Hindu Belief System

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Abstract
Hinduism is the world's oldest religion, according to many scholars, with roots and customs dating back more than 4,000 years. Today, with about 900 million followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. Roughly 95 percent of the world's Hindus live in India. Because the religion has no specific founder, it's difficult to trace its origins and history. Hinduism is unique in that it's not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies. In this paper author trie to discuss about the various belief in Hinduism.

I.   Introduction

Dharma is considered as the base of Hindu culture. It is difficult to define Dharma in a single sentence. Dharma can be duty, the right path, the one which is acceptable and useful to mankind etc. and as such, since the term is pregnant with meaning, it cannot be translated but to be adapted. Dharma is universal - speak the truth (satyamvada), non-violence is the best Dharma (Ahimsā paramo dharmaḥ) etc. are meant for universal application rather than individual or religious application. In fact, the path that is to be strictly followed by Hindus is called Sanātana dharma (the eternal or immutable Dharma), which means the path in question has no beginning or end. The opposite of Dharma is Adharma. The bottom line of Hindu culture is that Dharma fetches Puṇyam (opposite of Pāpam / or sin) whereas Adharma causes Pāpam (sin). Puṇyam would help in attaining Svarga / heaven) while Pāpam leads one to Naraka (hell).

Objective
The objectives of this paper is to discuss about the various belief in Hinduism

Methodology
 This study is descriptive in nature the investigator has made an attempt to study the various relevant books/Journals/internet for the information regarding the different belief of Hinduism.

Veda
Veda (a mass of knowledge), which is divided into four, ivz. Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda (by Vedavyāsa) is said to be the origin of Dharma (Vedodharmamūlam - Gautamasmṛti, 1-1). Consequently Adharma also has got its origin in Veda only. Veda is not authored by human beings (Apauruṣeya) but had emanated from Brahman, that is the very cause of the universe (Bṛhadāraṇyakopanisat, 2-4-10). Therefore, in Veda, there is no room for human errors. Also there is the implication that all the Vedas were available at a single point of time.

Puruṣārthas
According to Vaidika Dharma (Sanātana Dharma) there are four Puruṣārthas (goals or purposes of life), viz. Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. Dharma is the behaviour ordained by Śruti (Veda) and its ancillaries such as Smṛti (Dharma - śāstram), Itihāsa (epic), Purāṇa etc. Kāma is related to sex and family life. Artha is things that are related to money and wealth. Both Kāma and Artha are acceptable only if they are associated with Dharma. Mokṣa literally means 'relief' (from worldly bindings) it also means arresting the cycle of birth and death or merging Jīvātmā (individual soul) with Paramātmā (the universal soul).

Dichotomy of Veda
Veda, following the subject matter, can be put under two headings. The first part, called Mantrabrāhmaṇabhāga, deals with the performance of Yāgas (sacrifices), that are useful in reaching Swarga (heaven) whereas the second part called Upaniṣat (Āraṇyakam included) is useful in attaining Mokṣa thru Jānam (cognition). In other words, the former deals with Karma (rites) and the latter with Jānam (cognition).

Karma

By performing Karmas ordained by Veda, such as Yāga, one would reach Svarga and after enjoying the comforts there for some time, that is commensurate with the amount of Puṇyaone acquired, returns to earth (Kṣīnepuṇyamartyalokamviśanti - Bhagavadgītā, 9-21).

Mokṣa

On the other hand, the one who achieved Jānam, would attain Mokṣa, by which his Jīvātmā would merge with Paramātmā and consequently he would be out of the cycle of birth and death.

Theory of Karma

It is just like the Newton's third law of motion - every action would have an equal and opposite reaction. Hindu culture firmly stands on the law / theory of Karma - the effect of Karma, both good and bad, i.e. Puṇyam and Pāpam, would have to be faced by a person until it is exhausted.

nābhuktamkṣīyate karma janmakoṭiśatairapi|

avaśyamanubhoktavyamkṛtam karma śubhāśubham||

There is another view point - one's Karmas can be destroyed by Jānam -

jānāgniḥsarvakarmāṇibhasmasātkurutetathā (Bhagavadgīta, 4-37).

Mokṣa

Bhakti and Karma are useful in attaining J□ānam, thru Cittaśuddhi (cleansing of mind) while J□ānam leads to Mokṣa, which J□ānam leads to Mokṣa, which literally means 'relief' (from wordly bindings).

Bhakti

By worshipping God with devotion, one can cleanse his mind (Manas), which leads to attaining Jānam and consequently Mokṣa. So Bhakti is an indirect means of attaining Mokṣa. Without Jānam there cannot be Mokṣa (Jānādevatukaivalyam). Unlike Karma and Jānam, Bhakti is easy to follow even by a common man (mokṣasādhana sāmagryāmbhaktirevagarīyasī - Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṁkarācārya).

Monotheism - Polytheism

Ṛgveda (1-16-46) clearly says - there is only one god but scholars refer to it by different names (ekam sat viprābahudhāvadanti). There is only one God called 'Brahman / Parabrahman / Paramātmā, who is the very cause of the universe, is one and only one and it is worshipped in different forms and with different names - Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gāyatrī, Savitā etc. Brahma / Brahman (is neuter gender, the creator is Brahmā, in masculine gender) does not have any form and eternal (immutable) and also referred by names such as Sat, Cit, Ānanda, Īśvara, Sākshī, Antaryāmī etc.

Upādānakāraṇam and Nimittakāraṇam

Brahman is called the Upādānakāraṇam of the universe. It means unlike any other cause such as clay, which exhausts after making a pot, Brahman would manifest in so many forms, but still does not exhaust. So Upādānam is a term that cannot be translated just like some other terms such as - Dharma, Puṇya, Yoga, Karma etc.

A cause, which, without losing its nature, appears in many different forms, just like gold appears in the form of different ornaments but does not lose its originality, is called Upādānakāraṇam. An Upādānakāraṇam may not be capable of changing into an effect without the help of another cause, called Nimittakāraṇam, Gold, by itself, cannot turn into any ornament but requires a goldsmith, who is called Nimittakāraṇam. Brahman is both Upādānakāraṇam and Nimittakāraṇam of the universe. Upaniṣadic sentences such as - idamsarvamyadayamātmā (Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat, 2-4-6), brahmaivedamsarvam (Muṇḍakopaniṣat, 2-2-11), sarvamkhalivdam brahma (chāndogyopaniṣat, 3-11-1) etc. vouch to the fact that the entire universe is nothing but Brahman only.

Saguṇopāsanā and Nirguṇopāsanā

Such a Brahman is called Nirguṇa brahman, i.e. the one without any properties, such as form color, smell etc. And the worship of such a Brahman is called Nirguṇopāsanā. This kind of worship is considered to be comparatively difficult.

On the other hand, worship of Brahman in different forms such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gāyatri, Āditya etc. is called Saguṇopāsanā, i.e. worship of Brahman having some form, gender etc.Most of the people prefer this worship as it is easy to concentrate if the God has got some

form including idol. The same is called Pratīkopāsanā (Brahmasūtraśāṅkarabhāṣyam, 4-1- 4). Even Bhagavadgīta advocates this concept of Brahman being the very cause of the universe-vāsudevaḥsarvamiti (Bh.Gīta 7-19). Kṣetrajam cāpimāmviddhisarva kṣetreṣubhārata (ibid 13-2), samamsarveṣubhūteṣutiṣṭhantamparameśvaram (ibid 13-27). Here the terms Vāsudeva, Parameśvara etc. refer to Brahman only).

Advaitam

The thesis that Jīvātmā is not different from Paramātmā is called Advaitam (non-dualism) and Śaṁkarācārya had authored Bhāṣyas (sholium) on a number of seminal works such as Upaniṣats, Brahmasūtras (Vedāntadarśanam) and Bhagavadgīta, simply to establish the theory of Advaitam. Sadevasomyaidamagraāsit, ekamevādvitīyam (Chāndogyopaniṣat, 6-2-1), ātmāvāidamekaevāgraāsīt, nānyatki☐canamiṣat (Aitareyopaniṣat, 1-1-1) etc. - scores of such Upaniṣadic sentences can be quoted in support of Advaitam. Even today it is Advaitam that is followed by many people.

Viśiṣṭādvaitam

On the other hand, Rāmanujācārya propounded and advocated Viśiṣṭādvaitam, wherein Advaitam (non-dualism) coupled with Dvaitam (dualism) is accepted as the thesis and the Upaniṣadic sentences, which are quoted in support of Advaitam are interpreted in such a way that they are suitable to Viśiṣṭādvaitam.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, Brahman itself manifests into various objects and as such it is Advaita, whereas, since Brahman is seen in many forms, there is difference between Brahman and the objects. Therefore, there is non-difference (Abheda / Advaitam) and difference (Bheda) and this is the thesis of Rāmānujācārya. They also hold that Brahman is nothing but Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu) and he is with Lakṣmī or to put it simply Brahman is with form and properties and as such the concept is called Viṣiṣṭādvaitam (Viśiṣṭa) means 'associated with'.

Dvaitam

Madhvācārya or Ānandatīrtha propounded and expounded Dvaitam (dualism) - Jīvātmā and Paramātmā are different. According to this school Paramātmā is nothing but Viṣṇu only and he is associated with wife, Lakṣmi.

JagatMithyā

There is conspicuous difference between Advaitam on one side and the rest on the other -according to Advaita, the perceptible universe is mithyā (myth) or false and Brahman only is satyam (real) - 'brahma satyamjagatmithyā' asserts Śamkarācārya in Vedāntaḍiṇḍima.

Māyā

Brahman has got a capacity called 'Māyā', which is useful in exhibiting itself in many forms. The Māyāśakti is useful in making the beings face their Karma (nemesis), both good and bad. In other words, Jagat (universe) is nothing but a false form of Brahman. Sat (real) is the real form of Brahman whereas Asat (non-real) is the non-real form of Brahman. On the other hand, supporters of Viśiṣṭādvaitam as well as Dvaitam vehemently oppose the theory of Jaganmithyātvam (falsehood of the universe) and assert that universe (Jagat) is as real as Brahman. One more main difference between Advaitam and the other two schools is that there can be Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gāyatri etc. and one may worship any God as per Advaitam whereas the Viśiṣṭādvaitam and Dvaitam hold that Viṣṇu , associated with Lakṣmi only , is acceptable. During the course of time there emerged different extreme sub-schools like Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism etc. which caused chaos in the society due to mutual hatred and insult.

Karma (actions / activities / rites)
Four kinds of Karmas are mentioned in Veda –

a.   Nityakarma
Certain Karmas, such as Sandhyāvandanam (worship of Sun during twilight), Agnihotram (worship of Fire) etc. ordained by Veda should be performed daily at a particular time as per the prescribed procedure. Pūrvamīmāmsā (a Darśanam or system that discusses issues related to the earlier parts of Veda, i.e. Karmas) days that there will be Pratyavāya (sin) of such Karmas are not performed.

b.   Naimittikakarma
Nimitta means a cause. Ābdikam (yearly death ceremony) is performed if someone dies. Tarpaṇam (holy water) is offered to fathers of three generations, mother, her mother-in-law and latter's mother-in-law , who died.

Gṛhapraveśa (house-warming ceremony) is performed while occupying a newly constructed house. All such Karmas are called Naimittikakarmas.

c.   Kāmyakarmas
Any Karma performed with a desire in mind is called a Kāmyakarma - Vivāha (marriage) is for children. Jyotiṣṭomayāga (a sacrifice called Jyotiṣṭoma (Tāṇḍyabrāhmaṇam, 16-3-3) is performed for Svarga (heaven).

d.   Pratiṣiddhakarma
One should not consume Surā (alcohol) (Kāṭhakasamhitā, 12-12), one should not spit in waters nor should one bathe in the nude (yajurāraṇyakam, 1-112) - such are the Karmas that restrict one from doing something. Veda ordains - 'one should not hurt any being' (māhiṁsyātsarvābhūtāni) and at the same time it also says - 'an animal dedicated to Agni and Vāyu (Fire and Air) should be sacrificed (agnīṣomīyampaśumālabheta). In such cases it is decided that since Veda itself ordained the sacrifice, it does not fall under the restriction imposed earlier.

Karma and Caste system
Bṛhadāraṇyakapaniṣat explains as to how the four fold Varṇavyavasthā (caste system - the word 'caste' is from the a Spansih word 'custa' - group) had started - the society consists of four Varṇas - Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. At the beginning of creation, there was only one Brāhmaṇa, who was called 'Brahma' by Veda. Since, Brāhmaṇa was alone and as such does not have the capacity to perform a Karma and subsequently   protect   the   same,   Kṣatriya   was   created   (brahma vāidamagraāsītekamevatadekamsannavyabhavattacchreyorūpamatyasṛjatakṣatram (Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat, 1-4-11). Indra, Varuṇa, Rudra etc. are Kṣatriyadevatas. Thus also, the Brāhmaṇa could not perform Karma for want of wealth. So there was a need to create Vaiśyajāti (sanaivavyabhavat, saviśamasṛjata (Bṛ. 1-4-12). Aṣṭavasus, Ekādaśarudras, Dvādaśādityas etc. Gaṇas (groups) are Vaiśyadevatas. Then also the Brāhmaṇa was not able to perform the Karma as there was nobody to offer poṣaṇa (nourishing) and therefore the Śūdrajāti was created. Śūdra is called Pūṣā, i.e. the one who nourishes / supports adidamkiṁca (Bṛ. 1-4-13).

Dharma
Even after the creation, Brāhmaṇa was not able to perform Karma as there was no regulator of the four Varṇas. So Dharma for each Varṇa was created (sanaivavyabhavat tat śreyorūpamatyasṛjatadharmam (Bṛ. 1-4-14). Nothing is above Dharma and everybody is bounded by his Dharma.The Karma of Brāhmaṇa is with Agni (fire) and he (as Purohita) helps perform the Karmas. The one who is friendly with everybody is a Brāhmaṇa (maitrobrāhmaṇaucyate; Manusmṛti, 2-87).

Harmony among Varṇas
All the four Varṇas are equal and all should live together like brothers (ajyeṣṭhāsoakanisthāsaḥetesambhrātaraḥ, Ṛgveda 5-60-5) - says Ṛgveda.

Āśramas and Karmas
Four Āśramas (stages of life) are prescribed in Veda (Jābālopaniṣat - 4) –

a.   Brahmacaryam
After Upanayanam, the boy should leave the parents approach the Ācārya, and do service and learn Vidyā. One may become a Saṁnyāsī after Brahmacaryam (Jābālopaniṣat - 4).

b.   Gārhasthyam
Having completed his education, the Brahmacārī should get permission from Ācārya and get married. One may go for Saṁnyāsa from Gārhasthyam (Jābālopaniṣat - 4).

c.   Vānaprastham
Having noticed children to his children (i e grand children) and noticing his son preaching samskāras to his children, one should retire to a forest (with or without wife) for leading a spiritual life. One may go for Saṁnyāsa after Vānaprastha (Jābālopaniṣat - 4).

d.   Saṁnyāsa
Giving up Kāmyakarmas is called Saṁnyāsa (Bhagavadgītā 18-2). A Saṁnyāsī has to perform Nityakarmas and Naimittikakaramas. The top most Saṁnyāsī, called Paramahamsa does not perform any Karma.

Bhakti, Karma and Jānam

Some people think that these three are independent tools for attaining Mokṣa. But the fact is that it is Jānam that is the only tool by which Mokṣa can be attained (Śāmkarabhaṣyam, Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣat, 1-4-7). Bhakti, in fact embedded in Karma and J□ānam. A Jānī would have a kind of Bhakti, so that he can perceive Vāsudeva, both in (himself) and out (Bhagavadgīta, 7-11). Such a Bhakti would help one attain 'Cittaśuddhi' (cleansing of mind) and such a mind is qualified to achieve Jānam that consequently leads to Mokṣa. Karmas (all) are useful in generating Vividiṣā (a desire to know Brahman).Karma causes another birth. Sacitakarma is the Karma that is accrued thru different incarnations. Prārabdhakarma is the portion of Sa□citakarma that has started giving results in this life. If one gets J□ānam or Brahmajānam then all his Sacitakarma would be burned (Bhagavadgīta, 4-19, 37).

Rather, the Prārabdhakarma has to be faced. So, one (like Śaṁkarācārya) may try for Jānam irrespective of his Āśrama. There is no any prescribed path of procedure for a Saṁnyāsī.

Jānam for all

Vaidikakarmas can be performed by people belonging to the first three Varṇas, viz. Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya and Vaiśya. As far as J□ānam is concerned, a person belonging to any Varṇa is eligible, provided he possess the four qualifications mentioned in Vedānta (Brahmasūtraśāṅkarabhāṣyam, Adhyāsabhāṣyam).

Vidura, Dharmavyādha are not Dvijas (first three Varṇas). Sulabhā, Maitreyī and Gārgī are ladies. All these people embraced Jānam for Mokṣa (striyovaiśyāstathāśūdrāḥte' piyāntiparāmgatim, Bhagavadgīta, 9-32).

Dānam and Dakṣiṇā

Dānam generally means a 'gift or donation or grant or contribution'. Rather, in Indian cultural context it means more - a donation given to a Vipra (a Brāhamaṇa who learnt Veda and without vices) in order to get rid of sins. Therefore, in such a sense, the term Dānam cannot be translated but should be adapted. A Dānam can be given by a person in the name of another person, such as by a son in the name of a dead mother or father. Water, in the case of all Dānas, should be poured on donee's hand before handing over the item (Āpastambadharmasūtram, 2-4-9). Agnipurāṇam (209) clearly explains the procedure to be followed while offering a Dāna. The Dāna entails Dakṣiṇā (an amount of money). Taittirīyāraṇyakam (2-13) says that the Yajamāna (performer of sacrifice or rite), towards the end of the rite offers 'something' (as per his capacity) and the same is called Dakṣiṇā (tatoyatki□ca dadātisādakṣiṇā).

In the same text (2-15) explains the result of Dakṣiṇā - the sins are transferred to Dakṣiṇā to Brāhmaṇa (receiver) to the Veda (learnt by Brāhmaṇa) and the Brāhmaṇa has to get rid of the sins thru recitation (Svādhyāya) of Veda (dakṣiṇāmbrāhmaṇenabrāhmaṇasya

chandobhiḥchandasāmsvādhyāyenaapahatapāpmā). The following ten Dānas (popular as Daśadānāni) have to be offered when someone died (Jātūkarṇya in Madanaratna) -cow, land, sesame, gold, ghee (clarified butter), clothes, paddy/cereals, jaggery, silver and salt.

Dāna in general

In Kaliyuga, Dāna, compared to Tapas, Jānam and Yaja, is the best (Manusmṛti, 1-86).

The Bhagavadgīta (17/20-22) divides Dānas into Sāttvika, Rājasa and Tāmasa and defines them. Devala divides the Dānas into Nitya, Naimittika and Kāmya. Vasiṣṭhasmṛti (29-20) and other Smṛtis name three Dānas, viz. cow, land and education, as Atidānāni and declare that the last one, i.e. Vidyādānam, as the best of all. Some other Smṛtis named Mahādānas. 'Iṣṭāpūrta' is a term very popularly seen across Vedic texts as well as Epics and Purāṇas and Smṛtis and it is a kind of Dāna (Taittirīyasamhita, 5-7-7-1; Atharvaveda, 2-12-4).

Agnihotram (worship of fire), Tapas (sustaining pairs such as comfort and misery etc. and performing Vratas). Satyam (speaking the truth only), Vedapālanā (preserving Vedas), Atithyam (hospitality) and Vaiśvadeva (a rite) - are called Iṣṭa (Aparārka).

Dedication of deep wells, oblong large wells, tanks and temples, distribution of food and maintaining public gardens - are called Pūrtam (Aparāka). 'A rich man not donating anything should be drowned in water after tying a large stone around his neck' - rules Mahābhāratam (Udyogaparva, 33-60).

Devala says that one should not reveal the Dāna without proper cause. Bhṛgu (Manusmṛti, 11-9) and Bṛhaspati declare that if a rich person who donates to strangers, while his own people live a life of misery, it is pseudo-Dharma and just like a honey laced prism. Detailed discussions and norms are available across many Smṛtis and other works.

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