

A Study of Hindu Concepts about Gods and Goddess

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Abstract

This Paper focuses on the general study of Hinduism worship which began in ancient India between 2300 B.C and 1500 B.C. It also attempts to analyze main beliefs and practices of Hinduism from a wide range of traditional sources. The objectives of the paper are to explore the historical data relating to Hinduism, to connect all Hindus worship and to explain about belief in Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth, purity, fortune and prosperity). In revealing the account of Hindu, it is relied on the primary sources and the secondary documents, and the methods of narrating the events and linking the historical facts need to be considered. The study presents two results: discovery of the existence of Hinduism worship which belongs to the Aryans; and realization of the base on the Vedas and belief in dharma, karma, and reincarnation. By studying Hindu concept about god and goddess, it is recognized that Hinduism existed as a major world (world's oldest) religion, one fundamental principle of the religion is the idea that people's actions and thoughts directly determine their current life a future lives.

Keywords: Account, Context, Hinduism, Historical Events, Worship Goddess Lakshmi

Introduction

In Myanmar, Hinduism is practiced by 0.5% of the population. Most Hindus in Myanmar are Burmese Indians. Hinduism, along with Buddhism, arrived in Burma during ancient times. Both names of the country are rooted in Hinduism; Burma is the British colonial officials' phonetic equivalent for the first half of Brahma Desha the ancient name of the region. Brahma is part of Hindu trinity, a deity with four heads.

Rakhine Yoma is a significant natural mountainous barrier between Burma and India, and the migration of Hinduism and Buddhism into Burma occurred slowly through Manipur and by South Asian seaborne traders. Hinduism greatly influenced the royal court of Burmese kings in pre-colonial times, as seen in the architecture of cities such as Bagan. Likewise, the Burmese language adopted many words from Sanskrit and Pali many of which relate to religion. While ancient and medieval arrival of ideas and culture fusion transformed Burma over time, it is in 19th and 20th century that over a million Hindu workers were brought in by British colonial government to serve in plantations and mines. Many Hindu gods and goddess are likewise worshipped by many Burmese people, such as Saraswati (known as Thuyathadi in Burmese), the goddess of knowledge, who is often worshipped before examinations. Lakshmi also worshipped by some Burmese people.

Thus, it is recognized that the historical account of Hinduism is important for studying aspects of Hinduism continue in Burma today, even in the majority Buddhist culture.

Data and Methods

The data used in this paper are been mainly collected from the primary sources and the secondary documents in National Library, Library of Department of Historical Research, Universities' Central Library, Library of University of Yangon, Library of History Department (University of Yangon) and Library of History Department (Dagon University). Examining the data collected, the paper is presented by the application of methods of narrating the events

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and linking the historical facts. For further realizations, the necessary explanations and remarks are included in presenting the account.

Findings

It is noted that the History of Hinduism, unlike other religions, Hinduism has one founder but is instead a fusion of various beliefs. Hindus began to emphasize the worship of deities. Hindu practice is characterized especially by temple worship. Constantine Rhodes presents over five hundred elegantly translated Sanskrit verses, including devotional songs, mantras, and ceremonial instructions that devotees use to invoke the god and goddess.

Discussion

The term “Hinduism”¹ is simply modern word for the majority of the diverse religious traditions of India taken as a whole. The historical beginnings of the varied Hindu traditions can be traced to the ancient Aryan migrations into south Asia in the second millennium before our common era. The Coming from central Asia, this large group of nomadic cattle herders crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains and migrated to the Indus valley, and their language and culture blended with that of the indigenous people living in the region. The ritual hymns which they chant, passed down orally for many centuries, are gathered in the Rigveda², the earliest of all religious texts.

The Vedas are a large body of religious texts originating in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism. This collection of sacred verses and hymns was written in Sanskrit. Vedic religion became more and more the preserve of the Brahmin,³ priestly class of early Indian society. The Brahmins gradually elaborated a cult characterized by complex rituals of sacrifice, involved purificatory rules, and increasingly fixed distinctions of birth upon which the later caste system was based.

Caste⁴ was conceived of as the Cosmic Person Himself manifesting as human society. From the head come the Brahmins who are the priests and teachers. From the shoulders and arms come the Kshatriyas- the rulers, warriors and landowners. From the thighs come the Vaisyas-the merchants and traders. From the feet come the Sudras-the artisans, agriculturalists, and laborers. It has to be determined on the basis of character and occupation. The castes were originally not based on race or birth but on innate nature, inclinations and tendencies of the individual concerned, and profession adopted and pursued.

One the popular level, the period after about 500 B.C. is most notable in Indian religious life for two developments. The first was the elaboration of ascetic traditions of inner quest and self realization, such as that of yoga⁵. The second was the rise of devotional worship of specific gods and goddesses who are seen by their worshipers as identical with the Ultimate-in other words, as supreme deities for those who serve them. The latter development was of particular importance for popular religion in India. Thus most Hindus worship one

¹ “Atman”, the belief in soul

² Sanskrit: rgveda, from “praise” and veda “knowledge” is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns.

³ Sanskrit, a varna (class) in Hinduism specializing as priests, teachers and protectors of sacred learning across generations.

⁴ Human society of Hindu

⁵ To unite the human spirit with the God, which require a starting point based in morality.

deity, but they do so in the awareness that faith in other deities can also lead one to the Ultimate.

Hinduism is different than other major religions because there is no single founder but is instead a fusion of various beliefs. It is a complex belief system with an amalgamation of numerous faiths, beliefs and practices. Main Hindu beliefs are the Vedas, Brahman, many gods and goddesses, worship. Hindus believe in the doctrines of samsara (the continuous cycle of life, death, and reincarnation) and Karma⁶ (the universal law of cause and effect). One of the key thoughts of Hinduism is “atman” or the belief in soul.

Hinduism is a religion of many gods. God is always with them gives Hindus great hope and courage. There is no religion in the world which is as colorful and vibrant as Hinduism, with its pantheon of gods and goddesses and the vision of a hierarchical universe, ruled by numerous deities who derive their power and authority. They live in their own spheres, in the company of their associate gods and devotees, and participate in the creation, preservation and destruction of the worlds and beings as part of their obligatory duties. Most of the male and female deities are worshipped not only in their individual aspects but also in their universal aspects. The most popular gods and goddess are Brahma⁷, Vishnu and Shiva, Saraswatin⁸, Lakshmi, Durga⁹, Kali¹⁰, Rama, Krishna¹¹, Hanuman, and their local versions, aspects, emanations, and manifestations. Followers believe there are multiple paths to reaching their god.

Lakshmi is the consort of the god Vishnu. Lakshmi is also called Sri because she is endowed with six auspicious and divine qualities. She is one of the principal deities of Hinduism and the most popular goddesses of Hindu mythology. Lakshmi is known as the goddess of wealth and purity, fortune and prosperity. Lakshmi has also been a goddess of abundance and fortune for Buddhists and was represented on the oldest surviving stupas and cave temples of Buddhism. In the ancient scriptures of India, all women are declared to be embodiments of Lakshmi. The marriage and relationship between Lakshmi and Vishnu as wife and husband is the paradigm for rituals and ceremonies for the bride and groom in Hindu weddings.

Lakshmi is commonly portrayed as a beautiful woman with four arms, standing on a lotus flower. There are usually one or sometime two elephants behind her, anointing her with water. She is often depicted sitting beneath Vishnu, massaging his feet.

Lakshmi is depicted in Indian art as an elegantly dressed, prosperity-showing golden-coloured woman with an owl as her vehicle, signifying the importance of economic activity in maintenance of life, her ability to move, work and prevail in confusing darkness. She typically stands or sits like a yogin on a lotus pedestal and holds lotus in her hand a symbolism for fortune self-knowledge and spiritual liberation. Her iconography shows her with four hands, which represent the four goals of human life considered important to the Hindu way of life: dharma¹², kama¹³, artha¹⁴, and moksha¹⁵.

⁶ The result of a person's actions, major belief in Hinduism.

⁷ Hindu Creator god, supreme in the triad of great Hindu gods.

⁸ The Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom, and learning.

⁹ Worship Principal and popular form of Hindu Goddess, a goddess of war.

¹⁰ The kindest and most loving of all the Hindu goddesses, a great protector.

¹¹ A major deity in Hinduism, the eighth avatar of the god Vishnu, the supreme god.

¹² A major Signifies behaviors, the order that makes life and universe possible, and includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and “right way of living”.

¹³ One of the four proper and necessary goals of human life.

Archaeological discoveries and ancient coins suggest the recognition and reverence for Lakshmi by the 1st millennium BCE. The festivals of Diwali and Sharad Purnima are celebrated in her honor.¹⁶ Lakshmi takes many divine forms, manifests in eight different ways. The eight forms of Ashta-lakshmi, through their individual nature, are believed to fulfill these human necessities and desires.

Aadi-Lakshmi or Primeval Lakshmi, also known as Maha-Lakshmi or The Great Lakshmi. She is regarded as the wife of Lord Vishnu. Aadi-Lakshmi is often depicted living with him at his home in Vaikuntha, or sometimes seen sitting in his lap. Her serving of Lord Narayana is symbolic of her service to the entire universe. Aadi-Lakshmi is portrayed as four-armed, holding a lotus and a white flag in her two hands while the other two are in abhaya mudra, in which the right hand is held upright, and the varada mudra, in which the right palm is held out with the fingers pointing down.

Dhana-Lakshmi means wealth in the form of money or gold. At an intangible level, it may even mean inner strength, willpower, talent, virtues, and character. Thus, the name Dhana-Lakshmi represents this aspect of the human world, and by her divine grace, we can get an abundance of wealth and prosperity. This form of Goddess Lakshmi is portrayed as six-armed, wearing a red sari, and holding in her five hands a discus, a conch, the holy pitcher, bow and arrow, and a lotus, while the sixth arm is in abhaya mudra with gold coins rolling from her palm.¹⁷

“Gesture of fearlessness” is a mudra that is the gesture of reassurance and safety, which dispels fear and accords divine protection and bliss in many Indian religions. The right hand is held upright, and the palm is facing outwards. Varada mudra indicates a gesture by the hand and symbolizes dispensing of boons. For varadamudra, right hand is used. It is held out, with palm uppermost and the fingers pointing downwards.

Hindu practice is characterized especially by temple worship (puja), in which offerings of flowers, food, and the like are brought by the worshipers. Recitations of sacred texts, many of which are vernacular hymns of praise to a particular deity, are another important part of Hindu devotionism. Mantras, or special recitative texts from the Vedas, are also used by many Hindus in their original Sanskrit form. These texts are thought to have extraordinary power.

Hindus worship Lakshmi at home as well as in the temple. Friday is believed to be the most auspicious day for her worship. Lakshmi is particularly worshipped during the festival of Diwali¹⁸. This festival commemorates the epic story. Ramayana is the legend of Lord Rama's battle with the demon Ravana, in which Lakshmi features. In the story of Ramayana, Sita is married to Lord Rama. Hindus believe Sita is an incarnation of Lakshmi. The story tells us that Rama had been cast out of his rightful kingdom, and had gone to live in a forest with his wife and brother. The battle between Rama and the demon Ravana¹⁹ begins when Ravana abducts Sita from the forest. The epic follows the story of Rama defeating the demon, and his

¹⁴ One of the four aims of human life in Indian philosophy, “meaning, sense, goal, purpose or essence” depending on the context.

¹⁵ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara).

¹⁶ Lakshmi – Wikipedia

¹⁷ The 8 Forms of Lakshmi, Hindu Goddess of Wealth

¹⁸ The Hindu festival of lights, usually lasting five days and celebrated during the Hindu Lunisolar month Kartika. Diwali symbolized the spiritual “victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance”.

¹⁹ The mythical multi-headed demon-king of Lanka in Hindu mythology. With ten heads and twenty arms, he famously fought and ultimately lost a series of epic battles against the hero Rama.

eventual return to his kingdom. As the three heroes, Rama, his brother Lakshman²⁰ and Sita returned home, people light candles to guide their way in the dark. In honour of this, on the second day of Diwali people light candles in their homes to guide Lakshmi, in the hope that she will bestow good fortune on their home for the coming year. After worshipping Lakshmi on Diwali, many Hindus gamble and spend profusely, believing that Lakshmi has bestowed good fortune upon them. In addition to this, two days before Diwali, a festival called Dhantares²¹ is celebrated to seek more blessings from her. During this time Hindus buy gold and silver and start new business ventures.

Most of the Hindu deities are depicted as sitting on lotus flower or holding it in hands, lotus flower symbolizes eternity, enlightenment, purity, divine beauty and good fortune. Lotus flower as Padma (pink lotus), kamala (red lotus), Pundarika (white louts) and Utpala (blue lotus). Lotus Flower, is one of the most significant religious symbols in Hinduism. Goddess Lakshmi is usually depicted with a lotus flower. She is usually shown sitting on a lotus flowers and holding it in her hands. In spite of continuously being in water, lotus never gets wet. It grows in smutty swamps or murky water, but never bothers about its dirty surroundings. Thus Lotus flowers symbolizes that ultimate aim of all living beings on this earth, is to perform their karmas (duties) without bothering about the external factors or the results. It is said that Goddess Lakshmi likes lotus flower most. Hence, lotus flower is considered to be one of the most special offerings for Goddess Lakshmi, during Ldkshmi pooja or Diwaili pooja. Lotus flowers also differed as a seat for Goddess Lakshmi during worship.

Conclusion

This paper studies on Hindu concepts about god and goddess. Unlike other religions, Hinduism has no one founder but is instead a fusion of various beliefs. Main Hindu beliefs are the Vedas, Brahman, many gods and goddesses, worship, rebirth or reincarnation, avatar, etc. From this study, it is resulted good knowledge of the Hinduism, along with Buddhism, arrived in Burma during ancient times. Knowing Gods and Goddess are always gives Hindus great hope and courage. Hinduism embraces many religious ideas. One fundamental principle of the religion is the idea that people's actions and thoughts directly determine their current life and future lives.

By studying the Hindu concepts about god and goddess, it can be understood that Hinduism is the world's oldest religion. 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.

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²⁰ The younger brother of Rama

²¹ Friday, Goddess Lakshmi came out from the ocean of milk during the churning of the Sea. Hence, Goddess Lakshmi is worshiped.

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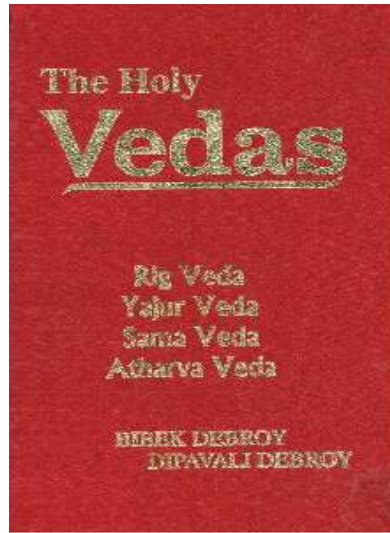
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Aryan Migrations



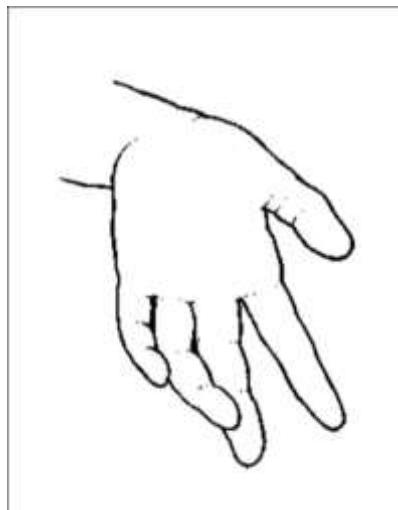
Vedas



Eight forms of Lakshmi



Abhaya Mudra



Varada Mudra



Coin of Lakshmi



Diwali



Lakshmi with Lotus