not open to foreigners examining their religion is evident from Bernier's writings. Bernier's base of atomism of Gassendi could have led to a productive exchange between the European and Indian culture, however, it seemed as if he gave up because he could not visualise a coherent Hindu cosmological theory and the " pundit" who was his only source of information, did not have enough skills to dialogue.

There were sporadic writings through this time, for example by Abraham Roger, 1649, themed on " Paganism" that attempted to describe the Hindu culture of India, but at some point they tended to disintegrate into a judgemental dismissal of the body of knowledge that was very different to say the least. There always seemed to be enough examples to create caricatures and convince the western world, that India was not worthy of serious enquiry.

All in all, from a modern day perspective, it seems that the Indians had created multiple layers to protect themselves from invaders, missionaries, scholars, traders all of them having an agenda to rip open the cultural centre and expose the vulnerability to the world. So it seems that visitors were kept at bay, given spices, gold, and sent on their way. The resistance also came from an established social structure and was maintained by those in power, for whom, it made sense to keep up the confusing and diffused aura, so they may profit as the privileged few who understood both sides.

Marx and Weber's writings in the 19th century are also historical sources of information on this time, although Marx did not write anything that helped the world understand Hinduism. Webers's writings did contain some key <https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-research-paper-research-paper-samples-2/>

concepts which were central to the Hindus, such as “ Samskaras” or “ Karma” but also contained some extreme views which were more true of Webers’ own personal struggles and growth. It was not until the late 18th century, under the colonial rule by the British, that Indians met westerners as friends, who wanted to understand or join the Indian culture, without an agenda.

Around that time, Indians within India had also begun to look beyond their borders and the environment seemed ready for cultural exchange. The exchanges thereafter where both the Indian and the British culture absorbed elements from each other created an environment where a genuine interest could sustain and studies could be done. Dayananda Saraswati from “ A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism” Dear Sikander Bhaiya, I came across something interesting and wanted to share it with you. I’m taking a class in Hinduism, about 10, 000 miles away from home, and learning about Dayananda Saraswati, who as it turns out, is the founder of our Arya Samaj sect.

You may recognize the Arja Samaj nurseries near our house, well here is some information behind the teachings at these schools. As my professor says, Swami Dayananda was born into a Brahmin family in 19th century India. But one point you should know is that his real name is Mool Shankar and he was born in Gujrat. He found the Arya Samaj, meaning cultural organization, after an impacting event during the night of Shivratri. When mice ran all over Shiva and ate the offerings given to him, he could not understand why the idol could not defend himself from a mouse.

Then, after the death of his sister from cholera, he no longer believed and degraded idol worship. That is when he created the Arya Samaj movement for people who do not believe in idol worship. Nevertheless, Swami Dayananda did not form the Arya Samaj based on this one principle, looking at Hinduism as a whole he rejected all the “ falsehood” and created a body who believed in all the good in Hinduism. Swami Dayananda studied believed in the Vedic scriptures. One such notion he believed in was Moksha. Moksha is the escape from the reincarnation cycle and to finally become one with God.

But, I personally believe that reincarnation is not bad and have no desire to escape this cycle. Why would one not appreciate the life God has given us and instead escape life to be absorbed into the soul of the Divine Spirit? As Swami Dayananda proclaims Moksha “ is not emancipation but death or annihilation”. Death and annihilation are not words that come with a good meaning. Not everyone should be influenced to reach Moksha but instead be grateful for and enjoy what God has given us. Education is the sector in which Swami Dayananda made the most progress. For one, he wanted the Veda Bhashya to be translated into English in order to pread the information contained in these scriptures to the Europeans. He also believed in equal education for all. At his point of time in history women were not given the same rights as men and were often left to take upon simple maiden tasks. But he stated that this would cause “ warfare in the house”. Women will also be wanted as teachers in all girls’ school and knowledgeable enough to be involved in administrative affairs. In addition, Swami Dayananda urged

teachers and their scholars not to give into corrupt acts that could prevent teaching or learning.

I think he wanted to ensure that people and their actions were not what kept them from acquiring knowledge. I greatly support Swami Dayananda's belief that marriage should be Swayamvara. He believes that a man and a woman should "suit each other" before marriage so they will be happier. In addition, he condemns child marriage, which usually results in women becoming widowed at a young age. This is such a pervasive phenomenon that completely stopping child marriage has still not occurred in India. Instead he added another custom that women can remarry as long as they were not "consummated" in their first marriage.

This allows women to live a normal married life later on. I hope this letter has given you some light on Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj principles. Read on about this great Indian leader, his principles are inspiring. - Tanya Ramakrishna Paramahansa, from "A Source Book of Modern Hinduism" Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a famous follower of Bhakti traditions of 19th century India. He was born into a poor Brahmin Vaishnava family in a Bengal village where he devoted his life to "strenuous spiritual discipline" (Richards, 63) to reach union with the Divine, whom for Ramakrishna was Kali.

He became a priest of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple near Kolkata, the city where his portrait hangs on every corner. Ramakrishna understood that Hinduism is like a shoreless ocean but still has two main facets Bhakti and Jnana, methods to become union with the Divine. He had chosen the Bhakti path to reach full consciousness with his Divine Mother, Kali. But he does not  
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narrow his view of religion and God to only Kali. I agree with Ramakrishna when he says that God comes in various forms and as one becomes more devoted to God they begin to understand the wholeness of God's existence in this universe.

When one sees Kali, the idol, with a naked eye they see black. But her color can be compared to the blue sky, as one approaches the sky they realize it has no color. Yet, the sky is nowhere and everywhere, just like Kali. So, as one comes closer to Kali you will see her without color. Indians believed that there once existed Asuras , demons, who were tall, dark skinned and out to harm. Kali is a goddess who absorbed the negative physical attributes of the Asuras, hence her dark colored skin, but on the inside is a goddess who embodies Shakti, empowerment and strength.

In India, Kali is considered the most powerful women who kills all evil and absorbs their poison so others are void of it. She is a powerful female warrior, which goes against the stereotype that men are the ones who hold the strength and power to fight. Hinduism as a religion gives great power to women, unlike the society which strips women of their influence. I strongly support Ramakrishna's perspective that " each religion is only a path leading to God" (Richard, 65). I admire the many rivers into one ocean analogy used to describe his idea of different religions but only one God.

He was accepting of all other religions and believed " it is not good to feel that one's religion alone is true and all others are false" (Richard, 65). One can see that equality was important to Ramakrishna whether it was through religion, the caste system or gender rules. He illustrated that by finding love for God, one's mind, body and soul no longer belong as a part of the cast  
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system. In addition, during Ramakrishna's time in history women were not given the same rights as men and were often demeaned.

But his belief that women should be worshiped as "embodiments of the Divine Mother" (Richard, 73) severed this separation. I greatly admire Ramakrishna as he demonstrates his idea of 'duties' undertaken by people for name and fame, resulting in an individual's ego. Duties that are made and carried out by one's self is not as selfless as those completed as they are presented. Success from carrying out 'duties' is what creates a person's ego. The ego makes people individuals and separates them into 'you' and 'I'. But God sees everyone as one and wishes others would see the same.

The only means by which all individuals can become one is by "going away from the world into solitude" (Richard, 69). This moves the individual away from the distractions of the Maya and allows one to concentrate on the inner self to develop the love of God. With the love of God and as part of one, they are no longer an individual ego. Mahatma Gandhi from "Gandhi's Key Writings: In Search of Unity" Let me tell you about a man named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who is known as Mahatma, meaning great soul, Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi was born in 1869 to a Vaishnava family.

His mother and father were greatly religious people and influenced his perception of the world. However, growing up, he realized he was not a man of religion but of ethics. His interest in ethics drove him to study Law in London, England. With a background in Law, Mahatma Gandhi set out to create equality and morality amongst the people. His first attempt was in South Africa where he went to attain civil rights for the 62, 000 Indians living

there as laborers. At that time, Indians were not allowed to vote and were deprived of many other human rights.

The civil rights movement led by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa is where he found Satyagraha. Satyagraha as a theoretical principle was first introduced in Mahatma Gandhi's book *Hind Swaraj* and he shows how he used this philosophical principle in South Africa through his book *Satyagraha In South Africa*. Satyagraha is a theory that "recognizes the universal possibility of goodness and virtue" (Suhrud, 78). The original Gujarati title of Mahatma Gandhi's book is *Dakshin Africa Na Satyagraha No Itihas* (Suhrud, 77) when translated into English it would read "A History of Satyagraha in South Africa".

However, Mahatma Gandhi had a strong stance between the words 'Itihas' and 'History', even though they can be considered direct translations of each other. He believed that Itihas in English means 'it's so happened' as opposed to 'history' because for him history is associated with a past filled with wars and hatred. This is a glimpse of how Mahatma Gandhi coined the term Satyagraha as a "soul force" that is completely void of violence. (Suhrud, 77) Satyagraha's meaning has many faces and the theory itself comes along with many values, but the real meaning of Satyagraha is "holding on to truth".

According to Mahatma Gandhi this meaning should insinuate love and firmness, bringing about non-violence. This is a separate term from passive resistance, because the latter is still considered a weapon using violence. In fact, one of the principles of Satyagraha is 'Ahimsa' meaning non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi started the Satyagraha struggle in South Africa with a  
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series of non-violent protests. One such act was the burning of registration certificates at a community bonfire. This bonfire was an act of defiance against the Asiatic Registration Act of 1907.

The means by which Gandhi took a stance against the act broke the law, hence he took the corresponding punishment i. e. multiple blows to the head. As a Satyagrahi, Gandhi did not respond to the violent punishment but instead attempted to get back on his feet and continue burning the registration certificates. Due to Gandhi's persistence, he was thrown in jail for not succumbing to the police. This is one brutal example of how Mahatma Gandhi implemented Satyagraha in South Africa.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that morals and ethics were essential in order to create unity amongst societies and the people within them. From moral and ethics he derived a dogma known as Satyagraha whose core values are truth and ahimsa. Mahatma Gandhi adopted this attitude and applied it in any of his rebellious acts in South Africa. This was an astute strategy he created, so regardless of his actions that stood against the power, he was still ethically correct, making it more difficult for the authorities to bring him down. In this manner, Mahatma Gandhi attained civil rights for the Indians in South Africa.