



The Rationale and Logical Approach behind Development and Pursual of Hindu Practices

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Abstract

Religion is the opium of masses but none has been able to define the word with much precision owing to its diversity and magnanimity of faiths and beliefs. Whatever be the culture and religion, humans have sensed a natural power greater than themselves. Hinduism is one such religion with no one founder and known date of origin. Hinduism embraces a great diversity of beliefs, a fact that can be initially confusing. One can believe a large variety of things regarding God, the cosmos and the ways to get free from cycle of birth and rebirth and still be considered as Hindu. Similarly Hindu practices are of different hues and manifestations. In this paper we are trying to incorporate the rationale behind all those religious practices. The logic cannot be supported with scientific beliefs but there was and has been some reason behind our Hindu practices as to why we perform them and in that particular fashion alone.

Keywords: Religion, hinduism, hindu practices.

Introduction

In every culture and every age humans have sensed in the natural world a power greater than themselves. Surrounded by phenomena they cannot understand and forces they cannot control, they have apprehended a sacred presence. Man responded to these supernatural forces with fear and in this order respect them. He tries to understand them. But in absence of knowledge and having no control over these natural power he attempts to gain favor from these unknowable forces¹. While doing this he developed different forms of worship, recognized certain phenomena as sacred and keep them detached from ordinary daily practices, adopt various practices, perform rites and rituals, set standards to live life effectively and efficiently etc. From their beliefs about the cosmos and human nature, people derive morality, ethics, religious laws or a preferred lifestyle². During the course of action all these are influenced by different heterogeneous factors and reasons like Geographical, Historical, Sociological, Psychological, Physiological, Scientific, Logical and so on.

From earliest times, religion, its belief, rituals, prophets, scriptures, and traditions has played a significant and often critical role in human history. Originally, all major religions were holistic in approach, not restricting themselves to individuals, but assuming a powerful role in the society as well. The geographer Ellen Semple, stressed that the imagery and symbolism of a religion are significantly affected by its place of birth. Huntington suggested that "every religion is at least modified by its surroundings, especially those of its birthplace". Like Semple, he also argued that objects of worship are frequently determined by geographical factors, that's why Rain

God is predominantly important in India where rains are uncertain³.

Objectives

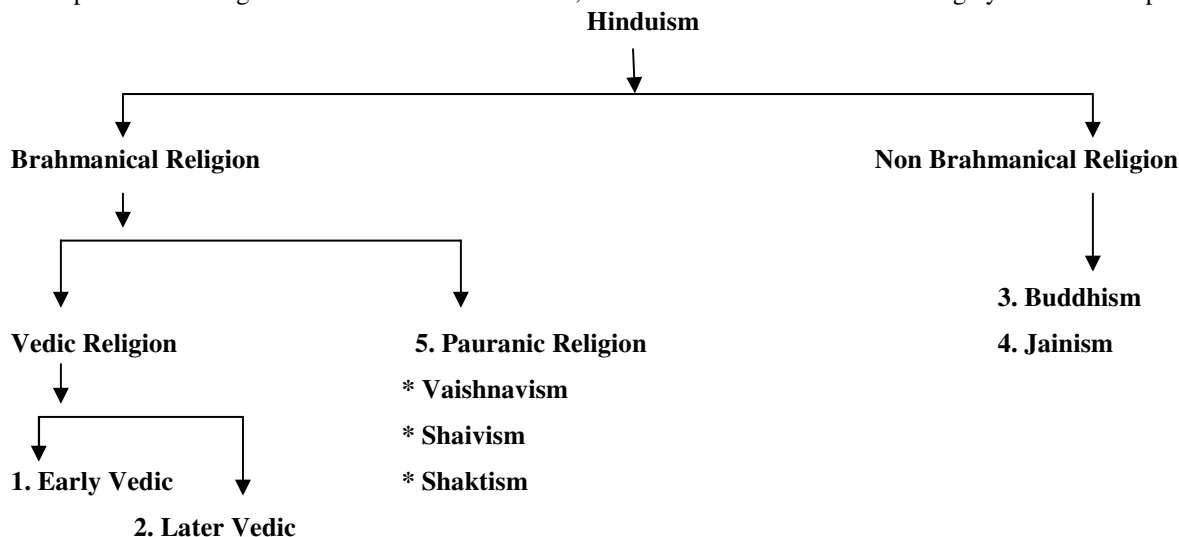
i. To have an overview of facts, philosophy and basic features of Hinduism. ii. To analyze the various phases of development of Hinduism. iii. To find out the rationale behind the development of various Hindu Practices.

About Hinduism

Hinduism is not the exception. It is also influenced by the above said factors. It is said to be the world's oldest known religion. History of Hinduism can be traced back to 6000 B.C. It is the third largest religion of the world with more than 1 billion followers. It constitutes about 14% of the world population. Most of the Hindus live in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka with considerable presence in all other parts of the world also. About 85% of Hindus live in India⁴. That is why India is also called as "Hindustan." Hinduism is also known as "Hindu Dharma". Here dharma refers to the specific law of reality and duties expected according to the religion.

The word "Hinduism" actually has no real meaning because Hinduism was not founded as a religion. The name "Hindu" is given by the people outside of the India, especially Greeks and Arabs, to those living in the vicinity of "Sindhu" river. Due linguistic features of those people they called it "Hindu". So, the way of life people living near Sindhu river were following is called "Hinduism"⁵. It originated in India. It has no single founder but it develops and grows from hundreds of years and it is continuing yet. Hinduism becomes the foundation stone for

three prominent religions of the world i.e. Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. It is largely based on the preachings of Vedas.



Hinduism comprises of different religious sects like Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism⁶. In daily life, normally all hindus believe and follow all three sects collectively, by worshipping Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, and Maa Shakti.

Swastika and Aum are the main symbols of Hinduism. The saffron is the sacred colour of this religion and saffron colour flag is the normally used in all religious activities. There are number of sacred books of Hinduism like Vedas, Upanishadas, Puranas, Bhagvadgita, Ramayana and Mahabharata⁷. Most of the Hindu scriptures are written in Sanskrit language. Sanskrit is considered to be the mother of all the languages. Hindus strongly advocate vegetarianism. Most of them do not eat non vegetarian food especially on auspicious days. Food is considered as god and therefore it is highly revered. Wasting food is considered as a sin.

Hindu Philosophy

Hinduism is very much scientific in nature. When we study the basic fundamentals of Hinduism, it is very much associated with the Law of Conservation of energy. Law of Conservation of energy is a science law which states that “Energy can neither be created nor destroyed. Only one form of energy can be transformed into other. The sum of all the energies in the universe remains the same.”

In the same way, according to Hinduism, man is mortal but the soul is immortal and it follows the continuous cycle of birth and rebirth. The soul is neither created nor destroyed but it changes bodies as a living person changes his/her clothes. Human body is perishable. So, the thing which we call death is actually transformation of soul from one body to another as energy changes from one form to the other form. This cycle of birth and rebirths continues endlessly. So the ultimate goal of a Hindu life is to attain salvation (also called as Moksha) i.e. freedom from

the cycle of birth and rebirth⁸. One can attain salvation when soul merged with the supreme spirit called “Brahma” who is eternal, genderless, omnipotent, and omniscient. Everything originates from that Brahma and ultimately merges into it.

Development of Hinduism

Hinduism has passed through various phases with time and accordingly various sects of Hindu religion developed during the course of action. It can be seen through flow chart, set in chronological order. “Phases are as follows” Personification of Natural powers: In the initial stage man did not have knowledge about geographical phenomena. He didn’t know about rain, flood, draught, seasons, lightening, thundering etc. He was afraid of excess rain and lack of rain. He was frightened even at the sound of thundering⁹. He didn’t have any clue as to why all these things are happening. Moreover, he couldn’t control them. So he personified these natural powers. During that time Early Vedic and Later Vedic religion developed. If we see the gods of that time they are Sun God, Moon God, Indra (as rain god), Varun (as water god), Agni god (fire) etc. He not only worshipped them but offered gifts to them. Here Brahman (the priest community) acted as a mediator between common man and god. But during later Vedic period, man started getting knowledge. He knew the geographical reasons. And due to ill practices in the social system new form of Non Brahmanical religion developed.

Development of Non Brahmanical religion: Due to so many controversies in the Vedic religion, with so much ill practices common man suffered a lot. Rigorous and expensive “Karamkands” at every stage of life from birth to death penalized the common man. At that time new Non Brahmanical religion developed. They too had the same philosophy, they also talked about getting rid from cycle of rebirth and attain salvation (nirvana), but their path was entirely different from the earlier

one. That was not expensive and common man could understand that easily. They proposed the policy of middle path. Buddhism and Jainism were the main religion. Both of them developed almost at same time.

Rejuvenation of Brahmanical religion: After the nirvana of Gautam Buddha (founder of Buddhism) and Mahavir Jain (24th tirthankar of Jainism), these religion couldn't go long. Due to own controversies and flaws and defect both religion loses its charm rapidly in India. Also Buddhism continuously grewed in other countries. This is the period of rejuvenation of Brahmanical religion. It is also called as Pauranic religion (related to Purans). Now three sects were developed i.e. Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism. It believes in trinity of god i.e. Bramha (the creator), Vishnu the (preserver) and Mahesh or Shiva (the destroyer)⁶.

Important facts about Hinduism

i. Hinduism is termed as oldest known religion of this world and Rigveda is oldest literature of this universe⁹. ii. Vedas came into existence around 5000 years ago and it was preserved by the process of reciting and memorizing all the verses and hymns. Through teacher-disciple practice it passes from one generation to other⁹. iii. Manu is considered as the first law maker and Manu Smriti as the first book of law in the world⁹. iv. The tradition of marriage was propounded by Hinduism¹⁰. v. Hinduism is the source of three great religion of world i.e. Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism¹⁰. vi. Sanskrit is considered as the oldest known language of mankind, infact it is called as the mother of other language⁹. vii. Status of Teacher (or Guru) is more than God itself and parents. viii. Food is also considered as god and therefore it is highly revered. ix. Ayurveda, Accupuncture, Accupressure, Meditation, Yoga, Sankhya Shastra, Palmistry, Cosmology, Astrology, Geometry, Martial Art etc. originated in India and it is the best gift of Hinduism given to whole mankind. Today everybody is recognizing the benefits of these practices¹⁰. x. Numeric Zero (0) and decimal system was given by India and modern sciences especially astronomy is largely based on this¹⁰. xi. Followers of Hinduism are the second most tortured community in the world after Jews. xii. Hinduism believes in trinity of god i.e. Bramha (the creator), Vishnu the (preserver) and Mahesh or Shiva (the destroyer). But still Brahma is not worshipped individually as like Vishnu and Shiva due to mythological story associated to his offence towards females. This reveals that Hinduism is bold enough to penalize every perpetrator whosoever he/she may be. It also proves that Hindu mythology is not just a fairy tale but it is revolution in itself as no culture/ religion would abandon its own god from worship⁹.

Rationale behind the development of Hindu Practices

Offering Water to the Sun in the morning: The warm infrared rays of the sun are useful in the treatment of neuralgia, neuritis, arthritis, and sinusitis. Warmth also helps bring healthful,

natural body oils to the surface of the skin, keeping it smooth and protected. However, if the Sun is very bright, we might get Sunburst or sunburned skin which is caused by UV rays and this (UV) radiation can also cause damage to DNA. Therefore, to get the positive effects from the rays, it is advisable in the morning, when the rays are very gentle¹¹.

Fasting: Fasting is the course of action where we do not eat anything for half day, one day or more. Fasting is used as a treatment in Naturopathy as well as Ayurveda. According to ancient Hinduism tradition, one should fast once in a week with remaining empty stomach until afternoon. One is allowed to drink water until that time. In the afternoon one should have fruit juice or one or two fruits. This privilege is given because remaining empty stomach for long time can increase acidity and lower blood sugar and blood pressure. In addition to that some people need to do hard labor throughout the day. In such situation, it is very hard to remain empty stomach for the whole day. Some people even fall sick and faint at times if they do not eat anything throughout the day¹². One should break the fast in the evening after sunset. Timing for fast is from sunrise to sunset or else 12 a.m. to 12 a.m. next night i.e. 24 hours. In the bodies of fasting people, epinephrine and cortisone hormones mix into the bloodstream more easily. These hormones have effects also on cancerous cells. They serve as a shield against cancer; that is, they prevent the growth of cancer cells. Indeed, the body of a fasting person is in maintenance mode. The fat that surrounds internal organs melts away. The body becomes invigorated and gathers physical strength with an increased level of resistance to diabetes as well as stomach, kidney, heart, and liver disease.

Emphasis on Vegetarian Food: It is scientifically proven fact that meat eaters have more probability to have a Vitamin B12 deficiency than vegetarians. This is because of the bad quality of meat, and because the body has to use the entire vitamin which are already in the body present, to digest the meat¹². Eating non vegetarian food is not allowed on the day of fasting as it is hard to digest. If one eat non veg on the day of fasting, it is useless to fast. Plus, killing someone on the day when you are doing fast for God is bad.

Early Morning Wake up: India is often called as land of villages. Hinduism is closely associated with rural civilization. Early morning wake up is one of the main practices usually performed especially on auspicious occasion. In earlier time when there is lack of fire and electricity, it is not possible to work after sunset. So there is enough time for rest. When first morning ray fall on earth (called as Brahma Muhrat) they wake up. So that daylight can be more effectively utilized. In this way geographical factor play an important role behind this. Moreover it is scientifically proved that physiologically early to bed and early to wake up is good for health¹³.

Practice of Karma Philosophy: Hinduism advocates Karma philosophy. For this reeligious scriptures define four

purusharthas that are as follows; Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha. These are as much relevant as per economic, physiological as well as logical view. Here Dharma doesn't simple means religion or law but it actually means virtue, morality, justice, decency and righteousness. Man has to carry out his duty towards family and society and above all duty towards the humanity. So, he has to comply with Dharma while living in society by respecting the laws of society and doing the good things. Artha means wealth or the possessions related to earning money. This mean that Hinduism advocates not only acquisition of health but it also understands the importance of money in a person's life. To live life happily man needs money but this money should be acquired by honest methods only. If there is a clash between Dharma and Artha, Dharma should be given more concern than Artha. Kama means pleasure or enjoyment, especially "sexual pleasure." The word Kama here also means the happiness and delight we derive from cultural pursuits, sports, and other creative activities which help us enjoy the life. People know Hinduism for spirituality but Hinduism is also a very practical religion. It honestly appreciate that sexual pleasure is one of the highest and purest pleasures that God had given to man. No doubt sex is an important part of human's life and we should accept it wholeheartedly. It is the basic impulse through which we procreate and preserve the human race. The Moksha means salvation i.e. liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Hinduism believes in reincarnation or rebirth. Our today is the result of our past life Karma and what we would be in the next life would be the result of what we do in the present life. Our soul thus gets trapped in the cycle of birth and rebirth. Therefore, Moksha is necessary to liberate the soul from this phase. Moksha is the ultimate goal of Hindu's life¹⁴. Hinduism not only tells the aims of life but also tells how to accomplish them. A Hindu's life is therefore divided in four stages or Ashrams to achieve these aims.

Ashram system: Human life is divided into four ashrams as per Hinduism. Average human life is estimated to be 100 years and it is divided into four equal parts of 25 years. These four ashrams are; Brahmcharya Ashram (upto age of 25 years), Grihastha Ashram (26-50 years age), Vanprastha Ashram (51-75 years) and Sanyasa Ashram (76-100 years or till death). These divisions of Ashram are very much scientific and practical from Anthropological to physiological, from economic to spiritual view.

Varna/Caste system: The society is divided into four different class/ varna/ caste i.e. Brahman (the teacher), Kshatriya (the protector), Vaishya (the merchant), and Shudra (the labour). Analogically, the Brahman is the brain, Kshatriya the arms, Vaishya the stomach, and Shudra the legs in society. However it is said that it is against the natural law but at that point of time it was right. No one disparage Shudras, one cannot imagine a body without legs¹⁴.

Daily Bath/Holy Bath: To have bath daily is also good practice practiced by every Hindu. It is the process of purification. It is

also influenced by geographical factor. Because climatic condition allow to have bath daily. Moreover there is enough water in the form of river in this area. So Holy Bath is also associated with most of the festivals of Hindu. But such condition is not necessary for other religion. Such as Muslim purifies them just by small amount of water. As this religion is originated in arid region and there is scarcity of water.

Effects of conducting Yagna: Many researchers have conducted experiments to see the impact of yagnas on environment and they found it tremendous. It helps in purifying the environment. Virus and disease present in the environment get burnt. Moreover person performing Yagna also get benefitted as it clears the path of nadis which tend to get blocked by fat turned into cholesterol¹⁵.

No same Gotra Marriage: If the parents are closely related, the probability of both having inherited the same Recessive Gene is increased and as a result the probability of the children showing the recessive trait is increased as well as the risk of Recessive Gene Disorder becomes high¹².

Plant and worship Tulsi and adding it to water and food: Tulsi is a very good medicinal plant. Scientific evidences suggest that it is hepato-protective, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, cardio-protective, adaptogenic, antidiabetic, anti-carcinogenic, neuro-protective, radioprotective, mosquito repellent etc¹².

Application of Sindoor or Vermillion: Almost every married hindu women applies sindoor in their hair parting. This tradition is followed since ages. There are scientific rationales behind this exercise. The parting line of a woman's hair where sindoor is applied, there lies the most important spot, the spiritual center called Brahma-randhra, an aperture in the crown of head. This astral aperture is very sensitive, said to be the gateway to the absolute extending from perineum to the crown of the head. The practice of applying sindoor in the hair parting is followed only after marriage because as soon as the wedding knot is tied, the free spirited girl all of a sudden transformed into a responsible/ mature wife and she has to take care of everybody present in her new family¹⁶. Thus, under such circumstances and responsibilities she sometimes gets pressurize. When sindoor is applied in the hair-parting, mercury present in it, act as a medicine because it is known for removing stress and strain and keeps the brain alert and active. It helps in cooling her and resulting in providing mental peace to her. Hence vermilion having mercury in it works as a therapeutic medicine to deal with the stress and anxiety of new life by keeping her mind cool, composed and poised.

Use of Hindu calendar: Internationally we are following the Gregorian calendar now a days. It is based on sun. If we compare the gregorian calendar with the hindu calendar (generally referred as the Panchang), it is found that the Hindu calendar is much more scientific, technical and logical in nature. While the former one is based on the Solar variation and consider the earth's revolution around the sun, the latter is based on the moon's

revolution around the earth, where each month takes 28 days. To compensate for the loss of days an extra month called as Adhik Mass (mass means month), is added after every 30 months. This doesn't mean that Hindu Calender does not take into solar consideration; rather it is a combination of both solar and lunar assumption. The months are based on lunar variations, while the seasons are governed by the sun. A important example of a solar festival is that January 13-14 is celebrated as Pongal (in Tamil Nadu), Makar Sakranti (in North India) and Lohri (in Punjab). All of these are the bearer of the news that sun is entering into Makar rashi, or sun is moving towards northern hemisphere. Although the date is supposed to be somewhere between December 20th and 23rd but due to earth's tilt, it has kept sliding over the years. It is amazing to know that in about 1000 years later Makar Sankranti will be celebrated in month of May⁸.

Medicinal quality of Herbs: Health science re-invented the benefits of many Herbs like ginger, garlic, coriander, cloves etc. Turmeric has been part of our cooking since ago. It is used both as a spice, medicine as well as for natural colouring. Ayurveda cuisine refers to the use of turmeric in its dishes, and that practice has been passed down the generations. It is also a common custom to apply turmeric paste on bride and groom face and bodies before marriage in the traditional Hindu ceremony¹⁷. These herbs have medicinal quality and it is found that Hindus have been using them for thousands of years¹².

Lighting lamps during Diwali (Kartik month): Kartik season is essentially winter where the chill winds supersede sun's heat. Without warmth in the atmosphere, germs and viruses multiply tremendously. Lighting lamps with sesame seeds is found to rectify accumulation of germs in the atmosphere. It is also found that inhaling the peculiar smell that emits from the lamp clears the path of nadis (finer nerves) which tend to get blocked by fat turned into cholesterol⁸.

Conclusion

Thus we can conclude that certainly there is some rationale and logical approach behind different Hindu practices. The logic may be supported or influenced by different heterogeneous factors and reasons like Geographical, Historical, Sociological, Physiological, Scientific etc. As **George Lindbeck** (a theologian), says that religion does not refer to belief in "God" or a transcendent absolute, but rather to "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought ... it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments."²

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