

Comparative Study of Religions

Hinduism

Introduction

The most popular among the Aryan religions is Hinduism. 'Hindu' is actually a Persian word that stands for the inhabitants of the region beyond the Indus Valley. However, in common parlance, Hinduism is a blanket term for an assortment of religious beliefs, most of which are based on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

Sources (Scriptures)

There are several sacred scriptures of the Hindus. Among these are the **Vedas**, **Upanishads** and the **Puranas** are the upper most. The word Veda is derived from vid which means to know, knowledge par excellence or sacred wisdom. There are four principal divisions of the Vedas (**Rigveda**, **Atharvaveda**, **Yajurveda**, **Samveda**). After these there is **ITIHAAS**: The two epics of Hinduism are the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**.

Concept of God in Hinduism

Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. Indeed, most Hindus would attest to this, by professing belief in multiple Gods. While some Hindus believe in the existence of three gods Bhrama, Shiva and Vishnu. Some believe in thousands of gods, and some others in thirty three crore i.e. 330 million gods. However, learned Hindus, who are well versed in their scriptures, insist that a Hindu should believe in and worship only one God.

The major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim perception of God is the common Hindus' belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything, living and non-living, to be Divine and Sacred. The common Hindu, therefore, considers everything as god. He considers the trees as god, the sun as god, the moon as god, the monkey as god, the snake as god and even human beings as manifestations of god!

Concept of Life after death

Most of the Hindus believe in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which is called '**Samsara**' or the doctrine of rebirth is also known as the theory of reincarnation or of transmigration of the soul. This doctrine is considered to be a basic tenet of Hinduism. According to doctrine of rebirth, differences between individuals, even at the time of their birth are due to their past karma i.e. actions done in the past birth. For example if one child is born healthy while another is handicapped or blind, the differences are attributed to their deeds in their previous lives. Those who believe in this theory reason that since all actions may not bear fruit in this life, there has to be another life for facing or reaping the consequences of one's actions.

The important point worth noting is that the doctrine of rebirth is not postulated, propounded nor even mentioned anywhere in what are considered to be the most authentic Hindu scriptures i.e. the Vedas. The Vedas make no mention of the entire concept of transmigration of souls.

Buddhism

Introduction

Historical criticism has proved that the original teachings of Buddha can never be known. It seems that Gautama Buddha's teachings were memorized by his disciples. After Buddha's death a council was held at Rajagaha so that the words of Buddha could be recited and agreed upon. There were differences of opinion and conflicting memories in the council. Opinion of Kayshapa and Ananda who were prominent disciples of Buddha were given preference. A hundred years later, a second council at Vesali was held. Only after 400 years, after the death of Buddha were his teachings and doctrines written down. Little attention was paid regarding its authenticity, genuineness and purity.

Source (Scripture)

The most important of all Buddhist scriptures is the **TRI-PITAKA** which is in Pali text. It is supposed to be the earliest recorded Buddhist literature which was written in the 1st Century B.C.

The **TRI-PITAKA** or Three Baskets of law is composed of 3 books:

1. Vinaya Pitaka: 'Rules of Conduct' This is a book of discipline and mainly deals with rules of the order.

2. Sutta Pitaka: 'Discourses' It is a collection of sermons and discourses of Gautama Buddha and the incidents in his life. It is the most important Pitaka and consists of five divisions known as Nikayas. Dhammapada is the most famous Pali literature and contains aphorisms and short statements covering the truth.

3. Abhidhamma: 'Analysis of Doctrine' This third basket contains meta physical doctrines and is known as Buddhist meta physicals. It is an analytical and logical elaboration of the first two pitakas. It contains analysis and exposition of Buddhist doctrine.

Noble Truths:

The principal teachings of Gautama Buddha can be summarised in what the Buddhists call the 'Four Noble Truths':

First – There is suffering and misery in life .

Second – The cause of this suffering and misery is desire.

Third – Suffering and misery can be removed by removing desire.

Fourth – Desire can be removed by following the Eight Fold Path.

B. The Noble Eight Fold Path:

(i) Right Views (ii) Right Thoughts (iii) Right Speech (iv) Right Actions (v) Right Livelihood

(vi) Right Efforts (vii) Right Mindfulness (viii) Right Meditation

Concept of God

Buddha was silent about the existence or non-existence of God. It may be that since India was drowned in idol worship and anthropomorphism that a sudden step to monotheism would have been drastic and hence Buddha may have chosen to remain silent on the issue of God. He did not deny the existence of God. Buddha was once asked by a disciple whether God exists? He refused to reply. When pressed, he said that if you are suffering from a stomach ache would you concentrate on relieving the pain or studying the prescription of the physician. "It is not my business or yours to find out whether there is God – our business is to remove the sufferings of the world".

Concept of Life After Death

To Buddhism, however, death is not the end of life, it is merely the end of the body we inhabit in this life, but our spirit will still remain and seek out through the need of attachment, attachment to a new body and new life. Where they will be born is a result of the past and the accumulation of positive and negative action, and the resultant karma (cause and effect) is a result of ones past actions.

Judaism

Introduction

Judaism is one of the major Semitic religions. Its followers are known as Jews and they believe in the prophetic mission of Prophet Moses (pbuh).

Sources (Scripture)

The complete Jewish Bible is composed of 24 books called the **Tanach** (תנ"ך). The Tanach is made up of Torah (5 books of Moshe, the word Torah means 'teachings'), Nevi'im (Prophets), K'tuvim (Writings).

Concept of God

Unlike other ancient Near Eastern gods, the Hebrew God is portrayed as unitary and solitary; consequently, the Hebrew God's principal relationships are not with other gods, but with the world, and more specifically, with the people He created. Judaism thus begins with an ethical monotheism: the belief that God is one, and concerned with the actions of humankind.

Concept of life after death

Traditional Judaism firmly believes that death is not the end of human existence. However, because Judaism is primarily focused on life here and now rather than on the afterlife, Judaism does not have much dogma about the afterlife,

- Judaism believes in an afterlife but has little dogma about it
- The Jewish afterlife is called Olam Ha-Ba (The World to Come)
- Resurrection and reincarnation are within the range of traditional Jewish belief
- Temporary (but not eternal) punishment after death is within traditional belief

Christianity

Introduction

Christianity is a Semitic religion, which claims to have nearly 1.2 billion adherents all over the world. Christianity owes its name to Jesus Christ (peace be on him). The Holy Bible is the sacred scripture of the Christians. Christianity teaches that Jesus is the Son of God, God having become human and the savior of humanity. Because of this, Christians commonly refer to Jesus as Christ or Messiah. The three largest groups in the world of Christianity are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, and the various churches of Protestantism. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox patriarchates split from one another in the East–West Schism of 1054 AD, and Protestantism came into existence during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, splitting from the Roman Catholic Church.

Source (Scripture)

The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the Holy Scripture of the Jews and contains records of all the prophets of the Jews that came before Jesus (pbuh). The New Testament contains records of the life of Jesus (pbuh). The complete Bible, i.e. the Old Testament and the New Testament put together, contains 73 books. However, the Protestant Bible i.e. the King James Version, contains only 66 books as they consider 7 books of the Old Testament to be apocrypha, i.e. of doubtful authority.

Therefore the Old Testament of the Catholics, contains 46 books and that of the Protestants, 39 books. However the New Testament of both these sects contains 27 books.

Concept of God

Concept of God in Christianity is as Trinity, it refers to the teaching that the one God comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons; the Father, the Son (incarnate in Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Together, these three persons are sometimes called the Godhead, although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead. An early statement of Christian belief, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not



three Gods but one God". They are distinct from another: the Father has no source, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Though distinct, the three persons cannot be divided from one another in being or in operation.

Concept of Life after death in Christianity

Christian eschatology is concerned with death, an intermediate state, Heaven, Hell, the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, a rapture, a tribulation, the Millennium, end of the world, the last judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and the ultimate consummation of all of God's purposes. Eschatological passages are found in many places, especially Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew 24, Matthew 25, and the Book of Revelation.