
CONCEPTS OF HINDUISM

GOOD AND EVIL

In reality there is no such different things as good and evil. They are mere conventional terms. The same thing we call bad, and again another time, we call it good, according to the way we make use of it. A lamplight, because of it burning, we are able to see and do various things in the dark. Again you put a finger in it, the same lamp burns in another mode of usage. Similarly, with virtue and vice. Broadly speaking, the proper use of any of the facilities of our mind and body is termed virtue, and improper application or waste is called vice."

Swami Vivekananda

Is Hinduism Polytheistic or Monotheistic?

Hindus worship many gods but believe all of them to be manifestations of a single godhead. It is said that the impersonal Godhead (brahman or Sivam) becomes accessible to all by manifesting as a personal god (ishta devatai), a household god (graha devatai), a family god (kula devatai), a village god (grama devatai), a cosmic god (param ishvara- Parameshwaran) and as the soul (atma).

Some gods are enshrined as idols in temples, adored through elaborate rituals and petitioned by devotees. Human beings through history have formulated many different names and forms for the Divine or Eternal. Just as we have many names and forms for other things, whether it is foods, or types of art, so too, in religion a similar great diversity has been created.

The Western world has prided itself in monotheism, the idea that there is only One God as the highest truth. Western religions have said that only the names and forms, which refer to this One God, are valid but those, which appear to worship another God, or a multiplicity of divinities, must be false. They have restricted the names and forms they use in religious worship, and insist that only one set be true and correct and others are wrong or unholy.

As a universal formulation Hinduism accepts all formulations of Truth. According to the universal view there is only One Reality, but it cannot be limited to a particular name or form. Though Truth is One it is also Universal. It is an inclusive, not an exclusive Oneness. This Truth could be called God but which transcends all names. The different Gods and Goddesses of Hinduism represent various functions of this One Supreme Divinity, and are not separate Gods. Having many names for something is not necessarily a sign of ignorance of its real nature. On the contrary, it indicates

an intimate knowledge of it. For example, Eskimos have forty-eight different names for snow in their language because they know snow intimately in its different variations, not because they are ignorant of the fact that all snow is only one. The many different deities of Hinduism reflect such an intimate realisation of the Divine on various levels.

Sruti, the unwritten portion of the Vedas tells us this about the Almighty –
**"OM Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaad Poornamudachyate;
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornamevaavashisyate".**

Translated, this verse means

**"That is Whole. This is Whole. What has come out of the Whole is also Whole;
When the Whole is taken out of the Whole, the Whole still remains Whole".**

The purport is that the infinite cannot be measured. God is Infinite. If you divide or subtract anything from the infinite what remains is still infinite. You can definitely represent the Infinite in different ways. The Infinite also manifests in billions of ways. The truth is - Hinduism is monotheistic (Believes in One God). However, Hinduism believes not only in One God, but also in His Supreme Personality. This personality of the Supreme Being is manifested in different forms around us to help mankind visualise Him. This belief of Hinduism is often confused with polytheism.

To illustrate this point - We all observe the unending processes of birth, existence and death, which seem to be continually taking place around us. We constantly witness these processes and are yet ignorant of them, living as we do in the comfort of our illusory lives. The seers of ancient Hinduism gave form and shape to the truth - Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma creates, Vishnu sustains, and Shiva destroys or consummates everything in the universe.

That the Supreme can be worshipped in any form is a unique concept in Hinduism. It should be clear from the above that Hinduism worships multiple forms of the one God. Such worship is truly a tribute to His greatness.

Why do Hindus worship god in different forms?

Though Hinduism accepts of several gods or deities, it accepts only one God, the Supreme. Out of these deities, Indra and others are actually ordinary souls like us, who rose to those positions in the cosmic scheme as a result of the extra ordinary religious merit they had acquired in the previous cycle of creation. It should be noted here that these deities who rule over certain aspects of the powers of nature, are like

the officers of the government, who exercise their powers delegated to them by the Head of the State. Once their merit gets exhausted, they have got to vacate their positions and try for Moksha or liberation.

Next, we take up the case of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. They are not three independent and separate deities, but three different aspects of the same Supreme God, while engaged in the processes of creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe, in that order. It is similar to the role played by the same person as the father at home, as the boss in the office and as a customer in a shop. Other deities also should be considered in the same light, as different aspects of the Supreme God, manifesting themselves for specific purposes.

The powers of these deities, which are inseparable from them even as the power of fire to burn cannot be separated from it, have been conceived of as their consorts and called Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati (or Sakti).

This does not amount to saying that all these deities are imaginary creations. All of them, without exception, are different modes and aspects of Paramatman or God, even as all sweets made of sugar are sugar itself. Since it is difficult for common people like us to worship God as He is, the ancient Rishis have given these forms and their names after receiving them from God Himself through Tapas or austerities. Hence, the realization that one gets through meditation on these is identical with God experience.

Now a word about the incongruities found in some of the Puranas. Since they have evolved over several centuries, it is difficult to separate the earlier original from the later additions. It is reasonable to surmise that quite a few of the latter might have been interpolations introduced during the periods of conflicts among the various cults and sects, to establish the superiority of one over the other. Hence the incongruities deserve to be ignored.

No Hindu believes ultimately that there are several Gods. They believe there is only one power controlling the universe. In order for the human mind to focus and understand, Hinduism allows us to worship that power through whatever form or image. Once the devotion gets stronger, the mind sees beyond that image and idol to realise that supreme power.

When a child is born we bless him with an 'official' name. Mother has a 'pet' name for him; the friends have a 'nick' name. It goes on, and he ends up having so many names, like, Anna, thamby, son, daddy, boss, grandpa and many, many more, and yet

See page 32

ஒரு குறள்

திருவள்ளுவர் சிறந்த தமிழ்ப் புலவர். அவர் திருக்குறள் என்னும் நீதி நூலை இயற்றினார். திருக்குறள் 1330 குறள்களைக் கொண்டது. அதில்

கற்க கசடறக் கற்பவை கற்ற பின் நிற்க அதற்குத் தக

என்பது ஒரு குறள். ஒருவர் கற்கத் தகுந்த நூல்களைக் குறும் நீங்கக் கற்க வேண்டும். கற்ற பின்பு கற்றதற்குத் தகுந்தபடி வாழவேண்டும் என்பதே இதன் பொருள். நாமும் திருக்குறளைப் படித்து பயன் பெறலாமாம்.

பிரதீபா சிறீரங்கநாதன்
மேற்கு இலண்டன் தமிழ்ப்பாடசாலை.

நான் படித்த பாடசாலை

நான் மேற்கு இலண்டன் தமிழ் பாடசாலையில் படித்தேன்.

அங்கு நல்ல ஆசிரியர்களும், நற்குணம் உள்ள மாணவர்களும் படிக்கின்றார்கள்.

அங்கு கல்வி கற்பிக்கும் ஆசிரியர்கள் எங்களுடன் நல்ல நண்பர்களாக இருப்பார்கள்.

நான் விரும்பி படித்த பாடம் நடனம், தமிழ், சங்கீதம்.

எனக்கு ரொம்ப பிடித்த ஆசிரியர் திரு. அரங்க முருகையன் அவர்கள்

கஸ்தூரி. யோ
வாகு 15



சிந்தியா முரளிதரன்
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Contd from page 27

he is still the same one. Like wise the God can be called by different names by different people, but he is the 'ONE'.

The best explanation of God as being both with and without form came from a recent Hindu prophet called Ramakrishna (1836-1886). He explained why there is no contradiction in thinking of God as being both with and without form. He gave the example of ice and water. It is the same thing with and without shape. He says that the love of the devotee freezes the formless God into the form of his choice. Hence any approach to God is fine. Any form of God we decide to worship is fine. He said God is both with and without form and much more.

(Compiled by: Mr. Kokiladevan)