

“An Idiot’s Guide to Hinduism”



By Musafir

We hear complaints from Hindu diaspora about western leaders and institutions circumventing Hinduism in their statements and discussions. Many westerners including some law-makers characterize Hinduism as a pagan religion that is the practice of worshipping many gods and their idols. The Abrahamic religions namely Christianity, Islam and Judaism condemn polytheism and idolatry. They equate Hinduism with inexistent Greco-Roman religions where many gods and their strange myths were devotionally and blindly accepted by the masses.

There are fallacies and some truth in the above statement. Let’s deal with the fallacies first. Hinduism may appear as a pagan religion to the outsiders due to the images of many god forms displayed in temples and Hindu homes. The truth is that the Hindus pray to one God despite accepting many images of the same Almighty. The Hindus believe in harmony, so they accept different forms of the same God from different regions and cultures. As a matter of fact, even images of Christ, Mahavir and Buddha can be found in many Hindu homes. Thus a plurality of gods does not denote polytheism in Hinduism but rather the plurality of the forms in which the same one God might appear. When I visit a South Indian temple, I pray to Venketesh, at the same time I pray to Vishnu in North Indian temples without ever distinguishing between the two.

Hinduism cannot be equated to old pagan religions as the latter didn’t have core beliefs which define Hinduism. Some key beliefs of Hinduism are mentioned below:

1. Hindus believe “eka brahama dwitiyo nasti,” there is one true God who is a real entity that encompasses everything (seen and unseen) in the

universe.

2. Truth is one though the wise may express it in a variety of ways.

3. Everyone should follow dharma which consists of right conduct, righteousness, moral law, and duty.

4. Soul and Moksha. A Hindu believes that the individual soul (atman) is neither created nor destroyed; it has been, it is, and it will be. Actions of the soul while residing in a body require that it reap



the consequences of those actions in the next life — the same soul in a different body. The goal of the individual soul is Moksha that is liberation- release from the cycle of death and rebirth. It occurs when the soul unites with Brahman by realizing its true nature. Several paths can lead to this realization and unity: the path of duty, the path of knowledge, and the path of devotion.

Unfortunately, many of the misconceptions are created by Hindus themselves. Many Hindus have no concept of the above mentioned facts. They also believe in ridiculous myths similar to the Greco-Roman pagans. There are open infights between various cults in Hinduism. We should not only preach true Hinduism, we must also understand its true nature and follow in our daily lives.

Moreover, all the Hindus should be able to understand and explain the differences between Hinduism and the Abrahamic religions. Monotheism in Abrahamic religions represents the denial of gods in God, while the monotheism of Hinduism represents the affirmation of gods in God. Failure to recognize this tempts the followers of Abrahamic religions into branding Hinduism as pagan.