Hinduism Project

YOU WILL BE GIVEN TIME TO WORK ON THIS PROJECT IN CLASS. YOUR HINDUISM BOOKLET AND NOTES WILL BE THE MAIN SOURCE OF REFERECNCE AND YOU ARE EXPECTED TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS **IN YOUR OWN WORDS** AND IN PROPER GRAMMATICAL SENTENCES. IF I CAN’T READ IT, I CAN’T GRADE IT. ***THIS IS YOUR TITLE PAGE. DO NOT LOSE IT, YOU WILL NOT GET ANOTHER ONE AND YOUR PROJECT WILL NOT BE MARKED WITHOUT IT.***

1. Explain the importance of **Brahman** to the Hindus. Be sure to deal with the ***atman*** and the ***maya*** in your explanation. (T/I 10 marks)
2. List the major Hindu festivals and indicate what they communicate. (T/I 10 marks)
3. Describe the three general branches of contemporary Hinduism. Make sure to identify the main differences between them. (Com 20 marks)
4. Describe the ***common basis of belief*** of Hinduism - Ahisma/Karma/Samsara. (Com 10 marks)
5. Outline the 3 different paths to salvation according to Hinduism. (App 15 marks)
6. Illustrate how the Hindu notion of time is different from ours. (App 5 marks)
7. Identify the major Hindu Gods and describe their ***personality*** or ***physical features***. (K/U 10 marks)
8. Identify the ***three historical stages*** in the development of Hinduism. Describe what happened during each stage. (K/U 10 marks)

T/I /20 Com /30 App /20 K/U /20

**Please use the time wisely and read and write well.**

**Introduction to Hinduism**

**What do Hindus believe?**

The fact that Hinduism has no single founder, sacred text, creed, or hierarchy led to the organic development of a variety of customs, practices, gods and goddesses, theologies, and philosophies, creating a rich pluralism in the field of Hindu beliefs. Hinduism is not, nor has it ever been a single, unified faith tradition. Instead, Hinduism is the umbrella term used to denote a network of Indian belief systems united by shared philosophical concepts and interrelated theologies founded upon the Vedas, a set of ancient religious and ritual texts.

Hinduism defies easy categorization in terms of whether it is monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, or panentheistic. According to Hindu belief, Brahman is the eternal origin and foundation of all existence, but views on the precise nature of Brahman and how Brahman manifests it-self/himself vary amongst different Hindu groups. Hindus generally recognize three different gods (*devas*), known as the *Trimurti*, as the three primary manifestations of Brahman: Brahma the creator god, Vishnu the preserver god, and Shiva the destroyer god. Hindus believe these gods incarnate from time to time in human form, though they are not actually human, in order to defeat evil and help humanity live according to the laws of the universe (*Dharma*). Such an incarnation is known as an *avatar*. Brahma is typically not worshipped in the same way as other gods because it is believed that his work – that of creation – has been done. Those who practice the most popular forms of Hinduism usually choose to serve either Shiva or Vishnu.

Across denominations, Hindus believe that the power (*shakti*) of a deity is actually present in that deity’s image (*murti*). Hindus do not worship the image itself, but their worship is offered to the deity whose power is in the image. During ritual worship (*puja*), the gods are served and cared for as honored guests through the offerings made to their images.

The most basic and widely known concept in Hinduism is *dharma*. *Dharma* (with a capital “D”) refers to the communal order of a society and the cosmic order of the universe. Related to this is *dharma* (with a lower-case “d”), which refers to the individual’s religious and communal duties according to his or her place and position in life. From this standpoint, even the gods and goddesses within Hinduism must take ac-count of *dharma* when they act, aligning their personal *dharma* with the universal *Dharma*. Hindus generally believe that the true self (*atman*) of every person is eternal and that they have no say into the way of things. Therefore, human survival depends on the choice to live according to *Dharma* by consistently doing one’s *dharma*.

Hindus also believe in *samsara* – the endless cycle of rebirth. For millennia, the image of the world as a place where the soul is continually reincarnated has dominated the Indian imagination. Hindus view the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth both in positive and negative terms. Positively, since the cycle causes people to be reborn after their deaths, every life should be lived ethically to maximize one’s enjoyment in both the present life and in future lives. Negatively, since life is often filled with hardship, the ongoing experience of tragedy reveals a morbid reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the

goal of many Hindu practices is to end this cycle.

The idea of rebirth is not exclusive to Hinduism, but the belief that one’s future incarnation is dependent on the ethical quality of one’s behavior in this life was pioneered by early Hindu sages. This belief that one’s ethical behavior determines one’s place in *samsara* is known as *karma*. *Karma* deter-mines the rank and form of one’s next birth in the cycle. In a more general sense, it refers to the actions that a person performs and the consequences of those actions. These consequences or effects, considered as part of the act itself, will at some point return to the person who performed the act in the first place. In short, the idea of *karma* means that every person gets what he or she de-serves based on the totality of one’s actions throughout all one’s lives, current and previous.

The Hindu concept of *moksha* refers to escape from the cycle of rebirth and liberation from its web of ignorance and desires by realizing that one’s *atman* is either the same as or united with the supreme *Brahman*. Believers reach this goal by recognizing that the differences they perceive between them-selves and *Brahman*, and between themselves and the rest of creation, are merely illusion (*maya*). There are a variety of ways to achieve *moksha*, but many Hindus believe dedication to a particular deity is the most powerful. Religious rituals and praiseworthy actions may also alleviate the karmic consequences of past transgressions, assisting one in achieving *moksha* by diminishing the power of *karma* to keep him or her en-meshed within *samsara*. Some Hindus even withdraw from the world and live an ascetic life to diminish their negative *karma*. However, the most famous Hindu text – the *Bhagavad Gita* – teaches that obedience to one’s dharma combined with inner denial of attachment to or desire for the results of one’s actions can lead to *moksha*.

**Denominational differences**

The three general branches of contemporary Hinduism are Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism, each characterized by distinct views of *Brahman* and each internally diverse. Vaishnavism, one of the largest branches of Hindu thought, upholds the god Vishnu (or one of his *avatars*, such as Rama or Krishna) as the one supreme God. Vishnu preserves and protects the universe and has appeared on the earth through his *avatars* to save humankind from tyranny. Vishnu is most often worshipped in his incarnation as Krishna as the personification of divine love. Thus, Vishnu is linked most closely with kingship and the preservation of order. For Vaishnavites, *moksha* is not merely understood as the *atman* merging into *Brahman*; Vaishnavites believe that the ultimate destination for those who attain *moksha* is an eternal afterlife in Vaikuntha, the blissful abode of Lord Vishnu.

In Shaivism, believers devote themselves to the god Shiva. Shiva is a necessary part of the *Trimurti* because, without destruction, there can be no recreation. Even though Shiva destroys life in order to make room for new creations, generosity to his devotees is common. Shiva is typically depicted as a young man with matted hair, and often with a body smeared with ashes and meditating on burning ground.

Shaktism focuses its worship on Shakti (also called Devi), the Divine Mother goddess of the Hindu pantheon, as the one true God-head. Unlike Vaishnavism in particular, Shaktism does not acknowledge the existence of other gods independent of the one on which it focuses worship. The goddess Shakti is identified with *Brahman* and, as such, all other gods are viewed simply as different manifestations of her. Shaktas hold a number of similar views as Shaivites, which is reflected in the close association that Shaktas believe exists between Shakti and Shiva; Shiva is the completely transcendent male divine force, while Shakti is the transcendent and immanent female force through which all divinity reveals itself in the human world. Shaktas believe that all women are appearances of Shakti and thus deserve respect, which male followers must grant before being able to worship the Goddess.

In addition to these three devotional branches of the Hindu tradition, which are divided based on which deity they consider supreme, there is also a spectrum of different philosophical schools that differ on the true relationship between *Brahman* and creation. On one end of the spectrum is the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, which suggests that there is no difference between *Brahman* and creation; all appearances of difference are merely illusion. This view is known as Hindu monism. Followers of Advaita Vedanta believe that their *atman*, or personal soul, is one and the same as the universal *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not just the source of all existence but is existence itself, not just the source of consciousness but consciousness itself. All things in the universe are not merely united but are actually one and identical, like a drop of water in an infinite sea.

Dvaita Vedanta, known as Hindu dualism, supports the view that there is a distinction between *Brahman* and the created world, though the nature of the distinction varies widely from a high level of differentiation to almost none. Generally, followers of this philosophy believe that one should strive to bring oneself as close as possible to *Brahman* but will never achieve complete one-ness, which is impossible. Dvaita Vedanta views the relationship between creation and *Brahman* as that between fish and water: fish are born in water, live in water, and, at death, dissolve back into the water, but they still are not the water.

These two ends of the Hindu philosophical spectrum, and the various positions in be-tween them, exist in each of Hinduism’s devotional denominations, with the strongest diversity seen in Vaishnavism and Shaivism, in which devotees can see themselves as either one with or near to Vishnu and Shiva, respectively. These different denominations – Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism – along with the different schools of philosophy – Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta – give Hinduism the rich pluralism of beliefs and theologies that characterize the tradition.

Other notes:

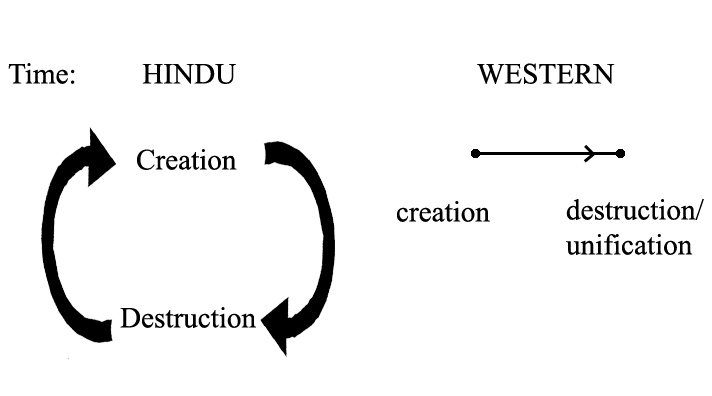
* Doctrine of Non-Violence (Ahimsa) – believe that Brahman permeates the world, so it is wrong to kill anything; it is an attack on Brahman

### **Cyclical Time**

* samsara also refers to the Hindu notion of time
* after billions of years of existence all of creation is dissolved and enters a state of suspended being when Brahman alone exists
* the world is recreated, society reformed and scriptures recomposed.

## Cosmology – an explanation regarding the nature of the universe

* it is important to understand what the universe is, and why it is, but there are no easy obvious answers
* Hindus deal with the universe as it is now, seeking salvation from the world’s bonds



Development:

Occurred over a 5000 year period, in 3 distinct historical periods or stages

1. The Pre-Vedic Period (2500 – 1500 BCE)

* in the *Indus Valley* in northern *India*, where a mother goddess was worshipped; she was a predecessor to the many goddesses worshipped in India today
* sacrifices made to a horned, three-faced god (early form of the Trimurti)
* may have practiced renunciation rites and exercise like yoga.

1. The Vedic Period (1500 – 600 BCE)

* the *Aryans* invaded northern India in the middle of the second millennium BCE, imposing their gods and elaborate system of sacrifice on the residents.
* Marked the origin of the *Vedas* (veda = “seeing” or “knowing”), the earliest Hindu scripture.
* Traditions focus on *this world*: rituals are aimed at maintaining a social order that will ensure for the individual a long and robust life; afterlife is believed to be a continuation of this life.

1. The Upanishadic Period (600 BCE – present)

* Upanishad literally means “to sit down before” a teacher
* The last book of the Vedas, the *Upanishads* are different from them; they seek liberation from the world; they advocate withdrawal from society and the use of meditation and techniques associated with *asceticism* (severe exercises in self-denial).
* The tension between fulfilling a social role and renouncing the world totally has been a focus of Hindu writings of this period.

**Three Paths to Liberation**

The Path of Action

* selfless to others
* right actions are performed for the sake of Brahman

The Path of Knowledge

* 3 steps
  + - learning – from the outside
    - thinking – internal reflection
    - viewing – seeing from God’s point of view
* use meditation to see how the person is attached to this world

The Path of Devotion

* most common
* pure, lifelong devotion to Brahman

**Hindu Festivals**

*Divali*

* joyous autumnal festival; national festival of India; “garland of lights”
* beginning of a new year & a fresh start: new house paint, banking
* special devotion to Lakshmi – fireworks, gift-giving

*Kumbh Mela*

* once every twelve years, millions of people gather to worship at the *Ganges River*, or “Mother Ganges” (people worship there daily)

*Ugadi*

* Hindu New Year
* officially at the beginning of the Indian summer though may be at other times
* rituals to welcome the New Year – asking for gifts from god
* make *Rangdi* – coloured patterns on the ground outside (words or greeting)

Pilgrimages:

* go to worship at special places (religious duty)
* often end at a temple; 12 have been identified s especially important; 4 of greatest importance: Badrinath, Rameshwaram, Puri, and Dwarka

Two Reasons for Festivals

* celebrate events in the lives of the gods
* mark the changing seasons

**Hinduism and Christianity**

***Hinduism*** ***Christianity***

Salvation is self directed – it Only Jesus Can Save us from our

Depends on your own efforts sins

Many Gods (\*aspects of Only one God

Brahman)

No fixed – Doctrines Official set of – Doctrines

- Sacred Books - Books (Bible)

- Moral Teaching - Moral Teaching

Reincarnation – soul gets as Soul only gets one chance

many chances as needed

Atman exists in all people One soul to one person

Moksha – Goal in life to Goal in life is eternal happiness

disappear with God

Priest direct, not perform rituals Priests lead religious rituals

Rituals usually solitary of Most rituals are congregational

family

* Hindus do not see themselves as participants with God in making the world a better place to live – Hinduism is basically “world-denying”
* Christians see themselves as “the hands of God” whose purpose it is to bring God’s kingdom to the earth. Christianity is “world-transforming”
* this is changing, as Hinduism is becoming more involved in civil and human rights in India – the caste system is now illegal

Mahatma Gandhi – social reformer in India; spent most of his life living out the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita (part of the Hindu Scripture), in which Krishna teaches that renunciation of the world is the surrender of selfish action. His campaign was to teach non-violence and fearlessness. He worked for the abolition of the “Untouchables” and independence from British rule.