

# Analysis of the basic concepts of Hinduism, Spirituality and Hindu Philosophy

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## Abstract

*There are widespread misconceptions about the faith and the philosophy of Hinduism. This paper discusses the basic concepts of the nature (Prakriti) and the attributes of Hindu gods and goddesses, and the philosophy of Vedas, Upanishads, and Vedanta for a clear understanding of Hinduism.*

*It is found that the Vedanta philosophy deals with differing relationships between Atman (Self) and Brahman (universal Self). Advaita Vedanta teaches the non-dualism of Atman and Brahman, whereas Vishishtadvaita Vedanta finds Atman and Brahman both different and non-different, while Dvaita Vedanta finds dualism of Atman and Brahman as its essence. Research has found that Hinduism is both monotheistic and henotheistic but not polytheistic. 'Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti' – call Him by whatever name you like, worship Him in any form you like, it all goes to that one Brahman, the Supreme Godhead. The paper discusses the spiritual meaning of Moksha, and the nature of conditioned and liberated souls in the context of Vedanta philosophy and Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Research has concluded that the core beliefs of Hinduism are (i) the Truth is eternal (ii) the Brahman is the Truth and the Supreme Godhead, (iii) the Vedas are the ultimate authority (iv) the purpose of life is to attain self-realisation (v) individual souls are immortal and (vi) the goal of individual soul is liberation from life-death cycles (Moksha).*

*The methodology applied in this paper is a review study of Hindu civilization, basic concepts of Hinduism and Hindu philosophy from Vedic scriptures, journal articles, and spiritual lectures on Hinduism. Special emphasis is given on the teachings of Vedanta and Srimad Bhagavad Gita. The findings of the study are analyzed in reference to Bhagavad Gita and presented in this paper. Author recommends that further research should be done on Hinduism and Hindu philosophy to derive a general unified code of conduct for all Hindus irrespective of castes, sects, and Hindu traditions so as to make Hinduism more coherent, and easy to practice worldwide.*

## Keywords

Atman,  
Brahman,  
Bhagavad Gita,  
Moksha,  
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## 1.0 Hindu Civilization

Ancient Hindu civilization has a profound impact on the development of spiritual values such as, tolerance, honesty, non-violence, justice, peace, and harmony in this modern world. It has been found that two major cultural streams contributed to the development of Hindu civilization. The first one was the most sophisticated culture of the ancient world, known as Indus Valley Civilization (3300 BCE -1400 BCE)

(Muesse, 2018) (Fig. 1). It is so named because many of its settlements were located along the great Indus River. At its height, the Indus Valley Civilization covered most of the western part of India, Pakistan, and parts of Afghanistan. The second disputed one is the *Indo-Aryan* culture assumed to be migrated to Indian valley from Central Asia in 1600 BCE and finally overtaken the Indus Valley culture by 1400 BCE.



Figure 1: Location of the ancient Indus-Valley Civilization

There is a debatable contemporary theory which suggests that *Aryans* are actually indigenous to India and not came from Central Asia (Muesse, 2018). The *Indo-Aryans* actually migrated from India to other parts of the world, which is known as 'Out of India theory'. According to this hypothesis, *Aryan* culture was an outgrowth of Indus Valley Civilization. For some researchers, it is a religious nationalistic view on the Indian history and is considered as an alternative to the established migration model (Witzel, 2000). Reflecting traditional Indian views based on the *Puranic* chronology, indigenists propose much older date for the Vedic Period (Deshpande, 1979) and argue that the Indus Valley Civilization was a Vedic Civilization (Tilak, 1893) and has an unbroken link with much earlier period of *Sindhu-Saraswati* tradition (7000 to 8000 BCE) (Fosse, 2005) (Fig. 2). In the *Rig Veda*, *mantras* used the sacred Indian rivers such as *Sindhu*, *Kaveri*, *Saraswati*, *Yamuna*, and *Ganga* confirm that Hindu Vedic civilization had been in India more than ten thousand years ago. The significance of this theory is that the foundation of Hindu philosophy is a product of ancient Indian *Vedic* culture. Recently, 'Out of India theory' has been revived by the Hindu nationalists and Indian scholars which is a subject of great debate in the development of modern

Hinduism in India and worldwide. This plays a strong support and a significant role in Hindutva politics in India and elsewhere.



Figure 2: Triveni Sangam (Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers) near Prayagraj (Allahabad)

The next phase which may be called preclassical period (1400 BCE - 100 CE) includes the development of the Hindu philosophy of *Upanishads* (800 BCE - 400 BCE), and the teachings of *Brahmins* (Hinduism), Mahavira (Jainism), and Gautam Buddha (Buddhism), and then came the great classical period of *Indic* civilization, known as Hindu-Buddhist *Indic* civilization, lasting until 1000 CE, which contains the development of modern Hinduism and the ups and downs of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Figure 3 shows the spreading of Hinduism from India to South-East Asia. Then, from 1000 CE to modern period till date, Indian sub-continent is experiencing the formation of a Hindu-Muslim civilization (Smart, 1993).

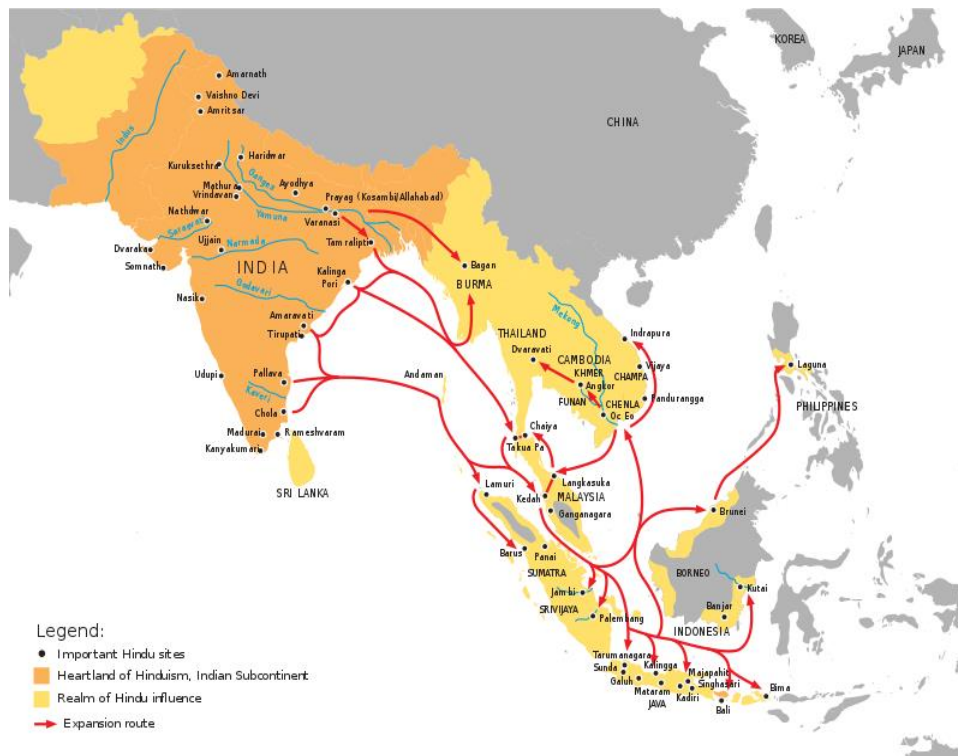


Figure 3: Hinduism from India to South-East Asia

## 2. Philosophy of Modern Hinduism

Hinduism can be misleading because of its great variety of customs, forms of worship, many gods and goddesses, myths, philosophies, types of rituals, styles of art and music contained loosely within the bounds of the religion. Hinduism is highly individualistic and encourages its practitioners to structure their beliefs and spiritual lives in the ways that best suit their individual needs and temperaments. Modern Hinduism is like the trunk of a mighty tree. It is as if many Hinduisms had merged into one. Hinduism is also known as *Sanatana Dharma*, which is eternal, means everlasting. It is believed that all people by birth are Hindus since Hindus believe in Supreme God known as *Brahmman* who lives in all entities as *Paramatman* (Gita, Ch IX, 4).

Research has found (Howley, 1998; Muesse, 2018; Nityanand, 2008; Smart, 1993) that there is a widespread misconception that Hindus believe in many gods and goddesses. This is actually not true. Hindus believe in one God. There is no doubt of that everlasting conception. This is the basic principle of Hinduism. At the same time, Hindus do believe in many forms of gods and goddesses with some specific attributes of the supreme God. This is due to the inherent philosophy in Hinduism that there are multiple paths to reaching the same Supreme God. '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*' – there is one God, though endless are His names and endless are His aspects in which He may be regarded. The unmanifested supreme God has no particular shape. Since He is all powerful, He can take any shape. The shapes of many gods are nothing but the imaginary manifested forms of the supreme God. Hinduism is strictly a monotheistic religion, misunderstood as a polytheistic religion even by most of the Hindus themselves. One of the problems to understand the basic concepts of Hinduism is due to various names of the same supreme God, such as *Brahmman*, Supreme Reality, *Bhagavan*, *Parameshwar*, Supreme Godhead,

*Paramatman*, Lord Krishna, Lore Vishnu, Lord Shiva, *Ishwara* and so on. Author is in the opinion that all these words can be replaced by one English word 'God' for the supreme Godhead and 'gods and goddesses' for all other minor divine entities. There can be one Sanskrit word '*Bhagavan*' for the supreme God. All the other divine entities have their respective names, such as goddess Laxmi, God Ganesh and so on. This can make easier to understand the concept of supreme God and the other divine entities in Hinduism.

Hindus, in general worship different forms of gods and goddesses in different names for certain material benefits, but these are temporary in nature (Gita, Ch. VII, 20-23). In this modern world, Hinduism is the only major religion (*dharma*), that is, well known for its diversity in rituals, beliefs and philosophical thoughts that suits persons of any background. One can choose his/her own deities to worship since worshipping to any deities can lead to the same supreme God in Hinduism. It is found in *Vedas* and other Hindu scriptures that ancient Hindu sages/*rishis* with their divine power had visualized many gods and goddesses with some specific power or attributes similar to portfolios of ministers in a modern democratic Government. For example, the goddess Laxmi is for wealth; the goddess Durga/Kali is for power (*Shakti*), and the god Ganesh is for removing obstacles and so on.

The supreme Lord Vishnu also descends from His divine abode to this world as *Avatar* to remove injustice and unrighteous activities (*adharma*) from this world; re-establish justice and righteous rules (*dharma*), and to protect innocent people (Gita, Ch IV, 7-8). According to Hindu scriptures, so far twelve *avatars* incarnated to this earth. Some of the well-known *avatars* are Shri Rama and Shri Krishna. Hinduism is now one of the major religions in the world and is spreading faster than ever due to its inherent spiritual values namely *satya* (truthfulness), *daya* (compassion), *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *asteya* (nonstealing), and for its unique cultural & philosophical diversity.

### 3.0 Who are Hindus?

Hindus are the people who believe in one God known as *Brahmman* and at the same time believe in many gods and goddesses, who are the different forms of one God. Hindus are usually born in Hindu families. Now-a-days, *Arya Samaj*, *Bharat Sevashram Sangh*, ISKCON and many other progressive Hindu Associations do convert people from other religions to Hinduism assuming that they return to their ancestor's religion (*dharma*) since Hindus believe that all are Hindus by birth since God lives in all entities as *Paramatman* (Gita, Ch IX, 4). Almost all Hindus believe in 'OM' (the universal sacred sound of *Brahmman*), Hindu Trinity (*Brahmma* - the Creator, *Vishnu* - the Preserver and *Shiva* - the Destroyer or Transformer), and life after death based on action (*karma*). Hindus, in general, respect and try to follow the teachings of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, narrated by Lord Krishna Himself, the supreme Godhead.

The core beliefs of Hindus are (i) Truth is eternal (ii) *Brahmman* is the Truth and Reality (supreme Godhead), (iii) the *Vedas* are the ultimate authority (iv) Purpose of life is to attain self-realisation (v) individual souls are immortal (vi) the goal of individual soul is liberation from life-death cycles (*Moksha*) (Prabhavananda, 2003).

### 4.0 Hindu Trinity

The concept of all pervading, attributeless, unmanifested, imperishable, immortal, and unborn supreme power known as *Brahmman* goes far beyond the understanding of common people. In ancient period, through meditation with utmost devotion and sacrifices, sages and *rishis* used to attain divine knowledge and vision and thus realized some specific divine powers with forms and attributes to suit the temperamental requirements of the human mind. One of the realized powers was '*Bhagavan Vishnu*' the conceived form of the inconceivable supreme '*Brahmman*.' In that process the '*Nirguna Brahmman*' became '*Saguna Bhagavan Vishnu*.' There are three modes of human nature: passion (*rajah*), goodness (*sattva*) and ignorance (*tamah*) (Gita, Ch. XIV, 5-10). Passion is for creation, goodness for maintenance, and ignorance

for destruction. Then, the concept of *Bhagavan Vishnu* was transformed into three names, such as *Brahmma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* depending on the particular aspect in which *Bhagavan Vishnu* was conceived of at a given time to represent the same God as *Brahmma* - the Creator (in charge of the mode of passion); *Vishnu* - the Preserver (in charge of the mode of goodness), and *Shiva* - the Destroyer or Transformer (in charge of the mode of ignorance).

### 5.0 The Symbol 'OM'

The *Pranava* or 'OM' is the universally accepted symbol of Hinduism. The sound of 'OM' is considered sacred not only in Hinduism, but in Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism as well (Rao, 1993). Actually, 'OM (A+U =O, M)' comprises three independent letters A, U, M, each of which has its own meaning and significance. The letter 'A' represents the beginning (*Adimatwa- Brahmma*), 'U' represents progress or manifestation (*utkarsha-Vishnu*), and 'M' represents dissolution or transformation (*Miti- laya - Shiva*). Hence the word 'OM' represents that Power which is responsible for creation, preservation/development, and dissolution of this universe, namely, the supreme God Himself. It represents the union of the mind, body, and the spirit/soul.



According to Vedic philosophy, at the dawn of creation, from emptiness first emerged a vibration, a sound, a syllable consisting of three letters -A, U, M. The 'AUM' is considered an original primal sound that vibrates all through in the immediate created universe. The *Yajur Veda* urges us to realize *Brahmman* through repeating and remembering 'AUM' or 'OM'. The *Kathopanishad* declares that 'OM' is *Parabrahmman* Itself. The *Mundakopanishad* advises the spiritual aspirants to meditate on the unity of the *Atman* (self) with *Brahmman* (*Paramatman*) by reciting 'OM' (Nityanand, 2008). Shri Krishna declared in the Gita that He is the 'OM' (Gita, Ch. VII, 8) and all religious rites start with the repetition of 'OM'. He also told Arjuna that he who leaves his body chanting 'OM' at the time of death, reaches the '*param gati*' means attains the Supreme (Gita, Ch. VIII, 13).

Fig. 4 The symbol AUM.

### 6.0 The Significance of Navaratri

The worship of goddesses in different forms can be found in many civilizations around the world (Muesse, 2018; Rosenberg, 1994). Though it is found that Hindus do worship different gods and goddesses since the Indus Valley civilization, but it is noticed in the northeast India (Bengal, Assam, and Tripura) and Bangladesh in particular, where there are some especial goddesses being worshipped by Hindus as diverse manifestations of one Goddess, representing the power or *Shakti* of the Supreme God (*Brahmman*) (Muesse, 2018). For example, they worship the Goddess Durga (also known as Parvati), who is also known as Goddess Kali in different form, representing the supreme female power of the nature (*Prakriti/Earth*) - the mother of all human beings. She provides fertility to all females; motherly love and affection, and rescues all from evil forces. Another two very popular female goddesses are 'Laxmi' -the goddess of wealth, and Saraswati (also known as Gayatri)- the goddess of knowledge.

The great festival '*Navaratri*' is celebrated every year all over India for nine days. During the first three days, Goddess Durga is worshipped to remove impurities from the mind. Then, for another three days, Goddess Laxmi is worshipped to cultivate the noble values and qualities in the mind. In the last three days, Goddess Saraswati is worshipped to gain material knowledge for decent living and spiritual

knowledge of the Self for salvation. When all these three attributes are gained subjectively, then Hindus celebrate 'Vijayadashami' – the true victory on the tenth day of the festival.

### 7.0 Varieties of Hinduism

It would be a monumental task to describe the varieties of Hinduism starting from *Vedic* period to date. For page limitation, the research of this paper excludes the basic variations being developed in Hinduism during the Middle Ages (around 500 AD to 1500 AD) especially in four main selective zones in India, namely *Vaishnavism* from Tamil Nadu, the *Lingayats* from south central India, *Kashmiri Shaivism* from the far Northwest and the *Caitanya Vaishnavism* in the Northeast of India (Smart, 1993).

### 8.0 Hinduism and ISKCON

In 1965, in New York, USA, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupad founded the *Hare Krishna* movement, known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), based on monotheistic strain of Hinduism. The followers of ISKCON worship Krishna as the Supreme *Brahmman* or *Parameshwara*. ISKCON always maintains its code of conduct at all places very strictly so that its core faith in Lord Krishna as Supreme Godhead does not get compromised because of cultural diversity around the world. ISKCON encourages its disciples to learn Sanskrit, chant *mantras*, be vegetarian and perform devotional services to Lord Krishna for realizing Krishna Consciousness.

Soon after Swami Prabhupad founded the movement ISKCON, it became one of the most successful public voices of Hinduism in the western world due to Prabhupad's two strategies: public engagement and the distribution of *Bhagavad Gita* and other Krishna consciousness related Hindu scriptures to people of all faiths. *Hare Krishna* (ISKCON) devotees did not retreat into temples with their devotions like other Hindu organizations. Instead, they began their missionary activities, such as chanting '*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna ...*' *Mahamantra* and other devotional songs using Indian instruments on street corners, in public parks, on wide city streets, at the airports and at college and university campuses in cities/towns around the world. They are very visible in their signature Indic colourful clothing. Second, the ISKCON followers distribute books free on the streets. General people find ISKCON - directed Hindu philosophy much simpler to understand and practice. The ISKCON devotees believe that through chanting '*Hare Krishna Mahamantra*' and singing devotional songs every day; performing devotional services to Krishna; controlling mind by Yoga & meditation, and pursuing charitable works on a regular basis, one can achieve Krishna Consciousness and attain *Moksha* or salvation from life-death-life cycles forever.

It is believed that five hundred years ago, Lord *Chatanya Mahaprabhu* appeared in this Kali Yug, as an *Avatar* of Lord Krishna and introduced the *Vaishnava* culture of *sankirtana* (*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna ...*) as a devotional song/jap dedicated to Lord Krishna for purifying the soul and for attaining the Krishna Consciousness. He predicted that in the near future this *Mahamantra* would be chanted and broadcast by Krishna devotees from town to town and village to village all over the world (Prabhupad, 1998).

### 9.0 Teachings of Vedas

*Veda* means knowledge. Every Hindu believes that the knowledge of *Vedas* is eternal. What is known as Hinduism or Hindu philosophy is in reality a misnomer. It should actually be called the *Vedic* religion, or *Sanatan Dharma* – mother of all religions, which is universally accepted religion, and its philosophy is known as *Vedanta*. Unlike other scriptures such as Bible or Quran where divine inspiration or delivery of the sacred message came through an angel or a chosen person or a messenger from God, the *Vedas* are said to be *Apaurusheya* or divine in their origin (Prabhavananda, 2003). The *Vedas* were not compiled originally by any human. They themselves are an Authority being the knowledge of the Supreme *Brahmman*. That means *Vedic* knowledge originated from the spiritual master, the Supreme *Brahmman*. 'Yo

*vedebhyh akhilam jagat nirmane ...'*, means God created the whole universe out of the knowledge of the *Vedas*. That means *Vedic* knowledge comes even before the creation of the universe.

According to *Vedic* philosophy, *Brahmma* (the creator in the Hindu Trinity) first received the knowledge contained in the *Vedas* from the Supreme and from *Brahmma* the knowledge descended to the *Rishis*, who are born in the beginning of each cycle. They are, therefore, the special messengers of God for the transmission of knowledge of Him through the cycles of creations. Another name for the *Vedas* is *Shruti*. The *Shruti* refers to the knowledge, which is acquired by hearing.

Krishna *Dvaipayana*, usually known as *Vyasa* or *Veda Vyasa* was a legendary sage who is also reverend as an *Avatar* of Lord *Vishnu* (Sullivan, 1999). To make *Vedas* easier to understand, *Veda Vyasa* compiled and arranged the *mantras* of *Vedas* and divided them into four parts, namely the *Rig*, the *Sama*, the *Yajur* and the *Atharva*. Of them, the *Rigveda* is the oldest. It has hymns in praise of gods. It has 10 *mandalas* or sections and 10552 *mantras* or hymns. The *Yajurveda* has 40 sections and 1975 *mantras*: mostly dealing with *yajna*. The *Samaveda* has 1875 *mantras*, mostly derived from the *Rigveda*. They are very melodious and are relatively easy to understand. The *Atharvaveda* has 20 sections and 5987 *mantras*, many of which were derived from the *Rigveda*. The *Vedas* have generally three parts and each part deals with: (1) details of how to perform a *yajna*, (2) knowledge which explains *Atma* and *Paramatma* and related aspects, and (3) devotion which gives details as to how to worship the God.

*Veda Vyasa* is also the author of *Mahabharata*, the largest Hindu epic of all times, where *Bhagvad Gita* is a part. His other important writings are *Brahmma Sutras*, *Eighteen Puranas*, and *twelve Skandas of Srimad Bhagvata*. According to Hindu Philosophy, through sacrificial rites and selfless works, our mind and soul can be purified, and we can become fit to inquire and learn the highest knowledge of *Brahmman*. The *Vedas* are divided into two parts: *Karma Kanda* (devoted to work) and *Jnana Kanda* (devoted to knowledge). Again, the *Karma Kanda* is divided into three parts: (i) the *mantras* or hymns addressed in adoration of *Brahmman* or gods in His various aspects and a collection of these hymns is called *Samhita* (ii) the *Brahmmanas*, written in prose describing the sacrificial rites and religious duties (iii) the *Aranyakas* or forest treatises which replaces the external rituals with symbolic meditation.

According to *Vedic* teachings, man's life has four stages. The first is *Brahmacharya* or student life when a boy lives with his teacher and receives religious and other training to control mind and acquires chastity, truthfulness, faith, and self-surrender. The next step is to lead a *Garhasthya* or married life. In this stage, man engages in duty bound works for a decent family life, practice ritualistic sacrifices while he is strictly forbidden to indulge in extra-marital affairs with other women. The third stage is *Vanaprastha* or retirement from the daily work for earning livelihood when ritualism is not mandatory but to follow the *Aranyakas* or symbolic meditation. The fourth stage is the life of renunciation in which he is bound neither by work nor desire but is dedicated wholly to acquiring the knowledge of *Brahmman*.

In *Vedas*, polytheism is present, and hymns are addressed to many gods, yet each of these gods at times sublimate into one universal God of the universe. Thus, polytheism merges into monotheistic view of a supreme God. Professor Max Muller explains this belief as Henotheism (Modak, 1995). That means, most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic, which means Hindus worship a single God known as *Brahmman*, but still believes in other gods and goddesses. Max Muller believed that *Vedic* culture should be studied to provide the key to the development of pagan European religions and of religious belief in general. That proves the significance of the ancient *Vedic* knowledge and culture to attaining religious and spiritual knowledge for the mankind worldwide.

Hindus believe that there are multiple paths to reaching the supreme God. '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*' - Swami Vivekananda gave a grand explanation of this saying, "They call It Indra, Agni, Varuna: That Truth is One, sages call It by various names". Shri Ramakrishna, in this modern age echoes this truth of universality when he said, "There is but One God, though endless are His names and endless the



aspects in which He may be regarded. As many religions, so many paths to reach the same Truth. It is to be realized by being or becoming It and the process of that realisation is worship and meditation upon It in Its personal aspect". Swami Vivekananda declares, "Personal God is the reading of the Impersonal by the human mind. A Hindu when is taught to love and worship God, he loves and worships Him as Personal-Impersonal".

### 10.0 Gayatri Mantra - A Universal Prayer

It is believed that Goddess Gayatri is the mother of all *Vedas*. She is the embodiment of all goddesses. Our very breath is Gayatri; our faith in existence is Gayatri. 'Dhimahi' means meditation. We pray to Her to inspire us with good intelligence. 'Dhiyo Yonah Prachodayat' - May the Sun illumines our intellects in the same way He sheds His effulgence. Chanting of the Gayatri Mantra purifies the mind and confers devotion, detachment, and wisdom. The Gayatri Mantra: 'Om Bhur Bhuvah Swah; Tat-savitur Varenyam; Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi; Dhiyo Yonah Prochodayat.' The literal meanings are: 'We meditate on that most adored Supreme Lord, the Creator, whose effulgence (divine light) illuminates all realms - physical, mental and spiritual. May this divine illumine our intellects. For maximum benefit, one should chant this *mantra* every day three times early in the morning. It can be chanted at any given time of the day as well.

### 11.0 Mahamrityunjaya Mantra

*Mahamrityunjaya Mantra*, also known as *Triyambaka Mantra*, is a verse from Rig Veda and is considered to be the most powerful *Shiva Mantra*. It gives longevity, wards off calamities, removes fear and negative thoughts, and prevents untimely death. One should chant this *Mantra* daily in the morning before starting works.

### 12.0 The Philosophy of the Upanishads

*Upanishads* are the last parts of the *Vedas*. The word *Upanishad* means literally 'sitting near devotedly', (*upa* means near, *ni* means devotedly, *shad* means sitting). Adi Shankaracarya (788 -822 A.D), the founder of *Advaita Vedanta* and Ramanujacarya (1017-1187), the founder of the qualified monistic school of *Vedanta* also known as *Vishishtadvaita* (qualified nonduality) are the main contributors of the *Vedanta* philosophy (Wendy, 1990). The *Vedanta* is the most recent part of the *Vedas*. The philosopher and theologian Adi Shankaracharya (Menon, 1976) is believed to be an *Avatar* of Lord Shiva, whose work on *Advaita Vedanta* (Comans, 2000) (Sharma, 1962) has a very strong impact on Hindu religion and philosophy.

The spiritual knowledge of *Upanishads* mainly deals with meditation and ontology which is a branch of philosophy that deals with the existence of life, being, becoming and reality. The other part of *Vedas* deals with *mantras*, benedictions, rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices. The main objective of the *Upanishads* is to deal with the identity of *Atman* (soul/self) and *Brahmman* (ultimate reality), or the inner self and the cosmic self. These two words '*Brahmman* and '*Atman*' are the two pillars on which rest the whole edifice of Indian philosophy. It is considered that amongst all the *Vedic* literatures, the *Upanishads* are the basic foundation or spiritual core of Hinduism.

*Brahmman* and *Atman*, and indeed, the whole teachings of *Upanishads* are revealed with a fair degree of completeness in the great sayings - the *Mahavakyas* (Prabhavananda, 2003), such as '*Tat tvam asi*' (Thou art That); '*Aham Brahmarshmi*' (I am *Brahmman*); '*Soham asmi*' (I am He). These *Mahavakyas* were used during the time of initiation of the students into monkhood at the school of Sankharacariya. The disciple must then meditate on the *Mahavakya* and realize *Brahmman* as identical with the inner Self.

The *Vedanta* philosophy narrates differing relationships between *Atman* (Self) and *Brahmman* (universal Self). The *Advaita Vedanta* teaches the non-dualism of *Atman* and *Brahmman* (Deutsch, 1988),

whereas the *Vishishtadvaita Vedanta* finds *Atman* and *Brahmman* are both different and non-different, while the *Dvaita Vedanta* finds dualism of *Atman* and *Brahmman* as its essence.

The *Advaita Vedanta*, literally means non-duality, which is a school of Hindu philosophy and spiritual experience (Deutsch, 1988). The term *Advaita* refers to the idea that *Brahmman* alone being pure conscienceness, is ultimately real, and the phenomenal transient world is an illusory appearance (*maya*) of *Brahmman* and the true Self. The *Atman*, which is self-illuminous pure awareness, is identical with *Brahmman*. *Jibatman* or individual self is a mere reflection of one *Atman* in a multitude of apparent individual bodies (Indich, 2000). The *Advaita Vedanta* is the oldest extant sub-school of the *Vedanta*, a tradition of interpretation of the *Prasthanatrayi*, that is, the *Upanishads*, the *Brahmma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Advaita Vedanta* emphasizes *Jivanmukhi*, the idea that *Moksha* (liberation) is achievable in this life in contrast to other Indian philosophies that emphasize *videhamuki*, means *Moksha* after death (Sharma, 2007).

### 13.0 The Universal *Atman* (Self)

In all beings exists the Self. 'In the heart of all, whatever there is in the universe, abides the Lord.' declares the *Isa Upanishad*. From the absolute point of view, no difference exists in beings and things; but empirically, with reference to this world, there is difference and diversity between one individual and another. The Self exists equally in all, but all do not exist equally in It (*Gita*, Ch. IX, 4).

*Sat-chid-ananda*, means absolute existence, absolute knowledge, and absolute blessedness, which are not qualities of the Self, but are its essence; that is to say, there is no distinction between them and the Self Itself. The three are one; only when we perceive the one thing in three different aspects. That is the eternal consciousness of the Self, reflecting through the mind of a man. Its differences are all due to differences in the mediums through which it is revealed.

### 14.1 Conditioned Soul

For a conditioned soul (*Jivatma*) our knowledge is not pure. The difference between conditioned soul and liberated soul is that the conditioned soul has four defects. The defects are that conditioned soul makes mistakes; conditioned soul remains under the influence of illusion (*maya*); conditioned soul has the cheating propensity, and uncontrolled desires of the bodily senses.

### 14.2 Liberated Soul (*Moksha*)

According to Hindu philosophy, *Moksha* means freedom or immortality from all living and material bondages, from all imperfections, and from birth and death cycles. It is the state of oneness with the Supreme and is the birthright of every person. The soul in its real nature is free and divine and *moksha* comes from the knowledge of this true Self. Worldly bondage lies in ignorance and freedom, or liberation comes by the knowledge of the Self. *Moksha* is just the recognition of one's divine Self.

*Moksha* can be attained in this life, or it may be attained after death. But, both forms of liberation are recognised in the *Upanishads*. The first one is called *Jivanmukti*, or freedom attained in this life. For a person who has attained Self-knowledge through transcendental consciousness, his vision of the world has changed into the vision of Reality or *Brahmman*. For such a person, delusion has vanished forever. He is free from selfish desires. His only delight is now in God or the Self. The transcendental intuition which has brought him the realisation of his oneness with God gives him also the realisation of the same God in all beings (*Gita*, Ch. VI, 29-31). The second form of liberation is called *Videha Mukti* or freedom after death. In this, the concerned person realizes the transcendental knowledge of the Self and Its identity with *Brahmman* only at the time of death. (*Gita*, Ch. VII, 30).

Attaining *Moksha* means attaining immortality as taught in the *Upanishads* does not imply a continuous existence of that individual after death. Attaining *Moksha* means the realisation of his/her

oneness with God. That implies that the true self merges with the supreme Self or *Paramatman* which is unborn, and undying and hence immortal.

### 15.0 Spiritual Consciousness

Spiritual consciousness relates to the realisation of the truth of *Brahmman* in our own souls. The sages have prescribed three steps, such as hearing (*sravana*), reflection (*manana*) and meditation (*dhyana*). We must first hear of the truth of God and of the *Atman*, and we must hear this truth from one unto whom it has been revealed. Sankharacariya rightly said, "Rare and blessed person is the combination of three: human birth, desire for freedom or liberation and association with a holy man." But, hearing alone is not enough since no true teacher likes a blind acceptance of his teaching. We must reflect in order to gain intellectual conviction of what we have learnt. The study of logic or of science aids us in reflection, and independent philosophical thinking trains the mind, and this mental training must be finally supplemented by meditation.

Our imperfections are caused by ignorance and right knowledge alone can delete this ignorance. These imperfections are immediate experiences, and they cannot, therefore, be removed by mere intellectual awareness of the true Self. Another immediate experience is needed to annihilate the present relative experience of imperfections. This immediate perception of truth of the Self and God is the effect of meditation. The highest form of meditation as stated in the *Upanishads* is concentration upon the truth 'Aham Brahmmaasmi- I am *Brahmman*. This is the Absolute *Brahmman* which is one with our inner Self. *Chandogyopanishad* also says that you are that soul which is *Brahmman*.

The purpose of our life journey should be from self-introspection to self-realisation. Sankaracharya stated, 'the journey is from 'Who am I (*ko aham*)?' to 'So am I (*so aham*).' It leads to the understanding and realizing that there is an over-ruling and all-engrossing power, and I am a part of it. In fact, I am It (*so aham*). I am the *Brahmma*. I am the Supreme.

### 16.0 Teachings of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

The three great books, namely the *Upanishads*, the *Brahmma Sutras* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* are known as the Scriptural Trinity- *Prasthaanatrayam*, the final scriptural authority of Hinduism. Of them, *Gita* is the essence of the *Upanishads*. It is said that when the *Upanishads* are compared to cows, the *Gita* takes the position of their milk. The *Mahabharata*- the greatest Epic of all times is held to be the fifth *Veda*. It can also be said that when the philosophy of the *Gita* is explained and expanded, it becomes the *Mahabharata*. Conversely, if the *Mahabharata* is condensed into philosophy, it becomes the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chidbhavananad, 2015). The *Bhagavad Gita*, the words of Lord Krishna, is a compilation of Arjuna's questions and moral dilemma, and Lord Krishna's spiritual answers that elaborate life's choices and complex concepts of Hindu philosophy.

Quotes from the Buddhist literatures (Upadhyaya, 1998) prior to the first century CE including the *Dharmasutra* texts; the *Brahmma Sutras*, and other contemporary literatures, it is concluded that the *Bhagavad Gita* was composed in the fifth or fourth century BCE by a great saint-Veda Vyasa (Sullivan, 1999). *The Gita* presents a synthesis of the *Sanatan dharma* and the spiritual knowledge for self-realisation. Lord Krishna is an *Avatar*, who is regarded as the human form of unmanifested Supreme *Brahmman*. Lord Krishna in His discourse to Arjuna explains the relationship of *Atman* and *Paramatman*; philosophy behind His creation of all living and non-living entities; nature of *karma* (work); power of *Prakriti* (nature); monotheistic *bhakti* (devotion), and the yogic ideas of *moksha* (Raju, 1992; Easwaran, 2007). The *Gita* synthesizes several competing spiritual paths (*Margs/Yogas*) to achieve Self-realisation. The different paths for each personality are the path of knowledge (*jnana yoga*), the path of devotion (*bhakti yoga*), the path of action (*karma yoga*) and the path of meditation (*raja yoga*).

According to Radhakrishna, quoted in a review by Rabinson (Rabinson, 2006), Lord Krishna's discourse is a comprehensive synthesis that unifies the competing strands of Hindu thoughts, such as *Vedic* rituals, *Upanishadic* wisdom, devotional theism, and philosophical insight. Aurobindo (Aurobindo, 1949) described Gita as a synthesis of various Yogas. Swami Vivekananda interpreted the teachings of Gita stating that, "there is living God in every human being and the devotional services to this living God in everyone without craving for personal rewards is a means to spiritual development and liberation from death-life-death cycles (Nadkarni, 2016).

There are eighteen chapters in Gita. Of them, chapter two is the most important chapter deals with self-realisation or the Yoga of knowledge and Hindu Philosophy. This chapter is an overview of the remaining sixteen chapters of *Bhagavad Gita*. The summary of this chapter includes Hindu faith of rebirth, worldly family life (*samsara*), *Jivatma* in each person (self/soul), *Paramatman* (Universal Supersoul) present in all living entities, different forms of Yogas, the nature of self-knowledge, divinity within (unmanifested Self) and so on. Mahatma Gandhi (Sargeant, 2009) memorized the last nineteen slokas of chapter two, considering them as his companion in his non-violent movement during the Indian liberation movement.

The synthesis in *Bhagavad Gita* addresses the three significant issues in Hinduism for the spiritual liberation and a release from the cycles of rebirth. They are: (1) self-realisation -based renunciation which discusses whether one should renounce a householder lifestyle for a life as an ascetic (*Sannyasi*), (2) Dharma-based family life (*grihastha*), that is, leading a householder life dedicated to one's duty and profession which can be regarded as 'inner renunciation' or 'motiveless action'. (3) Devotion -based theism, which means to lead a householder life devoted to Godhead (Lord Krishna) only.

In Gita, Krishna declares Himself to be one with Supreme *Brahmman* and urges Arjuna to attain to 'His being' by saying, 'Many have attained My status being free from passion, fear, anger and taking refuge in Me and purified by knowledge of Me.' (Gita Ch. IV,10). This is the uniqueness of Hindu Philosophy. This sloka is the centre of all spiritual teachings of Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Here Supreme God Krishna asking Arjuna to attain to His Being' means *Jivatman* can merge with *Paramatman*, thereby, one can declare '*Aham Brahmamashi*- means mySelf is *Brahmman*, provided the person surrenders to Supreme *Brahmman* and remains free from all passions, fear, anger, and other impurities. To make it simpler, Krishna again said to Arjuna, 'In whatever way, people worship Me, in the same way I fulfill their desires.' (Gita Ch. IV,11). In this world, it seems that God is kind to some fortunate people and unkind to others. But actually, it is not. Here, Krishna reaffirmed Arjuna that He blesses people according to their choices and mode of worship. After narrating all margs for Self-realisation, the nature of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, and the three natures of all people, Lord Krishna made a final declaration to Arjuna, 'Relinquishing all dharmas take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.' (Gita Ch. XVIII, 66). Here 'Liberate thee' means your own self would be manifested as My Self; 'Relinquishing all dharmas' means abandoning all actions, righteous and unrighteous (dharma and adharma).

## 17.0 Conclusions

The important findings of this paper can be concluded as:

Ancient Hindu religion is still one of the major religions in the world due to its ever-lasting spiritual values and inherent cultural & philosophical diversity.

*Vedas* and *Vedic* philosophy are the backbones of Hinduism.

Hinduism is both monotheistic and henotheistic but not polytheistic. Henotheism means one God but in many forms. Gita explains this as an unmanifested form of the Supreme God (*Brahmman*) who is worshipped as a manifested form (human form) of Supreme God (Krishna). Gita also narrated that less wise people worship many gods for material benefits, and He only satisfies their desires.

'*Yo vedebhyh akhilam jagat nirmane ...*' means 'God created the whole universe out of the knowledge of the *Vedas*. That means *Vedic* knowledge came even before the creation of the universe.

Hindu Trinity has three Gods, namely *Brahmma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. All three though seems different but they are the same God (*Bhagavan Vishnu*) in three names and forms (manifested) since their functions are different in nature, and it is easier to worship them separately for different material benefits.

'*Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti*' – call Him by whatever name you like, worship Him in any form you like, it all goes to that one *Brahmman*, the Almighty, Ultimate, Infinite, Supreme Godhead.

God created our senses. We experience the external world only and do not see the inner Self. Those wishing to attain self-realisation or *Moksha* (immortality) need to control those outgoing senses and find the Self within.

It needs to be identified in our consciousness that the true Self is one with *Brahmman*. *Katha Upanishad* says, "Know the body to be the chariot, the intellect -the charioteer, the mind - the reins, and the *Atman*-the Lord of the chariot."

He, who has attained the highest wisdom by rising above the differences which exists in the sphere of name and form, perceives only sameness, while others would perceive infinite diversity.

For achieving spiritual consciousness, we must first hear of the truth of God and of the *Atman* from a Guru, who is a living embodiment of the ideal, and learn to reflect in order to gain intellectual conviction of what we learnt and meditate for perception of the truth of the Self and the *Brahmman*.

*Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes on the performance of the duties of life with a mind free from worldly attachment and material gain while remaining surrendered and devoted to God.

The immediate perception of truth of the Self and God is the effect of meditation. The highest form of meditation as stated in the *Upanishads* is concentration upon the truth '*Aham Brahmmaasmi*- I am *Brahmman*. This is the Absolute *Brahmman* which is one with our inner Self.

It is found that ISKCON devotees have been propagating the spiritual message of *Bhagavad Gita* quite efficiently all over the World.

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