Abbe Jean-Antoine Dubois was a French-Catholic missionary with the Missions Etrangeres de Paris sent to India in the early seventeen-nineties whose mission-work continued until the early eighteen-twenties. During this time Dubois authored a number of important detailed accounts of the Hindu faith and culture, which were valued by many for their ethnographic knowledge. Once such contemporary proponent of the Abbe Dubois' work was Lord Bentwick. As discussed in the article "Castes of Mind", Nicholas B. Dirks quotes Bentwick, writing that, "in a political point of view, the information which the work of the Abbe Dubois has to impart might be of the greatest benefit in aiding the servants of the Government in conducting themselves more in unison with the customs and prejudices of the natives." (see Dirks 65).

Little information is known about the Abbe's life before his ordination an subsequent missionary work in India, where he was first stationed with the Pondicherry mission in the south of India. Following this the Abbe worked in Mysore aiding the reorganization efforts of the Christian community in the area, (see Dubois 1823:1-2). To better coalesce with the natives, Abbe Jean-Antoine Dubois adopted the diet and clothing tendencies of his Hindu contemporaries, effectively renouncing the European lifestyle of the time. During his time in India many small agricultural communities were said to have been founded by the Abbe Dubois, as well as the introduction of vaccinations as a method of disease prevention, (See Dubois and Beauchamp 1897:19). By eighteen-twenty-three Dubois left India and returned to Paris, where he later became the director of the Missions Etrangeres de Paris (see Dubois and Beauchamp 1897:xxviii).

Of the works authored by Abbe Jean-Antoine Dubois, the most influential of which is Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies, which is divided into three distinct parts, each of which discusses at length a different pillar of both Hindu culture and religion. The first and second sections discuss respectively the 'General View of Society in India, and Especially of the Caste System' and 'The Four States of Brahmanical Life', having a primary focus on cultural and societal implications of the Hindu tradition. While the third section aptly titled 'Religion' is concerned with the actual spiritual beliefs of practitioners of the Hindu tradition. Each of the three larger sections is further divided into chapters concerned with specific topics falling within the overarching theme of the section.

The first five chapters of the first section discuss at length the caste
system found at the epicentre of Hindu culture. The Abbe suggests that the ubiquity of the caste system in Hindu culture is the sole reason the Hindus did not regress into total barbarism which had been observed by other cultures occupying the ‘torrid region’ (Dubois and Beauchamp 1897:29). Dubois further illustrates the importance of the caste system by observing what became of social ‘pariahs’ a demographic of Hindu society with which he had become very familiar with. Stating that a population composed of such individuals quickly devolves into something altogether worse than the cannibalistic hordes observed in the African continent (see Dubois and Beauchamp 1897:29).

The second section takes an in-depth look at the Brahmin caste of Hindu society, covering a vast array of religious practices and expectations. It discusses at length all stages of brahmanical life starting with upanayana a ceremony in which young brahmin males are bestowed with a sacred cord, signalling their entrance into brahmic life. From this point until the age of matrimony they are acknowledged as residing in the condition of brahmacari. If the young male does not marry for any particular reason in the prescribed time period is no longer viewed as brahmacari and the name of grhastha not given to him. However, the six privileges afforded to the caste are still available to him. The six privileges being ‘to read, and get to read the Vedas, to make and to cause to me made, the sacrifice of the yajna, and lastly to receive alms and to give presents to the Brahmans.’ (Dubois 1816:101-102).

The second stage of brahmanical life is that of grhastha, a title afforded to Brahmin males who have married and had produced children. The Abbe highlights myriad of different observances this state of Brahmins is required to maintain, a significant portion of which focus on ritual purity and auspiciousness. Not the least of these practices is ritual bathing in water that is deemed sacred, like that of the Indus or Ganges rivers. While in the water, it is of utmost importance that the man to keep his thoughts transfixed on Visnu and Brahma, the ritual bath is finished “by three times taking up handfuls of water, and with their faces turned toward the sun pouring it out in libations to that luminary”, (Dubois 1816:149). After exiting the water the grhastha brahmin dresses himself in a particular fashion that does not affect his purity or auspiciousness. This practice is conducted three times over the course of a day.

Dubois also discusses at great length the assortment of different prayers devout members of the Brahman caste observe and provides an exhaustive example highlighting the specific mechanics of the sandhya or ‘triple-prayer’ (see Dubois 1816:154-157).

The third and final section of Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies focuses more attentively on religious beliefs at the core of Hindu tradition. The first chapter of this section begins to draw a parallel between the Roman and Hindu primary deities, comparing Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto to Brahma, Visnu, and Siva (see Dubois 1816:370). The Abbe continues by explaining the origins of each member of the trimurti (the aforementioned Hindu gods) and begins to highlight the henotheistic nature of the Hindu faith. Following this the Abbe gives a more in-depth description of each member of the trimurt, as well as other prominent figures like Krsna or Indra. Discussing in detail the role each member plays in the Hindu religion.
Special attention and detail is given in the discussion of Visnu, as Visnu is said to take up to ten different forms or *avatara*, each of these forms and the situation(s) they correspond to are briefly illustrated.

In his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India in which the Conversion of Hindoos is Considered Impracticable*, a work composed of a collection of correspondences written by the Abbe Jean-Antoine Dubois which were sent to his superiors in Paris, the Abbe gives a detailed account of the state in which the Christian, and especially the Roman-Catholic faith(s) were in India. The opinion held by Abbe Dubois was that because the caste system was so deeply entrenched in the Hindu tradition, the conversion of natives proved to be a task of immense difficulty. Abbe Dubois writes that "during a period of twenty-five years that I have familiarly conversed with them, lived among them as their religious teacher and spiritual guide, I would hardly dare to affirm that I have anywhere met a sincere and undisguised christian," (see Dubois 1823:63). Dubois continues to describe the degree to which this effect was observed, noting that one of the greatest points of contention for Hindu converts is the Christian belief of total equality between people of varied societal position in the eyes of God, that a Brahmin of high standing should be treated as equal to a ‘pariah’. Continuing this sentiment, the Abbe suggests that even a totalitarian or despotic rule could be imposed upon the Hindu people with greater ease than it would be to dismantle the caste system; thus highlighting the vast emphasis placed upon the caste system in the Hindu tradition.

The writings of Abbe Jean-Antoine Dubois offered a valuable insight into the complexity of the Hindu culture and the religion as a whole. The thirty years of experience working and residing among the Hindu people, adopting many of their customs and practices, allowed the Abbe to accrue a wide and intimate knowledge of the manners and customs of the Hindu tradition. Henry K. Beauchamp writes that "any account given by such a man of the manners and customs of the people amongst whom he lived must in any case be instructive," (see Dubois and Beachamp 1897: xxii).

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1. THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY

DECEMBER 28, 2019
Statue of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, founders of the Theosophical Society, at its headquarters in Adyar, Chennai.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was a prominent nineteenth century occultist who, along with Henry Olcott, formed the American Theosophical Society in 1875 (Bevir 2003:100). Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was born in Ekaterinslow, Russia on July 31, 1831 (Kingsland 32). The Hahn family was rather affluent, with both Helena’s father, Colonel Peter Hahn, and mother being descended from nobility, German and Russian respectively (Kingsland 32; Bevir 2003:100). When she was eleven years old, Helena was put in the custody of her grandmother living in Saratow, her mother having passed away a few years before, and her father traveling quite often due to his military position (Kingsland 37). After living with her grandparents for roughly five years she married General Nokifor Blavatsky; she was seventeen at the time and he was many years her senior (Kingsland 37; Prothero 202). Though the marriage did not last and the pair separated after three months, they were never legally divorced (Bevir 1994:749; Bevir 2003:100; Kingsland 37).

After leaving her husband in 1948, Blavatsky traveled extensively while studying the occult (Kingsland 39). Blavatsky had previously toured through England and visited Paris with her father at the age of thirteen, but it was not until after the end of her marriage that she traveled outside of Europe (Kingsland 37). Though it is generally agreed upon that Blavatsky traveled a considerable amount after leaving her husband, the places to which she traveled, in which order, and at what dates are rather contested. There is a consensus however, that she traveled to Constantinople immediately after leaving Russia (Bevir 1994:749; Kingsland 37; Prothero 202). There is some speculation that after leaving Constantinople Blavatsky
traveled to Greece and Egypt, but there is no overarching agreement on her destination upon leaving the city (Kingsland 37). Her extensive travels, which are occasionally referred to by some as a *wanderjaher* (Kingsland 53), are believed to include multiple visits to India and North America, as well as several countries in Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America (Kingsland 40-58). It is during this time that the title Madame Blavatsky begins to be used. Two of the places that Blavatsky is believed to have visited in search of occult knowledge are Quebec City, Canada around 1851 to consult with Indigenous tribes, and New Orleans to investigate reports of Voodoo practices (Kingsland 40, 42). As well, in the latter part of 1852, Blavatsky is speculated to have attempted to enter into Tibet for the first time in order to search for the physical location of her occult teachers, usually referred to as the Masters or the Mahatmas, but was denied entrance into the country, and thus in 1853 returned to England after having spent some time in Singapore and Java (Kingsland 43).

During her travels, Blavatsky fell ill a number of times. One such instance of illness was in 1858, while Blavatsky was in Russia visiting family, and was believed to be caused by an old internal injury that had re-opened (Kingsland 46). Blavatsky was again struck by illness while staying at Ozoorgetty in Mingrelia in 1863 (Kingsland 47). This bout of illness was very severe, and Blavatsky was escorted by servants to Tiflis, where her grandparents lived at the time, in order to receive medical treatment (Kingsland 48). During both incidences of illness, Blavatsky was believed to be the source of strange phenomena reported by those around her at the time (Kingsland 46-49). Blavatsky is also speculated to have spent seven years in Tibet receiving occult training from her masters (Crow 695; Kingsland 50). However, this assertion is highly contested due to the uncertainty of Blavatsky’s whereabouts during certain years and speculation on whether she received the training over those years intermittently or consecutively (Kingsland 50). Additionally, there are some that believe that Blavatsky’s occult gifts allowed her to astral project and receive instructions from her Masters on an astral plane rather than the physical one (Kingsland 50).

Between 1863 and 1867 Blavatsky traveled around Europe, and in 1867 left Europe to, again, travel to India; during this time, she did not contact her family (Kingsland 50). In late 1870, Blavatsky’s aunt, Madame Fadeeff, received a letter from Mahatma K.H., one of Blavatsky’s masters, which is considered “the first record of any phenomenal letter from a Master” (Kingsland 51). Blavatsky’s family was informed that she was in good health and gave an approximate date for her return to Russia (Kingsland 50-51). Blavatsky is said to have completed her *wanderjaher* in 1873, at the age of forty-two, and in July of 1873 she traveled to New York (Kingsland 52-53).

In New York, during September of 1875, Helena Blavatsky, along with Henry Olcott, founded the Theosophical Society (Bevir 1994:751; Bevir 2003:100; Crow 693; Prothero 205). This, however, was not the first attempt by Blavatsky to create a social organization dedicated to studying the occult. In 1871, a few years prior to the founding of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky had formed the *Société Spirite* in Cairo, Egypt (Kingsland 51-52; Prothero 202). The purpose of this previous society was the investigation into spiritual phenomena and spiritual mediums (Kingsland 51).
However, the Société Spirite was rather short lived, with some blaming its demise on Blavatsky’s deficit of organizational skills (Prothero 202), and others on the flawed character of other members of the group (Kingsland 52). At the start of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky was voted to be the Society’s Secretary, and Olcott was voted in as the Society’s first President (Crow 705; Bevir 2003:100). The focus of the Theosophical Society shifted over time, and it is believed that in the early days of the Society, its main purpose was to “attempt to reform spiritualism” (Prothero 198). It was only after the Theosophical Society’s Headquarters were moved to India in 1878-1879 that the Society began to express its “three basic aims [of]: [promoting] the brotherhood of man, [investigating] the hidden powers of life and matter, and [encouraging] the study of comparative religion” (Bevir 2003:100). This change in the purpose of the Society is often attributed to Blavatsky incorporating more aspects of Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, into the Society’s doctrine and practices (Bevir 1994:748, 756-759; Bevir 2003:104; Crow 695, 702, 710).

Blavatsky remained in India from 1878 until 1887, when she moved to London England and began a new branch of the Theosophical Society known as the Esoteric Section (Crow 704). The inception of the Esoteric Section was publicized in Lucifer, a journal published by the Theosophical Society along with The Theosophist (Bevir 2003:102), in October of 1888 (Crow 704). The creation of this supposedly higher order group within the Theosophical Society was aimed at providing what was to be considered a more practical form of occult teachings and “a deeper study of esoteric philosophy” to a select group of students who would study directly under Blavatsky (Crow 704). Those of whom were chosen to be a part of the Esoteric Section had to take an oath wherein they were sworn to secrecy about the teachings that would transpire, as well as “a pledge of obedience to [Blavatsky] her[self]” (Crow 706), thus making Blavatsky the sole head of the Esoteric Section (Crow 706). However, Blavatsky did not stop at the creation of the Esoteric Section, which boasted a healthy number of students, and went on to create the ‘Inner Group,’ which was seen as being the next level above the Esoteric Section (Crow 707). The members of Blavatsky’s Inner Group were hand picked by her, and fit the description of the students from the Esoteric Section who supported Blavatsky most loyally; although, the justification given by Blavatsky for entrance into the Inner Group was based on a member reaching a certain point in learning the teachings of the Esoteric Section that they required more advanced teachings than other members (Crow 707). It is believed that the creation of the Esoteric Society, and subsequently the Inner Group, produced a rift between Blavatsky and Olcott (Crow 705). Blavatsky wanted the Theosophical Society to keep its membership more exclusive and hierarchal, thus making its teachings less accessible, and Olcott wanted the Society’s teachings to be more publicly accessible and to focus more on social reform (Prothero 207-208).

Blavatsky’s position within the Theosophical Society was not only as the Secretary to the Society at large, as well as the head of both the Esoteric Section and Inner Group, but she was also responsible for the Society’s doctrine and created a vast amount of literature (Bevir 2003:100). Prior to the founding of the Theosophical Society,
Blavatsky had wrote a number of journal articles that defended spiritualism (Bevir 2003:100). The first book of Blavatsky’s to be published was Isis Unveiled in 1877, which consisted of two volumes that “claimed to examine religion and science within the context of Western occultism and spiritualistic phenomena” (Crow 694), and it was through the publication of these volumes that Blavatsky established her position as the member in charge of the Theosophical Society’s doctrine (Crow 701). After the establishment of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky continued to write articles on the occult which were run in journals published by the society, such as Lucifer and The Theosophist which was first published in 1879 (Kingsland 115, 252). The next substantial work put out by Blavatsky was The Secret Doctrine, which was published in 1888, and outlined Blavatsky’s beliefs on the evolution of humanity which she broke down into seven phases (Crow 696, 700). Before her death in 1891, Blavatsky was able to complete The Voice of Silence and The Key to Theosophy, both of which were published in 1889 (Kingsland 115, 237).

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky died on May 8th, 1891 (Henderson; Kingsland 252). In the years leading up to her death, Blavatsky had fallen gravely ill a number of times, and is said to have been healed by her Masters on more than one occasion (Kingsland 114-119). After Blavatsky’s death, Olcott is said to have re-ordered the Theosophical Society to better align with his vision of what the Society should be, thus moving away from Blavatsky’s highly esoteric structure (Prothero 210). Blavatsky’s death is still honoured by those who are a part of the Theosophical Society today (Henderson).

Bibliography


Related Topics

Henry Olcott
Theosophical Society
Société Spirite
The Secret Doctrine
Isis Unveiled
The Voice of Silence
The Key to Theosophy
The Metropolitan Gentry
William Quan Judge
George H. Felt

This article was written by Krystal Goltz (Fall 2018), who is entirely responsible for its content.

C. HINDUISM AND MODERNITY, C. THE CASTE (JATI) SYSTEM

THE BARDIC TRADITION IN HINDUISM

DECEMBER 26, 2017

Bards, in the English Oxford Dictionary, are defined as poets who recite epics and are tied to a certain tradition. India’s bards were not merely poets, rather, they had numerous duties which were much more intricate. Bards were genealogists, astrologers, praise poets, historians, court minstrels, and artisans (Balfour 341). They were responsible for reciting genealogies at weddings, keeping family history and lineage, and performing praise-poetry to deities and chiefs. They would also recite history and myths during festivals or rituals. In the past, they would announce and salute their kings in a social setting, and were regarded as sacred or Brahmin-like. Possessing a sacred status allowed bards to find employment guarding caravans or travellers, and to witness contracts and financial arrangements by threatening self-mutilation (traga) if one were to renege (Snodgrass 2004: 276). In 1885, it was reported that bards were found all over India, but were concentrated in Rajputana (modern day Rajasthan), and that every family of importance in Rajputana had at least one bard to announce their titles and achievements (Balfour 342). As a result of British colonial rule and laws, many services that bards would have provide are now obsolete, such as announcing titles for their kings, as India is no longer a monarchy. Rajasthan is one area that maintained bardic...
tradition and culture. As a result, many bards still reside and make a
living there today (Snodgrass 276). Modern bards make a living as
musicians, puppeteers, genealogists, religious teachers, agriculture
farmers, and reciters of historical knowledge.

Bardic hierarchy was dependent on how close to centres of wealth
and power they were, and the reputation of a king often depended
on his bard. A king or warrior would desire a loyal, talented bard, to
ensure “his name will survive his death” (Hardy 112). The
relationship of bards and their patrons was one of gifts in exchange
for services (Basu 85). Jeffery Snodgrass reports a myth told to him
by Narayan Bhat, a Rajasthan bard, that illustrates the powerful
influence bards possess due to their mastery of language (Snodgrass
2004: 270). In the myth, Man Sing, king of Jaipur, gifts his bard with
an elephant for praising his son’s birth. The bard was upset that he
had an elephant but not the equipment to ride it and the king
noticed, asking him what more he would want. The bard explained
and the king was enraged, to which the bard replied that the king
should shove the elephant up his ass (Snodgrass 2004:271). Man
Sing then had to travel to a wedding without his bard to accompany
him, where all of the other guest bards were reciting praise poetry.
This elevated all other guests above Man Singh. The bard had come
secretly, and was then spotted by the king, distressing him. He
feared the bard would insult him in front of everyone. To avoid this,
the king motioned to the bard that he would receive 4 elephants if
he raised his honour. The bard created a verse that compared Man
Singh to Visnu, able to destroy Ravana’s fortress, a member of the
solar system himself This won the competition and impressed all the
other kings. The bard received his four elephants for his work.
(Snodgrass, 2004: 272). The myth exemplifies the influence of bards
on kingly reputation, the interdependence of kings and their clients.
Bards used their influence over reputation in other ways, being
masters of language and regarded as sacred, some bards were said
to have “the power of the ‘word’, the corpus of sounds by which the
moral order of society is maintained and altered” (Kamphorst 228).
Certain bards were regarded as rsi-poets, able to curse, predict the
future, or cure ailments. Others would simply jest and satire a person
publicly for disgrace or mistreatment. In this way, bards would
promote Dharmic behaviour through their mastery and clever use of
language (Basu 220).

Modern Rajasthan, an Indian state that has maintained strong bardic
identity, holds two main classes of bards: Bhats and Charans. These
words are derived from Sanskrit roots. In the Dictionary of Spoken
Sanskrit, Bhat comes from a Sanskrit translation meaning ‘scholar’ or
‘lord,’ while Charan is said to mean ‘god’s feet’ or ‘son or daughter of
the goddess.’ These definitions introduce an important concept
regarding the status of these two Bardic classes, that Charans are
perceived as elite over the Bhats (Kamphorst 225). In Hindu
mythology, there is a story of how Mahadeva (Siva) created a Bhat to
attend to his lion and bull, but every day the bull was killed by the
lion. Mahadeva, tired of creating a bull daily, created Charan, equally
devout as the Bhat but of bolder spirit, to watch over the lion and the
bull. From that date on the bull was never slain again (Balfour 341).
This gives Charans a strong identity, that allegorically they are
guardians of justice, in the from of the bull, against savage violence,
as the lion (Kamphorst 225). This myth highlights differences in the
tradition of the two classes, such as their claim of different ancestry,
In Rajasthan today, Bhats are low caste bards who mainly make a living as entertainers. Most commonly they are puppeteers who make a profit by selling their puppets to tourists after a show. They claim descent from Brahmins who composed Sanskrit verses of praise on stone tablets in temples (Snodgrass 2004: 275). They currently serve an untouchable caste of leather workers called Bambhis through jokes, dramas, stories, and music. If they share food with these patrons, they are moved into the lowest caste with them in the view of Brahmin and other orthodox adherents (Snodgrass 2004:273). The Bhats perceive themselves, however, as equal if not greater than Brahmins. This is a result of their culture of language and learning: they create myths that make the other castes of society seem dependent on their skill over words. In their view, remembering history is a process that keeps the past alive and is an act of reconstruction (Snodgrass 2004: 282). This also identifies them with the Brahmin, as the ideology behind Hindu ritual sacrifice is to reconstruct the dismemberment of Purusa.

Colonialism had a large impact on the livelihood of these bards. The need for bards as messengers and negotiators faded as Britain demilitarized regions of India. Their function as guardians of caravans and contracts dissipated as railways replaced caravan routes, and acts of self mutilation (traga) were outlawed. Replacing feudal landholding and the patron-client economy with commercialization deprived bards of their property, status, and income (Snodgrass 2004: 277). Modernization extinguished many bardic duties, though some have survived in new contexts. Genealogies are still recited at weddings; also, hotels, restaurants, nobles, and militants hire Bhats to present history and epics through puppeteering and storytelling. This allows them to make a living through an art of their past. They are also employed at folklore festivals, singing and poetry competitions, and maintain some of their power over reputation during elections. When the Babri Masjid Mosque was destroyed in 1992, the Baharatiya Janata Party hired Bhats to spread anti-Muslim sentiment and help them gain popularity to win the upcoming election (Snodgrass 2004: 279).

Charans are an elite bard caste in western India that identify with the Ksatriya, rather than the Brahmin varna. The root of the word Charan can be traced back to the Rajasthan words caranau (to graze or wander), uccarari (the art of recitation, verbal expression), or chahar (love, justice). Each of these relate to Charan lineage and identity as cattle and horse traders, linguistic masters, and agents of loving devotion (bhakti) to goddesses (devi) (Kamphorst 224). Charans fulfill the same roles as Bhats, while possessing a unique identity of their own as more courageous and fierce. The Mahadeva bull myth is likely the origin for this difference. Their courage is attributed to their role as royal bards who would ride into battle with their kings. Being on the battlefield allowed them to create ballads that would commemorate the deeds of their warriors. Charans have distinct literature on this; Vira kava, a genre of warrior and king hero praise, and panegyrics: praise of battle-field bravery, victory, royal generosity, and sacrifice (Basu 83). Charans experienced significant loss of their culture, as Bhats did, during colonization. When Europe colonized India there were no longer frequent battles over territory, the result of this was evident in
Charan literature. They could no longer compose praise about the best warriors, so they began to glorify the best hunters. Eventually, modernization caused them to become praise poets of their own caste (Basu 90). Praising themselves and their tradition allowed them to become unique. As bardic tradition came to an end throughout much of India during British rule, they maintained an active and strong culture. Ancient bardic tradition and practices still thrive daily in Kacch, and a festival dedicated to Charan lineage takes place there every year.

In Kacch, to applaud, glorify, adore, or eulogize the qualities of an exalted being is considered a vocal art. Charans have mastered this art and made it a part of their social identity (Basu 81). 35000 people in Kacch identify themselves as Charans, which entails: having the ability to compose poetry, recite in many different styles, remember history, love the play of words, and be inclined to asceticism. They have a uniform dress code and claim that Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, language, and learning, gifted them with their nature. Charans are mainly praise-poets, who doubled as herders, agricultural workers, and artisans. In Kacch they played a larger role in ritual over Brahmin priests. During Navaratri, a 9 night goddess festival, a buffalo is sacrificed and a Charan woman would be the first to drink its blood and become host to the goddess for the rest of the royal sacrifice, embodying her. Charan Matajali are human-goddesses, said to have the power to destroy enemies, spontaneously produce water, and uphold the moral status of kings by cursing or rewarding their actions. Some Charan women are deified after death, Ai Sri Sonal Mataji is one of these women who was born in 1920, and passed away in 1975. Sonal Mataji was born into a time of colonial rule in India and was a guide for her people during the changes brought with modernization (Basu 89). She emphasised a vegan diet, meditation, asceticism, anti-alcoholism, and rejected blood sacrifice. The Charan Caste Council created a festival that begins on her birthday, and last two days each year: the Sonal Mataji. The festival allows these bards to keep many of the traditions used by their ancestors in the past. It begins with ritual praise worship, and is followed by praise poetry of the goddess. Lectures are then given on the history of the Charan caste: their origin in the peaks of the Himalayas, their descent down from the mountains, the breeding of cattle, attaching themselves to patrons, their role as warriors, and lastly their establishment in Kacch. The Following Speeches relate these stories to present morals that are expected of these bards today: to be loyal, have dharmic action, and to sacrifice oneself for moral cause. Many performances of poetry, song, and recitals are performed over the two days, creating a sense of belonging that embodies loving devotion (bhakti) to the goddess (Basu 96). This is a modern example of bardic tradition that flourishes today.

An example of Bardic tradition in the past is a 19 night long story that was recorded by a scholar in 1965 (Beck 13). Olappalayam was a village in south India when Brenda Beck conducted her fieldwork. The story is called The Elderbrothers' Legend, and was conducted by firelight in the evenings with costumes, body paint, drums, and poetic recitation. The story referenced places in past that still exist today, providing geographical information about specific areas and their history. The story also revealed the relationship of kings with their subjects, and illustrated the ethnic and moral code of the area.
Beck reported that local ritual, praise, and mannerism, mirrored practices within the story, stressing how important bards are in transmitting Hindu ideology and behaviour. Beck also stated that the story encompassed the region's unique culture and history, revealing the devastating loss of culture from modernization which make it difficult for these stories to be told in the same way today. (Beck, 17)

Bardic tradition is an important aspect of Hindu culture that has experienced drastic change during the period of colonization and industrialization of the world. In the past, bards were considered a sacred order and thus could work as grantors. They were messengers, exclusive educators, court minstrels, could dictated a nobles' popularity, and would ride into battle reciting warrior praise. In exchange for their service they would receive gifts, such as animals and land. In modern society, they make a living mostly as teachers and agricultural workers, while performing poetry and history on the side. Most bards are now found around Rajasthan, and view themselves as a third social body in the caste system. Genealogies and recitation of family history is part of Hindu weddings still today, and a few bards still make a living as story tellers through theatre (Snodgrass 2004: 278). Some areas of India have defended their bardic lineage and still practice it today, such as the Charans. Overall, bards continue to serve Hinduism by spreading mythology, composing praise, promoting dharmic behaviour, and keeping history alive across generations.

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Related Topics for Investigation

Cand Literature
The Theosophical Society held its first regular meeting on November 17th, 1875 in New York City (Campbell 29). The Society had been envisioned only two months prior by its first President, American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, supported by his fast friend, the German-Russian Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (Campbell 27), or H. P. B., as she preferred to be called (Campbell 2). To distinguish itself from other organizations (Campbell 78), the Society claimed three essential goals: to create a universal brotherhood, to compare humanity’s diverse ways of knowing, and to gain a better understanding of the hidden laws of nature and the abilities which lay dormant within humans (Scott 179). Rather than asserting a single doctrine for its members, the Society embraced an eclectic method of research, examining all religions and the Absolute Truth being pointed to by each of them (Olcott 58). Merriam-Webster defines theosophy itself as a way of coming to know the divine through mystical experiences. Similarly, in India, it was translated as brahmavidya, meaning the study or knowledge of the divine (Ingalls 87). The Theosophical Society would go on to have broad influence...
across the globe, with special relevance to the revival of Hinduism in India, and its heightened popularity in the West.

The Society was inspired by a number of previous traditions, such as American Transcendentalism and Spiritualism, which were in vogue during the 1870s (Campbell 9, 20), as well as Occultism (Campbell 10) and Free Masonry (Campbell 12). While these traditions were in part a response to existing dilemmas within Christianity (Campbell 9), the Theosophical Society very quickly began to align itself more with Eastern traditions than those of the West (Campbell 87). This shift toward the “Orient” became clear in 1879, when founders Olcott and Blavatsky moved the headquarters of the Theosophical Society first to Bombay, and then on to Adyar, south Chennai (then Madras), Tamil Nadu, India in 1882 (Campbell 78, Cranston xiv).

The Society rapidly grew in size and influence after Blavatsky and Olcott’s arrival in India, due in part to the moderate success of their magazine, The Theosophist, which they had co-founded with Alfred Percy Sinnett (Morrison 8), and to their deep reverence for India as well, which warmed many locals to their cause (Campbell 79). More than one hundred Theosophical Society branches were opened within five years of Blavatsky and Olcott’s arrival to India (Campbell 86). Most locals who joined the Society were of the Brahmin class, and had been educated in the British schooling system, which left them torn between the religion of their childhood and the rationalism in which they were trained (Bevir 104). The reconciliation, which the Society offered, between the ideologies of Hinduism and science (Bevir 104) was another significant reason for the rapid growth of the Society.

This ability to reconcile the “old” and the “new” was one of the characteristics of Neo-Hinduism, a movement which was instrumental in reigniting India’s passion for her own religious history (Bevir 105). The Theosophists were a major landmark on the map of Neo-Hinduism, along with the Brahmo Sabha and Arya Samaj movements (Bevir 105). Blavatsky’s choice to attribute the purest source of ancient wisdom to India, rather than Egypt or any other Eastern country, connected well with the Samajists in particular, who sought to bring back the sanatana dharma of the Vedas (Campbell 77). The Samajists and the Theosophical Society were already closely connected prior to Blavatsky and Olcott’s arrival in India, and united into a single organization for a brief period of time before Olcott and Blavatsky came to realize that the organizations had too many significant differences (Campbell 77). Their biggest concern was that the Arya Samaj organization, which was founded by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati in 1875 (Campbell 77), asserted the absolute superiority of Hinduism (Bevir 105), which went directly against the eclectic stance of Theosophy. Although their formal ties were dissolved, the impact of these Neo-Hindu organizations continued to shape the future of society and religion within India for many years to come.

In 1884, only two years after the move to Adyar, controversy overtook the Theosophical Society. Emma and Alexis Coulomb were old acquaintances of Madame Blavatsky’s, who had worked as members of the staff in Adyar until being discharged (Campbell 88). Seemingly in anger at their dismissal (Cranston 266), the Coulombs sent forty letters of reputed communication between Madame
Blavatsky and Madame Coulomb to the Christian College Magazine; the letters indicated widespread fraud on Blavatsky's part (Campbell 88). Although H. P. B. wanted to take the Coulombs to court, Olcott and the rest of the Society barred her from doing so, fearful of the trial becoming an attack on their beliefs rather than on Madame Blavatsky herself (Campbell 91, Cranston 280). Fierce debate on the authenticity of the Coulomb letters continued for some time thereafter (Cranston 270-272).

The fires of the debates around the so-called Coulomb Affair were fanned by Richard Hodgson when he released a damning report on the Theosophists for the British Society for Psychical Research in late 1885. He determined that everything he saw during his time with the Theosophical Society was deeply fraudulent (Campbell 93), despite his friendly opinion of Theosophy prior to his arrival in Adyar (Cranston 277). Although some have accused Hodgson’s report of being deeply biased (Cranston 277), his judgement had widespread influence on the court of public opinion. However, in an unexpected turn of events, this attack upon the Society went on to cause its global popularity to rise, rather than to diminish (Cranston 284).

Following this dramatic period, Madame Blavatsky experienced a brief and life-threatening illness, and consequently resigned as the Theosophical Society’s secretary and leader of the Esoteric Section in March 1885. H. P. B. moved to Europe, where she bonded with Annie Besant, began to print her second magazine, *Lucifer*, and founded the Blavatsky Lodge of London in 1887 (Cranston xv). She remained in England until her death at age sixty on May 8, 1891 (Cranston 407). Colonel Olcott, however, had remained in Adyar after Blavatsky’s departure to Europe in 1885, touring throughout India and working to rebuild the Society’s reputation in the wake of the Coulomb Affair (Campbell 95).

Despite Olcott’s existing position as President, there was a four year struggle over who would lead the Esoteric Section of the Society following Madame Blavatsky’s death (Campbell 103). The struggle was ultimately ended when the man behind Theosophical expansion in the United States, and fellow competitor for the role of Esoteric Section leader, William Quan Judge, spearheaded a secession from Olcott’s Theosophy, declaring “The Theosophical Society in America” as separate in 1895 (Campbell 111). Olcott remained at the head of the Society at Adyar until his death in 1907, when the Englishwoman Annie Besant ran to succeed him as the Society’s President, and won by a large majority (Campbell 118).

Besant had been politically active in England, advocating for socialism, contraceptives, and atheism before ultimately aiming her sights on Theosophy (Ingalls 85). She moved quickly through the Society’s ranks, becoming so trusted that she would go on to speak as one of the representatives of Theosophy at the first World Parliament of Religions at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, only four years after she had joined the Society (Campbell 102). Mahatma Gandhi himself held Besant in very high esteem after having met her and Blavatsky in London, and had some of his own spiritual beliefs shaped by his time with the Theosophists (Bergunder 406). Annie Besant moved to India in the same year as the World’s Fair (Mortimer 61), where she became interested in Colonel Olcott’s
Following Olcott’s death and her consequent election as President, Besant endeavoured to build upon the work which Olcott had previously started; she focused on reformation of religion, education, and problematic social norms in particular (Mortimer 61). Some of her most important accomplishments included founding the Central Hindu College in Banaras, the Adyar Library (Ingalls 86), raising the marriageable age of girls, and stoking the flames of Indian nationalism (Mortimer 61, 62). Besant also produced an exceptional amount of literature for the Theosophical Society, wrote a much respected translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and studied other classical Sanskrit works; moreover, she declared India as her own land of spiritual origin, claiming to have lived there in at least nineteen of her previous lives (Ingalls 86).

Besant turned her focus to politics in 1913, when she formed the Brothers of India group and published a book entitled *Wake Up India!* (Mortimer 64). Shortly thereafter, she joined the Indian National Congress, and began publishing a weekly newspaper, *The Commonweal*, which outlined a plan of Indian independence (Verma & Bakshi 292). Besant then purchased and renamed the *New India* daily newspaper in 1914, using it to support an idea of Indian Home Rule (Mortimer 65) which she fashioned after the Irish Home Rule movements (Ingalls 87). Besant supported universal suffrage and a complex democratic system of jurisdictions and electorates (Mortimer 68), and worked tirelessly across India throughout World War I until she was placed under house-arrest by the government in June 1917 (Mortimer 73). This action pushed the debates on Indian independence to a breaking point (Mortimer 75); between August and December of 1917, the Secretary of State for India announced the imminence of the nation’s independence, and Annie Besant was freed and elected President of the Indian National Congress (Mortimer 76), the only Western woman ever elected to this position (qtd. in Bevir 112).

Throughout her life with the Society, Besant was closely tied to fellow Theosophist C.W. Leadbeater (Ingalls 88), an Anglican priest-turned-Buddhist (Campbell 114). Leadbeater’s reputation crumbled in 1906, when he was formally accused of pedophilia (Vas 1); the accusations, coming from young boys, centered around his recommendations of masturbation as an occult practice. While the Theosophical Society accepted his resignation in response to these allegations (Campbell 116), Leadbeater was controversially reinstated to the Society only a year later, following Besant’s election to the Presidency (Tillett 33).

Two years after his reinstatement, Leadbeater discovered the young Jiddu Krishnamurti living with his family at Adyar, and promptly declared him to be the next great World Teacher and vehicle for the Christ (Campbell 120). Annie Besant worked with Leadbeater to gain custody of Jiddu and his brother, Nityananda (Campbell 120), after which they sent the boys to England for further education during World War I (Ingalls 88). Although their father attempted to regain custody of his sons twice, once after their move overseas and once following Leadbeater’s alleged sexual assault of Jiddu, Mr. Krishnamurti’s attempts were unsuccessful, and Leadbeater remained very much a part of the boys’ lives (Vas 2).
While Nityananda was accepted to Oxford, Jiddu was not, allowing him to train full time for the day when he would officially become the next World Teacher (Vas 3). He was thought to have taken on the role in 1925, and Annie Besant consequently suspended the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, deeming it unnecessary (Campbell 129). An organization was built around Krishnamurti, called The Order of the Star in the East (Campbell 121), which grew throughout the 1920s, but was dissolved by Krishnamurti himself in 1929 (Campbell 129). While he went on to be a prolific lecturer and author, Krishnamurti left the Theosophical Society in 1930 (Campbell 147). Annie Besant died only three years after Krishnamurti’s departure, allegedly of a broken heart (Ingalls 88); her position as Society President was filled shortly thereafter by George Arundale (Campbell 130). However, the success which Krishnamurti found throughout his adult life, until his death in 1986, left some wondering if he was the World Teacher that Theosophy had promised after all (Vas 5).

Krishnamurti’s international fame (Campbell 148) serves as an excellent example of the way in which the Theosophical Society and many of its charismatic members helped to revive Hinduism in India and to popularize it in the West. While the effects in the West may be less noticeable, they are just as influential. Perhaps most importantly, Krishnamurti’s beliefs regarding meditation became popular in Hollywood, drawing many celebrities to his side, including Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo (Altman 213). Much of Krishnamurti’s appeal seems rooted in the disillusionment which many North Americans were feeling with Protestant Christianity at the time; furthermore, the meditative, inward-looking nature of his teachings – and those of the other Yogic teachers active during the same period, such as Yogananda and Vivekananda – allowed Americans to participate in “Americanized” Hindu practices without their fellow citizens noticing (Altman 213).

By the turn of the century, Americans were well-acquainted with the Theosophical Society; William Quan Judge’s schismatic organization, the Theosophical Society in America, already had seventy-one active branches within the United States by the year 1900 (qtd. in Morrisson 8). Theosophical ideas, such as the universalism and Unitarianism that Krishnamurti championed, formed a kind of bridge between the American disenchantment with Protestantism and their embrace of Asian religions. One can see the powerful effects of these Theosophical ideas still influencing spirituality today, especially in the current vigour for “neo-Vedantic” spiritual discourses formed largely within the context of Hinduism, such as those of Amritanandamayi Ma, better known as Amma (Huffer 377, 378). Although Amma’s teachings are rooted in Advaita philosophy, and she praises many aspects of Hinduism, she promotes non-denominational spirituality above all else (Huffer 377) – much as the Theosophists would have done, and continue to do.

The Theosophical Society in America still functions within the United States and internationally, simultaneously with the Theosophical Society at Adyar. These organizations are only two of the many spiritual movements which can find their roots within the rich, albeit short, history of Theosophy and its membership.
REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING


**Related Topics for Further Investigation:**

Amma (Amritanandamayi Ma)

Annie Besant

Colonel Henry Steel Olcott

C.W. Leadbeater
Free Masonry
H.P. Blavatsky
Indian National Congress

Jiddu Krishnamurti
Mahatma Gandhi
Neo-Hinduism
Neo-Vedanta
Occultism
Orientalism

Spiritualism

The Order of the Star in the East
Transcendentalism
Vivekananda

Yogananda

**Noteworthy Websites Related to the Topic:**

http://www.ts-adyar.org/

https://www.theosophical.org/

http://inc.in/

https://www.kfa.org/

http://www.katinkahesselink.net/his/chronol.htm
Sexuality in Hinduism is most notable through the observance of *kama*, one of Hinduism’s *catur-purusartha*’s (four human aims). Within the Dharma Sastras contain prescriptions for how one should live one’s life, as well as outlining various religious duties (*dharma*). *Kama* in this instance refers to fulfilment of sensual and sexual pleasure (Lidke 108). Attainment of *kama* for males is prescribed in the second of the four *asramas* (life stages), the *grhastha* stage. This stage of life is known as the householder stage, and in it Hindus are expected to marry. Sexual relations within a Hindu marriage are meant to be for procreation, however it is expected that couples will be intimate for pleasure also. Sexual indulgence can become a problem that will cause unhappiness for *grhasthas* and self-restraint is cautioned. Mentioned in various scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita* is extramarital sex, considered taboo as marriage is seen as contractual and for life (Mehta 66-67). The *catur-purusartha* exists within Hinduism’s caste system, and only the upper three classes undergo the rituals that transition from one *asrama* to the next (Mehta 63).

*Rgveda* 10.85 begins by telling us that there is a divinity to human marriage, in that it is modeled after the gods, before focusing on more on the humanness of marriage. Simply by being a woman, a bride is seen as having inherent value to not only her husband, but her husband’s family as well. This has to do with the expectation that children will be the result of a marriage (Menski 56). If a husband dies before the woman has conceived, she is not destined to remain a widow, but can be married to another member of her husband’s family in the hopes of conception. Ideally the original marriage will bear children, and so gods are invoked in certain rituals in the context of fertilization; Indra is invoked for strong sons while Agni is invoked for many sons (Menski 56). At the same time that a bride is seen as an asset to her husband and his family, she may also be seen as a danger. On a couples’ wedding night there is an expectation that the hymen will break and a woman will bleed during the act of intercourse. This, of course, will defile the bedding, but it is also seen as a destructive blood in a Vedic marriage. For this reason, a husband may consult a Brahmin to purify the cloth and
Some Puranas personify \textit{kama} as Kamadeva, the god of desire and passion. By contrasting this god with Siva in the \textit{Siva Purana}, this Purana is full of insight into how Hindus view sexuality. As Siva is sometimes seen as the eternal brahmacarin and supernaturally chaste, his interactions with Kamadeva show the sexual side of Hinduism (O’Flaherty 141). Much of the literature focuses on Kamadeva as he relates to Siva, but the information gathered in these texts give the reader some idea of what influenced Hindu attitudes and rituals relating to sexuality.

While Siva is seen as chaste in many rituals, the idea that he is tempted or does not remain chaste throughout are common. Some of the myths actually place him in the position of the creator, with an erect penis (\textit{linga}) and seminal fluid that acts as the seed of creation (O’Flaherty 143). Siva’s chastity is, however, his most powerful weapon in myths in which he is juxtaposed with Kamadeva. In one such myth, Siva is responsible for burning Kamadeva up, destroying him. Modern interpretations of this myth hold it as a temptation story, whereas early interpretations view it as a wholly asexual act. Siva, being compared to fire, when the two interacted is said to have melted or destroyed Kamadeva, who is likened to snow. In this analogy, Siva is so pure and chaste that Kamadeva’s sexuality could not possibly have affected him (O’Flaherty 143-34).

The Puranas include a different story of Siva burning Kamadeva. Siva may be aroused by the act or bring Kamadeva back more powerful. In the Puranas, it is suggested that Siva, rather than being so chaste that he is not affected by Karmadeva, in fact recognizes his power and possibly admires him (O’Flaherty 145).

Hinduism is unlike many western religions in that it does not have a single canonical text, but many. Other texts from early Hinduism that mention sexuality include the Upanisads and the Tantras (Doniger 2011). Some Upanisads compare Vedic rituals to sexuality, such as the oblation of butter into the fire resembling the acts of procreation. Each action taken in the ritual has a counterpart in love-making and eventual birth. The Tantras take this notion one step farther and suggest that sexual intercourse is not simply like a ritual, but that the act itself is a ritual (Doniger 2011). The most in-depth text dealing with \textit{kama} is the \textit{Kamasutra}, a text from approximately the third century B.C.E. By modern standards, the \textit{Kamasutra} is a liberal text, with thoughts put forth on subjects such as women’s sexuality and homosexual behavior (Doniger 2011). In opposition to the Vedas, the author of the \textit{Kamasutra}, Vatsyayana, dismisses the notion that people should only have to procreate. There is also the idea that since people of all ages are capable of understanding sexual acts, all should be familiar with the text. The idea of female pleasure and sexuality is strong in the text, even suggesting a woman leave her husband if he is not satisfying her, in contrast to what earlier law texts say (Doniger, 2011).

The Dharma Sastras’ view of homosexuality is one of taboo; a man who engages in same sex activity is to be punished, however slightly, for the transgression. Vatsyayana holds different ideas, where instead of the defamatory \textit{kli\textipa{b}a} [translated as eunuch, but holds many other meanings] he uses \textit{hijra}, a term that means third gender.
Rather than transgressive, third genders in the text are described in a more neutral way; hermaphrodites and bi-sexuals are treated the same as all others. Throughout the Kamasutra are references to servants and friends who perform oral sex on members of the same sex. The Kamasutra is unlike other texts, it is not a law book, but rather one that categorizes and attempts to explain sexuality. In this way, it is not judgmental (Lidke 124). This lighter view of homosexuality and transsexuality is found throughout both ancient and modern India (Doniger 2011).

Homoeroticism is an important aspect of Hindu literature, even if textual authorities disagree on its morality. The Hindu concept of rebirth, as well as its views of gods as being androgynous, means that gender and sexuality can be viewed as fluid. Heterosexuality, however, is still highly regarded as the normative sexuality (Lidke 124-125). Hijras can also be found in the stories of the epics, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In the former is the story of Sikhandhin, who begins the tale as Amba and is captured by a warrior. After spurning his advances in favor of one she loves elsewhere, she is eventually rejected by both the one she loves and later the warrior and his brother. She is granted a boon by Siva and asks to be reborn a male. She is reborn as a female hijra, her boon having not been granted as she had hoped (Lidke 126-127). Despite a long history of hijra populations and homoeroticism attitudes about sexuality and behavior changed during and after colonization. The British imposed anti-sodomy laws in 1860 and worked to impose Christian values (Lidke 127). Despite the efforts of the British, hijras still exist in India to this day and include those who proclaim themselves neither man nor woman. For a majority of Hijras the dominant gender is female, with dress and mannerisms being feminine whether one is biologically male or biologically female. In lesbian relationships this means that both partners are feminine, since masculine hijras are rare (Penrose 4).

The Kamasutra also speaks explicitly about females and their sexuality, not only in regards to hijras and males but also in regards to their relations with other females. There are references to penetration with sex toys, both of males and females. The word used for the penetrator is svairini, although some translators also put forth that svairini can also mean oral sex partner or prostitute (Penrose 15). The Kamasutra describes women as penetrators, both of men and of other women. The text, while describing homosexual acts, does not categorize the women as such (see Kama Sutra 2.8.13). Women’s sexuality in this context is defined by her dominance in the act of penetrating, not by the gender of her partner (Penrose 16).

Sexuality in Hinduism has been influenced by divine myths and written and revealed texts and has an effect on many aspects of life. Each of the four stages of life (asram vyavastha) have something to say on the topic and dharmic prescription in place. Sexuality also includes how gender is defined for Hindu’s, as the large and continuing hijras population is proof of. The texts also often have a lot to say about how one should conduct oneself in regards to sexuality, although with multiple texts there are often times contradictions.
REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING


Related Topics for Further Investigation

*The Kamasutra*

*Ashram vyavastha*

*Kamadeva*

*Sati*

*Sita*

*Siva*

*Visnu*

The marriage of the Pandeva’s
Discussions of gender within Hinduism are particularly interesting because “Hinduism is marked by a heritage of patriarchal hierarchy” with “a strong matriarchal mythology” (Joshee 73). Although the trinity in Hinduism [Brahma, Visnu and Siva] is male, “their power cannot be enacted without the female aspect” or sakti (Joshee 73-75). Elements of Hinduism, such as sakti, can empower women, however, most uphold patriarchal ideals and gender roles. Feminism defines patriarchal societies as those that “control” women in three elements, “sexuality, reproduction and labour” (Desai 1676). The oppression of women is integral to the operation of this patriarchal society. Although there are some similarities between Hinduism and feminism and feminism in other parts of the world, the patriarchy manifests itself differently everywhere. As a result, there are contextual differences in the gender inequalities and the conversations around these inequalities. For the purposes of this article, feminism will be defined as the movement towards liberation
In a patriarchal society through advocating and implementing change with the intent to create social, political and economic gender equality.

In Vedic times, women were able to participate in religious rituals, become educated, and marry at an older age. Their status “systematically deteriorated” so by the time of the epics it is evident that women were not appreciated or equal to men in the same way (Dhruvarajan 44). The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Laws of Manu propagate the ideal of “loyal and obedient wives whose only goal in life is to please their husbands” (Gross 74). Wives and women are seen in this text as needing to be under the control of and dependent on a man, their father in childhood and after that their husband. It is interesting to note that in the alternative oral retellings of the epics, patriarchal norms are disturbed (Sugirtharajah 100).

Entering into the wife role has traditionally been accompanied by a dowry. After marriage, if a woman is not able to produce a son, her husband is permitted to remarry by the Dharma Sastras (Chakravarti 2249). Stridharma is the duty of the wife to her husband. Despite such cultural and social practices, marriage is seen in the Hindu tradition as two halves, the husband and wife, joining as complementaries and “considers husband and wife spiritually one” (Nayar 210).

It has been suggested that “Aryan hegemony” dominated “Dravidian matrilineal traditions” and thus powerful goddesses were incorporated as secondaries to gods in the “Aryan patriarchal religion” (Dhruvarajan 45). This interaction with the Aryans could be one reason for the degeneration of the status of women. It has been also suggested that “the erosion of the position of women” can be associated “with the coming of Islam and the Mughal Empire” (Joshee 73). However, some suggest the status of women would have been better under Muslim law than Hindu law, at the time. A ruler of the Mughal Empire, Akbar, at one point attempted to abolish the practice of sati, making him the first to do so (Joshee 74).

Sati was the old Hindu tradition of the immolation of the widow on her late husband’s funeral pyre. Although the practice of sati may be classified as “murder of the cruellest kind”, some satis died with “courage and exaltation”, depending on the consent or willingness of the women (Nayar 446-447). Devout Orthodox Hindus believed that the practice of sati ensured the woman, her husband and their families would be rid of bad karma and “would be in paradise for 35 million years” (Nayar 256).

The social and cultural elements above illustrate the role of women predating the rise of feminist thought in India. In the 12th century, Mahadeviyakka, a female ascetic of the Virasaivism movement, did not conform to traditional gender roles and chose living naked and without a husband or male companion. She claimed to be “transcending” gender roles, therefore “attained to peace (Olson 498). Mahadeviyakka however is a rare example from India’s past of independent female thought and it is not until the 19th century that feminist thought and movements worked to elevate women’s social status.
19th century feminism was mainly focused on the gender inequalities faced by upper caste women and issues such as child marriage, *sati* and education. In 1818, Raja Ram Mohan Roy brought *sati* to the public's attention. He distributed pamphlets that argued against claims for textual pro-*sati* evidence and petitioned for legal action on *sati*, mentioning that women were being "induced by the persuasion of their next heirs" (Sarma 19). Because of these actions, a government order abolished the practice of *sati* in 1829. In 1848, Mahatma Phule started a school for untouchable girls and a home for the upper caste widows who were socially outcaste because of illicit sexual relations. He claimed that the "'softer' forms of gendered domination that the upper caste women faced were no less oppressive than the expropriation of manual and sexual labour experienced by the lower caste women" (Ghosal 795). Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Phule were among the first to introduce feminist notions and challenge societal gender norms (Rani 64).

With the influence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's *Brahmo Samaj* in 1872, Act III prohibited polygamy, permitted widow marriage and promoted higher education for girls (Rani 64).

Anandamayi Ma, a female guru in the early 19th century, provides an interesting example of the ideal wife role in Hinduism. Apparently there were no sexual relations in their marriage, Ma and her husband still loved and cared for each other. Ma was spiritually gifted and therefore was her husband's *guru* (Lipski 7). Some unmarried girls could avoid disappointing their family by becoming spiritually devoted to Ma (Hallstrom 204). She still recommended women maintain their traditional role as the ideal wife (Hallstrom 210).

At the end of the 19th century, women leaders became more active in the feminist movement in India. With these leaders came the development of women's groups and organizations. 1915-1925 saw the formation of Women's India Association, the National Council of Women of India, Annie Besant's Home Rule League and the All-India Women’s Conference (Rani 64). Annie Besant supported uplifting the status of women in India, while advocating for women to maintain their traditional Hindu roles. She supported feminism only to the extent that women would remain mainly absent from the public sphere. For example, she opened a school for girls, but only so they could learn to be better wives (Anderson 31). In 1921, women gained the right to vote in the Madras and proceeded to campaign for further political equality (Rani 64).

Mahatma Gandhi brought feminism into the movement for Indian independence [India gained independence in 1947], yet also advocated for women’s ideal role as serving her family. According to Gandhi, Sita from the *Ramayana* was an ideal wife and devotee (Dhruvarajan 44). Gandhi "worked for the Indian women’s emancipation tirelessly" and saw their political involvement as integral to the rise of women’s status (Baruah 13). He even said that "women is more fitted than men... to take bolder action in ahimsa" (Sarma 6). He was greatly supportive of women's freedom in India and within Hinduism because he believed daughters and sons should be treated with "perfect equality" (Sarma 8). He favoured a meritocratic shift, in which persons were valued without regard for gender. These radical notions not only brought about political and social change in the status of women, but also instilled a sense of
“strength and power” in the “souls” of Indian women (Sarma 10). It was during this time of social reform that women were more encouraged to join the political sphere.

Post-independence India carried this view forward in legislation and under article 15(1) in the Indian Constitution there cannot be “discrimination by the State on the grounds of...sex” and 15(3) allows “special provisions” for women and children (Kalyani 75). At this point, feminism in India was largely removed from political discourse. It was seen to have been successful in achieving the original mandate. This decline also occurred in the western feminist movement after the suffragette or first wave movement (Kumar 20). It was not until the 1970s that feminism in India experienced a revival and could be because of a growing discontent amongst women regarding their involvement, or lack thereof, in India’s post-independence development. This position generally blames “patriarchal culture” for “diluting freedom and equality”, therefore even though the constitution guaranteed equal rights after independence, women were not equally represented in the government (Rani 65).

The Committee on the Status of Women in India was established in 1971(Ghosal 799). Their report, Towards Equality, brought forward gender inequality issues into the political sphere (Ghosal 780). This report gives reasons why reserving seats for women would be of benefit to India and provides counter arguments outlining the fallacies in the opposition to this reservation. In the report it states that “[o]nly a system of reservations...will help to broaden the base of women’s representation” (Thakur 237).

In 1979 the “campaign against dowry murders” was the first time that dowry deaths were referred to as murders. Prior to this they were legally referred to as suicides (Kumar 22). In the 1980s, feminists like those involved in the “campaign against dowry murders”, influenced the government to pass and strengthen legislation regarding domestic violence. Additionally, feminists wrote simple manuals intended to help women escape domestic violence (Gangoli 103). Discussions around domestic violence and the uncommon practice of sati were further fueled by “the death of a young woman in Rajasthan in 1987” (Kumar 28). Following this, The Commission of Sati Prevention Act was enacted to prevent the practice and glorification of sati. The act clearly states that the practice of sati is “nowhere enjoined by any of the religions of India as an imperative duty” (http://www.wcd.nic.in/act/2314).

In 1990, the National Commission of Women was established to provide the State with information regarding the adherence to the laws regarding women and the progress made towards gender equality in India. The original constitution was amended in 1992 to mandate a reservation of one third of seats for women in local level elected bodies (Rani 66). Although women have been constitutionally allowed to hold parliamentary positions after independence, women have always held less than 8% of the parliamentary seats in India (Kalyani 8). The laws may change, but these changes do not always change the social, political and economic status of women in India. This is shown in the laws regarding violence against women, especially marital rape. In a 1996 UN report, 74% of judges prioritized women preserving their family,
“even if she faces violence” (Kalyani 76). Marital rape is not an offense. The law defines rape as only “penetrative intercourse” and unless there is physical injury to the husband due to the victim’s resistance, the victim “is generally assumed to have consented to it” (Kalyani 75). 65.3% of women reported abuse in this 1996 UN report and the majority of these cases were not public abuse (Kalyani 73). Feminists offered considerations which were presented by a committee for amendments to this law, including expanding the provision on hospital and police rape. Because of these recommendations, child rape and child marriage were made legally separate categories. Child marriage is “reprehensible” and child rape within this marriage is seemingly impossible because “sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not rape” (Gangoli 86).

The UN report also showed that for every 927 women in India, there are 1000 men. This population gap has only gotten worse in the last 70 years, despite development progress made by India as a whole (Kalyani 8-12). The “50 million missing campaign” works to solve this gap [see websites below Bibliography], these women are not missing persons, but instead have been eliminated from the population due to “female infanticide”, “dowry-related murders” and “maternal mortality rate” (Banerji).

In 2014, feminists at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Technology and Ambedkar University Delhi were asked to illustrate their own experiences with gender inequality in India through signs that were photographed in the campaign "#INeedFeminism". One participant’s sign reads "I need feminism because I want my parents to know that it’s no sin to be me; to be a girl. That being a man does not give my brother an edge over me" [see websites below bibliography]. Another campaign has expanded on this with signs for why “India needs feminism”. The feminist movement sees a necessity for further improvements to be made regarding issues such as human trafficking, the Harijas or third gender, and sexual harassment or eve teasing.

Feminism continues to evolve to meet new challenges and strive for gender equality in every sector. For example, Reshma Saujani, a Hindu Indian American lawyer and politician started the organization “Girls Who Code” to minimize gender inequalities in the technology sector (Chanen 11). She aims to empower young women by providing an opportunity for them to learn to code.

Women are now able to learn the Vedas, partially because of western scholar influences and therefore increased access to religious information. Although some religious rituals are still restricted to men, women do assist or participate with some, if not most of the rituals, and there are rituals exclusively for women (Wadley 123). There has also been a significant rise in female gurus, who do not conform to traditional women’s roles of wife and mother, as they devote themselves to a life of asceticism (Wadley 123). This path counters the social norms and may not be accepted by the woman’s family.

Women in India are actively involved in addressing gender inequalities and changing the patriarchal society; they may even use traditional elements of Hinduism to do so. For example, a grassroots
The feminist movement began in 2002 known as “The Mahila Shanti Sena” and uses Ghandian principles of sakti as a “creative, transformative power” (Joshee 77). In this way, they are able to inspire women to have a role in politics by using a “positive and culturally appropriate model” (Joshee 81). They focus on non-violence so “when the United States army went to Iraq”, The Mahila Shanti Sena organized “rallies, formed human chains and created handbills” to bring attention to the harmful effects of war, particularly for “women and children” (Joshee 77). The power of sakti is used to empower women to be active, nonviolent initiators of change in their own communities. Hinduism and feminism continue to interact symbiotically to improve the status of women in patriarchal society, building on the advances outlined above made by feminists in the 19th and 20th century.

References and Further Recommended Reading


The Sankhya Hindu philosophy is one of the six orthodox darsanas (world outlooks). It is considered orthodox because of its adherence to the Vedas and the caste system. In the Sankhya philosophy, prakṛti is part of a dualistic philosophy that explains the states of consciousness by listing the components of reality. The Sankhya darsana explains the creation of the world with the intertwining of purusa and prakṛti, resembling explanations in the Vedas.
The materiality of the world is the workings of prakrti (Larson 167-168). The identification with all material things is what the Sankhya darsana explains as material consciousness. This sense of consciousness cannot be the true self because it is corrupted. Purusa is the true self and can only be achieved when all senses of prakrti are removed. Yoga is applied to the Sankhya darsana to attempt to reach moksa (full liberation) (Burley 36-38).

To list the components of reality that make up the cosmos, Sankhya philosophy begins by dividing pure, real consciousness from the illusion of consciousness that is within all entities of the cosmos. These separate states of consciousness are purusa and prakrti. Purusa is pure consciousness that can only be attained when prakrti returns to its dormant state. To achieve complete consciousness, the Sankhya philosophy promotes the advancement through the different elements of prakrti to realize that the material consciousness is false. Once all false identifications are let go, prakrti is dissolved and purusa is achieved. Reaching the state of purusa is to be free of all false identification (Jacobsen 8).

Prakrti is composed of twenty-three tattvas. Tattvas are elements that can be listed ranging from their coarseness to how subtle they are. As the progression from the coarse tattvas to the subtle ones occurs, the proportions of the three gunas changes (Parrot 60-63). These gunas (qualities) are tamas, rajas, and satvā; eachguna is attributed a different set of qualities. The satvā guna is the quality of enlightenment, intelligibility and clarity. The tamas guna is classified as vague and dull, and the rajas guna is passion and activity (Ramakrishna Rao 64-65). Within one’s life, they will experience all three gunas in different proportions. When one is not distracted with the tamas and rajas gunas, the clarity that is the satvā guna is able to dissolve the illusion of consciousness created by prakrti (Jacobsen 8).

The twenty-three tattvas of prakrti can be divided into five categories. The mahabhutas are the coarsest elements; they are; earth, fire, water, air, and space. All materiality of the world is based on these five elements, so the manifestation of prakrti relies on the identification with these elements. The subtle tattvas are what is absorbed through the senses (odor, flavor, texture, sound, shape and color) (Larson 236-237). The tattvas that are necessary for the continuation of material life are the five action tattvas; reproduction, excretion, motion, communication, and accumulation. The five knowledge senses allow one’s ego to identify with the grosser tattvas; these elements of knowledge are the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell). These twenty tattvas make up the materiality of the world. Without the identification and connection that one has with these tattvas the manifestation of prakrti would not be able to occur. Because materiality is intertwined with purusa in the creation of the cosmos prakrti is an evitable part of life. The last three tattvas, that compose citta are essential to the separation of material consciousness and the internal liberation that lies hidden amongst the tattvas that are prakrti.

The material consciousness that is made up the twenty tattvas must be combined with of the last three tattvas is called citta. Citta is attributed to the mind and thought; it is the perceived enlightenment of prakrti. Without the mind to identify with the
world there is no consciousness, perceived or real. *Citta* is comprised of three elements *manas*, *anhankara*, and *buddhi* (Larson 236). *Manas* is the inner agency that persuades one to believe in the material consciousness that is *prakrti*. *Anhankara* is one’s ego. The ego identifies with the heavier *tattvas* making full liberation a difficult concept to believe. *Anhankara* generates a false sense of self that is based solely on the materiality of the world around (Parrot 70-72).

The *buddhi* is the subtlest *tattva*. This part of *citta* allows one to realize that the *manas* and *anhankara* use the grosser *tattvas* to create material consciousness and that is not its true self. The ability to discriminate between the false sense of self that is *prakrti* and the ability to gain true consciousness is what makes *buddhi* the greatest *tattva* [Buddhi is often referred to *mahat*, which means the great or highest intelligence]. To achieve *purusa*, the *sattva guna* must be in its highest proportion. In this state of clarity one is able to wish to achieve pure consciousness. The awareness that *buddhi* has of material consciousness allows one to escape from the false identifications made by *manas* and *anhankara*. When one stops falsely identifying they are released from *prakrti* and are able to achieve the pure consciousness that is *purusa*. *Purusa* never stopped functioning when *prakrti* was present; it acted as an observer, waiting for the right moment to be revealed (Sharma 149-153). The Sankhya *darsana* promotes that advancement through the different elements of *prakrti* to the so that the identification of the true self is not another false identification. One must experience the material consciousness so that when it is time to identify the true self it will not mistaken it for something else (Ramakrishna Rao 61-63).

When *purusa* is realized all traces of *prakrti* disappear. The *tattvas* engulf into themselves and essentially disappear; this is possible because the Sankhya *darsana* presents both *purusa* and *prakrti* as transcendental, but real entities. When the material consciousness that is *prakrti* is gone, one is then left with their true self. Liberation is widely known as *moksa* in Hinduism, but is also referred to as *kaivalya* in the Sankhya orthodox philosophy. When *kaivalya* is attained one is fully liberated for all materiality. When one is advancing through the *tattvas* that make up *prakrti* it is important that they do not become consumed in them; the ultimate goal is to become liberated from *prakrti*, not to master living in a world of it. The Sankhya *darsana* adopts this philosophy while other sects of Hinduism focus on the mastery of the *tattvas*. *Prakrti* is escapable if one wishes to find true liberation. Sankhya *darsana* tells of the difficulty that is *prakrti*, but encourages and supports that finding one’s true self is much more fulfilling than the materiality of *prakrti* (Widgery 234-237).

**Bibliography**


Parrot, R. J. (1986) "The Problem of the Samkhya Tattvas as Both


Related Research Topics

Sankhya Philosophy

Purusa

Citta

Kaivalya

Darsana

Rajas

Tamas

Sattva

Related Websites

http://hinduwebsite.com/gunas.asp
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prakṛti
http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Tattva
http://www.yinyoga.com/ys1_4.1.1_purusha_prakriti.php
http://hinduonline.co/Scriptures/SankhyaDarshana.html
http://www.mahavidya.ca/sankhya-philosophy/

Article written by: Jillian Koenen (February 2016) who is solely responsible for its content.
The lotus is an iconic flower, originating in Southern Asia, which has claimed a place as a prominent symbol in ancient history, remaining as such today. It is through a combination of religious and symbolic connotations, nutritional and medicinal applications, and sheer aesthetics and laudability in its natural life cycle that have facilitated the lotus’s significance. While there are many species of lotus flowers across Asia, the Hindus’ Sacred Lotus is scientifically known as the *Nelumbo nucifera*. This perennial flower grows in the muddy waters of shallow pools throughout Asia (Kew n.d.). It possesses a unique nanostructure of its leaves which provides an uncanny self-cleaning ability, allowing the flowers to emerge from the mud without tarnish (Kew n.d.). This natural trait has facilitated symbolic reference towards the flower; rising out of the mud, untouched by the filth, resonated with ancient thinkers, philosophers, and religious peoples. Furthermore, beyond its life cycle, the lotus holds many unique properties which benefit human nutrition and health. Studies have found that this ancient plant, consumed throughout Asia, is highly nutritious and retains a number of medicinal properties from gastrointestinal regulation to bad breath remedy to insomnia reduction (Zhang et al 323,324). The relevance to health and wellness worked well with the divine reference in ancient Vedic scripture, where the lotus gained connections to the gods, to build the foundations of an icon.

Even as far back as the holy *sruti* texts of the *Rgveda*, the lotus finds its home in Hinduism’s spiritual origins. One translation of the *Rgveda* expresses the first mention of the lotus in the form of a metaphor (RV 5.LXVIII.7-9). The verse seems to describe a well wish for an unproblematic delivery of a child. One interpretation is that the metaphor of the wind ruffling the lotuses evokes auspiciousness in regard to the delivery (Garzilli 295). The lotus also appears in connection to the birth of Agni in *Rgveda* hymn XVI (Garzilli 300). There Agni is recognized as one of the two most worshipped gods of the scripture alongside Indra, God of Thunder. This initial reference to birth and divinity can be seen as a starting point for the symbolism of the lotus in later literature and practice. Although its presence in the sacred text elevates it to a status of divinity, its connection with the gods does not end with Agni and the *Rgveda*; rather it appears again and again throughout Hindu scripture.

Laksmi is the consort of Visnu, one of the most renowned gods in the Hindu pantheon, and she appears in each of Visnu’s reincarnations as his wife, should he have one. She is seen by the followers of Visnu as the “mother of the world” (Kapoor 1083), and maintains a close connection with the lotus, having her abode within the flowers themselves (Mahabharata LXVI). The *Hindus Encyclopedia of Hinduism* details the story of her birth: from the great churning of the sea, Laksmi was brought forth inhabiting the lotus and was “…covered in ornaments and bearing every auspicious sign…” (Kapoor 1083). She held lotus flowers in each hand and was called the Goddess Padma, meaning Lotus. Laksmi holds many names and many titles, just as the sacred flower does; she is the goddess of
wealth, auspiciousness, fortune and luck. The auspiciousness of the lotus may be due in part to the connection between the flower and the great goddess of luck. Indeed, followers of Vaisnavism, one of the main sects of Hinduism, hold Laksmi in high regard, believing she is the very power of Visnu to govern and protect the universe (Encyclopedia of Asian History 1988). As the goddess of the Lotus, this symbol becomes specifically significant to the Vaisnavas, although its significance is by no means confined to them.

Beyond the auspiciousness and fortune of the lotus in its connection to Laksmi, the creator god Brahma ties in early references of the lotus to the concept of rebirth. Though there are many stories regarding the origins or birth of Brahma, one depicts the god being born on a lotus flower from the navel of Visnu, the great unifying principle (Coulter and Turner 105-106). In fact, it is common for Hindu gods and goddesses to be depicted sitting on a lotus throne, as a gesture of divinity, purity, and a power (Lee and Nadeau 69). Even beyond its connection to the creator god, the lotus is one of Visnu's four attributes, standing as a symbol of creation (Timalsina 70). Furthermore, the sacred plant and deity, Soma, is believed, by some, to be the Sacred Lotus (MacDonald 150-152). Referenced in the Rgveda, (RV 8. XLVIII.3-4,11) Soma is deified, worshipped, and even expressed as offering immortality. There are numerous theories on the true identity of Soma and the Lotus would indeed be a likely candidate with its medicinal properties and previously established connection to the divine.

Each of the factors mentioned have played a role in the Sacred Lotus becoming an icon of Hinduism. The flower’s natural life cycle and biological properties make it both admirable and valuable. Its presence in the Vedas and its connection to popular deities, including its potential identity as a deity (i.e. Soma), make it sacred and spiritual; these aspects, and more, have elevated the wild flower of Asia to an icon of the Hindu faith. And yet, beyond its religious connotations, the sacred symbol of the lotus has spread, with the Hindu tradition, into the very culture of India.

In Indian art and architecture there are 8 symbols of auspiciousness. Among other key symbols like the conch shell (sankha) and the wheel (cakra), the lotus (padma) is incorporated into Indian art, bearing powerful symbolism in regard to divinity, purity, and auspiciousness (Gupta 30). Throughout numerous temples and shrines erected to worship various gods such as Siva and Surya are stone carvings, motifs, and statues accents by the image of the lotus (Harle 139, 144). Beyond the presence of lotus imagery, there is a further, subtle connection between Hindu architecture and the lotus in the very structure of Hindu temples. Rising up in tiered domes, or buds, the temples are said to resemble Mount Meru, a sacred cosmic center in Indian religions (Gupta 30). The mountain itself holds extensive symbolic reference to the cosmic lotus, standing as point of origins of creation and divinity (Mabbett 71,72). The intertwining of lotus imagery and symbolism into such a vast range of concepts as mountains to temples to health to the divine creates a picture of the depth of the symbol's place in Hinduism.

As the powerful symbolism of the lotus transcends the centuries, it ultimately finds its place in the modern day as an icon for businesses, a symbol of peace or tranquility, a reference to Indian religion, and
more contemporarily so, as an image of a movement sweeping
Indian politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a popular political
party in contemporary India with a unique platform of defining “…
Indian culture in terms of Hindu Values…” (Britannica 2014). The
party poses the lotus as their logo, utilizing the religious symbol to
gain the favor of Hindus (Malik and Singh 321). For the Hindu
population, standing behind a banner bearing the Sacred Lotus of
India, a central icon in the ancient tradition, may mean standing
behind Hindutva, or Hindu national identity, embodied in the sacred
meaning of the lotus. This connection between the divine flower and
the national identity of India reveals just how deep the roots of the
lotus symbol are. Even before the rise of the BJP party, the lotus held
the title of national flower for its sacred symbolism, according to the
Government of India (Government of India 2016). The connection
between the Indian subcontinent and the lotus, beyond any single
faith, expresses the significance of the flower even beyond its place
as a religion icon.

To this day, the lotus stands as a symbol related not only to
Hinduism, but also to numerous other religions, historical and
modern alike. The lotus appears historically in ancient Egyptian
religion where it held connections to birth, including that of the sun
god, Ra (Renggli 220), and was used as an apparent hallucinogen
(Sayin 291). Buddhists adopted symbolic meanings of the lotus very
similar to the Hindus, viewing it as a representation of one’s
personal journey through the muddy waters of samsara towards
blossoming, pure and perfect, into Nirvana (Prasophigchana 103-104).
The lotus is also representative of enlightenment through the
idea that those who have attained it will rise above the world like a
lotus rises above the muck and filth. Jains also view the lotus as a
sacred symbol of purity and power. Within the tradition are 14
auspicious dreams and eight auspicious marks, the lotus claiming a
place in both lists (Fischer and Jain 22). The Jains also maintain the
portrayal of their founders (tirthankaras) as seated or standing on
lotus blossoms, as seen Hinduism with respect to their gods (Lee and
Nadeau 69). As the religions of India spread across the globe, the
iconic image of the lotus continued to diversify and grow,
maintaining its significance while transforming with the times. From
the Rgveda to Indian Politics, the sacred flower of Hinduism has
certainly left its mark on history and continues to do so today.

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12: 22. Leiden: Brill

V.78.7, X.184.2, X.107.10, VI.16.13, and VII.33.11, VI.61.2, VIII.1.33,


**Recommended areas of Research:**

Padma (Sanskrit word for Lotus)

8 symbols of auspiciousness

Visnu & Laksmi

Mount Meru

Soma

*Nelumbo nucifera*

**Useful Websites:**

Sacred-texts.com


**Useful Books:**

The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent by James C. Harle

Elements of Indian Art by Swarajya Prakash Gupta

Article written by: Jessica Knoop (April 2016) who is solely responsible for its contents.
Just as in any functioning society, Hindus in India are organized into groups, and the daily interactions that go on within the groups are facilitated by the social class to which one belongs. While outsiders studying the system may see it as extreme and difficult to understand, Hindu lives have functioned within the social system they know and participate in. The caste system in India dates back as far as around 1400 BC, when the Vedic Aryans migrated into Punjab, India and enslaved the groups already inhabiting the land, including the Dravidians. Before migrating to India, the Aryans already had a system of clan divisions, and when they conquered the people they met in India they segregated them from themselves by race, calling themselves the “Arya Varna” (meaning “master class”), and the slaves the “Dasa Varna” (meaning “slave cast”) (Raj 2-3). This simple distinction was the basis for the system that would grow and develop, eventually forming the modern caste system used by Hindus in India today. The social system, based on ethnic, economic, and religious segregation, divides the people into four main classes, or varna. In Sanskrit, varna means “colour”, and it was speculated that this emphasized the segregation of the coloured races, dating back to the Aryans and the conquered peoples. However, this has since been challenged, and it has been suggested that colour was simply used as a means to distinguish people, not relating to ethnicity at all, but more in the way that one could distinguish the color “pink” from “purple” or “white” from “black” (Varna 2016).

The class system is set up with a basis of four main classes (or varnas): the Brahmins, the Ksatriyas, the Vaisyas, and the Sudras. Each class functions according to the expectations they know to be true for their class; expectations which have both evolved and emerged as the history of Hinduism developed. The origins of the four specific varnas are unclear, and different myths and stories have arisen depicting their creation. In one hymn, the Purusasukta, the varnas are said to have developed from the parts and limbs of Purusa. In this depiction, the Brahmin are said to have come from the mouth, the Ksatriya from the arms, the Vaisya from the legs, and the Sudra from the feet (Davis 52). This imagery clearly demonstrates the places each class holds in society. The four classes are also mentioned in the Rg Veda (one of the most influential Hindu texts), but in the form of three classes called Brahma, Ksatra, and Visa (Ghurye 44). The Brahmin class is the uppermost class, consisting of the elite priests. The Brahmin are responsible for the upholding of dharma, as they themselves are held to a high standard of moral behavior. The Brahmins are distinguished from the Ksatriyas by their ritual knowledge. A Brahmin is able to perform rituals, and can offer up prayers for others, especially in the matter of protection of his king (Ghurye 47). The Ksatriyas form the militant
class of India. They are able to carry weapons and it is expected that they would protect the rest of the people in this way. There are some stories of Ksatriyas acting as priests, and the tensions between the Brahmans and the Ksatriyas led to conflict every now and then as they each challenged the authority of the other class. Still, the two classes are known to work closely with each other in order to ensure the function and protection of daily society (Ghurye 50). The Vaisyas constitute the third class, known to be farmers and labourers. This class, best known as "the tenders of cattle", are in a position of uncertainty. The two upper classes can easily be grouped together, as they both display their authority over Indian society, but the Vaisyas can be grouped either up or down, depending on the behaviour or the situation being analyzed (Ghurye 63). In some situations they are seen as an upper class, while in others they are grouped along with the lowest class, the servants. This makes the lines between the classes hard to distinguish at times, and certainly provides an insight into the complexity and difficulty that comes along with trying to understand the caste system. The fourth class is the Sudras, the lowest of the four. The Sudras are a class destined for tedious, unskilled labour, and service of the upper three classes (Davis 52). Participation and placement in the classes are determined by Jati, meaning one’s birth group, from the Sanskrit word “jata”, meaning “born” or “brought into existence” (Jati 2016). In this way, it is understood that birth determines one’s place in the caste system.

Not included in the four varnas are a fifth class, a class so low in the caste system that they are referred to as “Untouchables”, and therefore excluded from the four-varna system. This class, the Dalits, occupy the lowest of the low in Hindu Indian society, and are highly discriminated against in all aspects of life. They are segregated and given the label of poor status in the economy, politics, employment, and so much more (Kaminsky and Long 156-157). As an outsider analyzing the system, it is important to acknowledge the role that the Dalits play in the interactions among the groups, but from a Hindu point of view, the Dalits are totally unacknowledged (Sadangi 18). The people that occupy this class are viewed by the rest of the classes as polluting, and are therefore given the “polluting” tasks in daily life. Ritual purity is an extremely important concept in Hinduism, and tasks are typically assigned levels of purity or pollution. It is of utmost importance that the upper classes maintain their ritual purity, especially the Brahmans, as they need to be ritually pure in order to perform their rituals. The tasks that are too polluting for the four varnas to participate in are given to the Dalits, as they are already polluted in their fundamental status. Besides occupation, Dalits are excluded from all aspects of daily life of Hindus of the other classes, including social and sexual contact, and eating. Contact between the Dalits and the four varnas is controlled and regulated, and eating among the groups is completely and wholly separated (Shrawagi 2006).

While there are multiple terms used today to describe the “untouchables", including Harijan, the term “Dalit" itself, although in existence for hundreds of years, was not always used to classify the excluded class, and was popularised fairly recently by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Mohanty and Malik 114). Ambedkar effectively attacked the Indian caste system in his adult life, basing his entire campaign on the sole foundation of social equality (Jagannathan 2015). Born a
Dalit himself, Ambedkar has successfully created a new definition for the term “Dalits” as a group of people who are “economically abused, politically neglected, educationally backward, and oppressed in religious and cultural ground because of caste discrimination in society” (Mohanty and Malik 114). The Dalit movement in India really began when India gained independence, but the Dalits were still denied any independence or equality in the new society (Sutradhar 91). This desire for equality urged members to begin pushing back against the upper classes. The upper classes traditionally starved the Dalits in social interaction, education, and the economy, believing that if they could maintain their powerless position in society and prevent them from furthering their education of equality and human rights that they could prevent any notions of dissent against the system, and continue to render the Dalits defenseless against the discrimination imposed on them (Sutradhar 94). However, the Dalits, after enduring centuries of abuse and oppression, began to feel angry about their position in society. They were working the land and serving the upper classes with no enjoyment of the fruits of their own labour. Thus, the Dalit movement was born, and fostered in the minds of those fighting for equality among the classes.

Jyotiba Phule was the first to emphasize the importance of the education of Dalits when it came to the Dalit’s movement, recognizing that with education would come the ability to reason and develop rationale, as well as the ability to carve out a place for oneself in politics and the socio-economic world (Sutradhar 96). This sentiment was carried even further by Dr. Ambedkar, who (along with another great thinker, Gandhi) fought for Dalits’ equality. While Ambedkar deeply desired equality among the classes, he recognized the importance of the caste system in daily social structure, and acknowledged the fact that a whole organization of society cannot change overnight without total chaos and disarray ensuing soon after. In this way, he recognized the need for separate-caste marriages, and pushed for smaller movements toward equality. By doing so, he hoped that eventually the Hindu caste system could gradually transition from one embedded in inequality to one with equality at the forefront, redefining daily interactions and social structures.

The Dalit movement is one that has been going on for years, heightening especially in the 1970’s, but is largely ignored in the grand scheme of things (Sutradhar 97). The feelings of exclusion and oppression felt by the Dalits in India continue to motivate them to keep quiet. The feelings of embarrassment and dedication to the caste system that is so deeply entrenched in Hindu thought and beliefs, and the acceptance of the way things are prove to be huge obstacles in the continuation and growth of the movement, not only in India, but on the world stage. Still, thinkers such as Phule, Ambedkar, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan fed the fire that drives the movement. Radhakrishnan had spoken out against the caste system directly, attacking its values. He emphasized the need to abolish the system (and the idea of untouchability) in order to achieve a modern nation with democracy and human rights for all (Minor 386). Today, in a world so focused on human rights, equality, and liberty of all people, the Dalits movement begs for people all over the world to recognize the needs of their friends in India. In order to see change there must be pressure put on the Indian government both
nationally and internationally, and Dalits must come together with non-Dalits in order to achieve a global movement to push for human rights in India to transcend the caste system (Bishwakarma 2015). Until then, over one-sixth of the population of India will continue to live in oppression under the caste system, born into the fate of a Dalit life (Overview of Dalit Human Rights Situation nd).

REFERENCES AND RELATED READING


Related Topics for Further Interest

Cardala
Dharma
Dharma Sastras
Duija
Harijans
Havik Brahmins
Jati

Laws of Manu
Madi
Mallige
Morathas
Mututchchetu
Purusasukta
Rg Veda
Vedas

Websites Related to the Topic

http://www.ncdhr.org.in/


http://www.hrln.org/hrln/dalit-rights.html

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The development and the components of Hindu monasticism may appear complex. Sankara, the famous Indian philosopher, founded a Hindu monastic federation referred to as the Dasanami Order (Wade nd). Hindu monks, known as *samnyasin*, were divided into ten lineages which trace back to Sankara and compose the Dasanami Order. The ten different monk/renouncer groups were then divided up among the four monasteries founded by Sankara (Clark 2). The four monasteries (*mathas*) are located in the east, west, south, and north of India and they are respectively called Govardhan, Sarada, Srngeri, and Jyotir (Clark 115). This order is the most respected and influential in the Hindu tradition (Werner 148).

Historically, it has been viewed that the four monasteries are representative of Sankara’s travel and his spiritual authority. Sankara’s life is regarded as somewhat legendary. He lost his father at a young age and he was an admirer of the *samnyasin* life style. Sources claim that at the age of eight, Sankara was captured by a crocodile while he bathed in a river. Sankara told his mother that if he did not receive her blessing to become a *samnyasin* the crocodile would have taken his life (Pande 31). Historians believe that three factors contribute to why Sankara is held in the highest regard. It is said that Sankara was an incarnation of Siva (Pande 73). His strong connection to and the belief in his embodiment of Siva could be due to Sankara’s connections to miracles. Secondly, the implementation of authentic practices was to emphasize the social and spiritual claims of the reorganized monasteries. The final aspect which made Sankara legendary was the expansion of the Advaitic and non Advaitic schools (Pande 73). The rationales behind legends of his incarnation have been to fortify the Vedic faith and help spread the spiritual way of living across India (Pande 82).

Samnyasin (renouncing) is the final stage of one’s life. One may renounce after they have completed the householders’ stage *grahastha* (Miller 3). However, some Hindus enter renunciation earlier, once they have completed their education, though such young renouncers are less common. A renouncer is considered to be a wise holy man. He is expected to withdraw from society. From that point on, his life is dedicated to the attainment of *moksa* (Werner 147). A renouncer’s withdrawal from society is theoretical because, he may live in close proximity to society and interact with its members however, physical detachment is essential (Olivelle 272).
One must leave their family and possessions in order to discover the meaning of life and gain inner peace (Burghart 635). Renouncers are placed outside of the caste system and are highly valued. A renouncer who receives offerings and praise from Hindus is not uncommon.

Once Hindu monks formally renounce, they are categorized in relation to the method of initiation and their way of life (Wade nd). Renouncers may fall into one of three distinct categories: the dandis, nagas, or paramahamsas. However, all Dasanami consider themselves as Siva (Clémentin 2). Many Dasanami renouncers decorate themselves with rudrākṣa beads and put three white horizontal stripes on their forehead to embody the symbolism of Siva and Viṣnu (Clémentin 3). Each type of renouncer group is affiliated with one of the four monasteries. To formally renounce, a monk must attain a new identity. He is given one of the ten surnames which made him a part of that particular spiritual lineage. The name one receives is linked to the monastery they are associated with and reflects their caste as well as their renouncing lifestyle. The monasteries from the south and west are mainly composed of dandi renouncers. The lineages commonly assigned to these monks, once they formally renounce include: Bharati (speech), Sarasvati (learning), Tirtha (sacred bathing), and Asrama (hermitage). Puri (town) and Giri (hill) are lineages linked to naga renouncers. Other names, sometimes received by all types of renouncers include: Vana (woods), Aranya (forest), Parrata (mountain), and Sagara (ocean) (Dazery na).

Receiving a new name is significant because it symbolizes the relationship one has under a guru which acts as an investiture. An opportunity for the new renouncers to teach and ordain followers is given (Clémentin 16). Once a name is received, one is able to initiate another person into the samnyasin stage of life. All three branches of the Dasanami (dandi, nagas, and the paramahamsa) have networks of mathas (monasteries) spread across India.

The dandis traditionally come from a high caste background and hold knowledge of the Sanskrit language. They are the wanderers who usually carry a staff. The staff may be embellished with a saffron cloth with an axe head under it (Clark 28). Generally, dandi renouncers were previous householders, have short hair, and believe that they are the true samnyasin (Clark 41). Their initiation ceremony is completed by a guru and the name given depends on what matha one is affiliated to (Clark 41). One of the four brahmacari names is given at the ceremony either being Svarup, Prakasa, Ananda or Caitanya (Clark 42). The second ceremony a dandi partakes in is called the viraja home (Clark 89). A short sacred utterance that presumably encapsulates the essential wisdom of Vedanta from the monk’s monastic lineage is spoken (Wade nd).

Renouncers, who fall under the paramahamsa grouping, discard all belongings including their staff, perform the most asceticism and obtain the highest amount of respect (Clark 102). They more frequently live in mathas and are affiliated to an akhara. However, paramahamsan monks are not deeply connected to the akharas life compared to the nagas (Clark 42).

Lower caste members form the naga renouncer group (Clark 39). Some scholars refer to them as “naked fighting monks” (Wade nd). The naga have been known to travel nude and they cover their entire
bodies (sometimes just their private areas) in ash, especially on festive holidays (Clark 35). The nagas are organized into seven akharas (Clark 48). To be initiated into the akhara as a naga, one must go through a third process referred to as the tang tode (Clark 98). This is a unique initiation among the three groups.

Typically, males are the ones who enter the stage of renunciation. However, women renouncers have recently been reported. About ten percent of female renouncers belong to the Dasanami (Clark 31). However, women may become brahmcarini, but they cannot enter the second stage of initiation in becoming "full" samnyasin (Clark 33). Women remove all jewelry as a symbol of their renunciation. The majority of women belong to the paramahamsa renouncer group. Two known monasteries exclusively admit women. The least number of women belong to the naga group (Clark 34).

A life apart from society cultivates detachment through a community which shares similar perspectives (Clémentin 2). Some renouncers may choose to join a monastic community (Tambiah 300). Monastic communities provide a shared living space between many samnyasin monks. It is where asceticism is ingrained through tradition (Clémentin 2). This concept of communal settlement was introduced by Sankara, and is referred to as the matha system (Miller 4). The purpose was to create a sense of solidarity through group support. The matha was a larger unit comprised of temples, a traditional Sanskrit school, a library, and a shelter for lay followers (Clémentin 4). The caste system was embedded into the institution. Individuals were born to specific gurus. Gurus raised money to support children’s education for their caste (Aya 58). Donations from patrons allow for monks to teach, provide medical care, and help feed the community (Miller 5). Service to the community was viewed as important and resembled Hindu cohesion. Monks may continue traveling, but if they remain in a community for an extended period of time they are less respected, except if it is the rainy season (Olivelle 271). Clémentin addresses that, “the important point to stress is that they do not owe their allegiance to a monastery, but to a lineage of spiritual succession” (3). Sankara’s successor, a Sankaracarya (head of 1 of the 4 monasteries) essentially becomes “the teacher of the world” by representing the founder of his lineage (Clémentin 6). Sankaracaryas have substantial spiritual power and settle disputes within the matha by helping with court cases (Clark 79). For example, cases may include initiation and personal affairs, adultery, abuse, and caste pollution. Sankaracaryas help decide the punishment of a fine, a fine, forms of social exclusion, and sometimes even excommunication ceremonies (Clark 80).

The origins of the Dasanami Samnyasin illustrate the prominence of Sankara’s philosophical influence in creating the order. Spiritual lineages of the samnyasin monks are traced back to Sankara. The samnyasins acquire a new religious identity in which they abide by certain roles, codes, and practices (Clark 2). The different groupings of renouncers across the four cardinal directions are symbolic of Sankara’s spiritual journey and the prominence of Brahman (Wade nd). The caste system is significant to the Dasanami Order because it allows for different renouncer groups to exist. Subtle differences exist among the samnyasins such as, their appearance, initiation process, status, and their affiliation to a distinct lineage (Clark 39). The matha system was important for the development of education
and philosophical ideas for the samnyasin and their lay followers (Clémentin 4). Life consisted of days of expressing bhakti in prayer, meditation, and lectures (Werner 147). Overall, evidence suggests that the Dasanami Order has been very influential and is a representation of Sankara’s philosophy.

References and Further Recommended Readings


Topics for Further Investigation

The Ramanadi Order

Bhakti

Guru

The Four Monasteries
Noteworthy Websites


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Article written by: Miranda Deringer (March 2016) who is solely responsible for its content.
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Post-Modernists argue that post-modern society is different to... Essentially, what is different, according to Post-Modernists, is that those stable institutions which used to bind us together have much less influence now, and with the rise of globalisation and New Media technologies, individuals are much more free to construct their culture and identity that they once were. Sociologists disagree as to exactly when post-modernism started. For some, the roots of it lie in early modernity, for others, post-modernism does not properly begin until the 1970s, still others argue (Giddens) that we don't even live in a post-modern society at all! View Revitalization Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. The Black Hawk War was a nativist resistance and revitalization movement, the ideological roots of which stretched back more than a century and reached their culmination during the War of 1812. The advent of settler colonialism in the more.

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reached their culmination during the War of 1812. The advent of settler colonialism in the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley after the War of 1812 kept these earlier nativist ideas alive, although