Hinduism and Religious Freedom: A Sourcebook of Scriptural, Theological, and Legal Texts

The Religious Freedom Project
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs
Georgetown University

Author of Introduction and Commentary:
Sara Singha, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Berkley Center

Advisor:
Anuttama Dasa, International Director of Communications and Member of the Governing Body Commission, International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Editor:
Timothy Samuel Shah, Director for International Research, Religious Freedom Research Project, Berkley Center

APRIL 2017

The author and editor gratefully acknowledge the many individuals who contributed to the drafting of this sourcebook with their suggestions, comments, expert review, and research assistance. They particularly thank Anuttama Dasa, who provided extensive advice and critical feedback, as well as Thomas Farr, Claudia Winkler, Nicholas Fedyk, and Chad Bauman. The final content of the sourcebook is the sole responsibility of the Religious Freedom Project and the principal authors.

The research for this RFP publication was carried out in collaboration with the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University. This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.
## Table of Contents

- **Introduction** ...................................................................................... 3
- **The Ancient Period (1500 BCE-475 CE)** ............................................ 19
  - The Ancient Period: Sources................................................................. 21
    - Scriptural Texts.................................................................................... 21
    - Legal and Political Texts.................................................................... 44
- **The Medieval Period (500 CE-1500 CE)** ........................................... 52
  - The Medieval Period: Sources................................................................. 54
    - Theological and Philosophical Texts...................................................... 54
- **The Modern Period (1750 CE-Present)** ............................................. 62
  - The Modern Period: Sources................................................................. 65
    - Philosophical Texts.............................................................................. 65
    - Legal and Political Texts.................................................................... 91
- **Endnotes** .......................................................................................... 109
OVERVIEW

It is difficult to speak of Hinduism and religious freedom in general terms. Unlike Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, there is no single, central, guiding text in the Hindu tradition. Nor, as in Buddhism, is there a central founding figure. Rather, Hinduism consists of a number of highly diverse and complex texts, practices, and traditions that were refined over many centuries. A further complication is that developments in Hinduism were—and remain—intimately entwined with the social, cultural, and political history of the vast Indian subcontinent. Today the Republic of India is the world’s largest Hindu-majority country and home to 96 percent of the world’s Hindus. There are also large Hindu populations in Nepal and Sri Lanka and a sizable diaspora scattered throughout the world. This produced a fluid and diverse collection of Hindu texts, traditions, and movements in both ancient and modern times, which contained a wide range of messages about religious freedom and religious tolerance. Overall, as the texts compiled in this sourcebook indicate, Hinduism has a long and complex history of engaging the issues and principles at the heart of religious freedom.

The term “Hindu” first occurred as a geographical marker to describe the people who lived beyond the river Indus (Sindhu). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the term Hindu was used in the subcontinent for people bound by particular ritual practices, including cremation of the dead and certain dietary

---

i. The understanding of religious freedom adopted by the Religious Freedom Project is robust and has two parts. First is the right to believe or not (freedom of belief or of conscience); to worship, alone or with others; and to exit religious groups because of belief or conscience. These components of religious freedom are essentially interior (belief and conscience) or private (worship). As such, they are, or ought to be, virtually absolute. There is no legitimate rationale for their restriction by any human agent, including governments. The second element entails both individuals and groups, and has distinctive public dimensions. It includes the rights of individuals and groups to act in civil and political society on the basis of religious conscience or belief, within very broad limits equally applied to all—religious or not. This two-part understanding of religious freedom, with its robust public components, is probably not fully present within any religious tradition or nation until the modern era. Even then, the degree of religious freedom present in any given nation was, and continues to be, contingent on historical and contemporary forces that may or may not be related to the dominant religious tradition. Restrictions on religious freedom, especially in its public forms, result from a variety of conditions, including communism, religious nationalism, violent religious extremism, and aggressive modern secularism.
codes. The attempt to develop and impose “Hinduism” as a systematic category did not occur until British colonial rule (c. 1858-1947). During this period, there was a widespread movement by British administrators and scholars to homogenize the diversity of Hindu practices under the single category of “Hinduism.”

However, as an amalgamation of divergent rituals, beliefs, and practices that developed gradually over many centuries, Hinduism defies traditional boundaries. Hinduism emerged from a variety of antecedent traditions, some possibly brought by Aryan peoples who may have migrated to the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia. This complex development yielded a rich textual tradition compromised of sacred literature as well as distinctive religious practices, including devotional songs and poetry, forms of meditation, and physical discipline (yoga). Religious studies scholar Gerald Larson likens this complexity to an immense banyan tree with a wide-ranging network of trunks, branches, and roots that are distinct yet interconnected.

In this sourcebook, we explore the varied ways in which Hinduism and Hindus have wrestled with religious freedom across the centuries. We examine how Hindu reformers have frequently sought to interpret the tradition as pluralistic. We also examine the challenges that more exclusivist outlooks pose for a robust understanding of religious freedom.

At times, Hinduism’s complex and dynamic relationship with religious freedom has been mediated by its interaction—sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflictual—with other religious traditions and communities. Because the Hindu tradition is so vast, fluid, and dynamic, it often has an absorptive quality. In ancient and medieval times, Hinduism often incorporated other religious rituals into its plural framework of multiple gods and religious expressions. However, these encounters were at times more confrontational. First under Islamic rule and later under Western colonial rule, Hinduism was more cautious about sharing ritual and social space with “external” religions. In general, the presence of non-indigenous religions raised fears about proselytizing. Conversion could disturb the sacred order by leading people away from their dharma, or “sacred duty.”

The diversity of Hindu postures vis-à-vis religious freedom—ranging from more pluralistic postures to more exclusivist and restrictive ones—is visible on the subcontinent today. In India, for example, forms of exclusivism have led on occasion to legal and extra-legal efforts to prohibit proselytizing as well as
attempts to reconvert those who have left Hinduism back to the Hindu fold. Similarly, the new constitution of Nepal, adopted in September 2015, expressly forbids “convert[ing] another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardize other’s religion.” While opposition to proselytism and conversion in many countries has political and social dimensions, theological arguments and considerations often fuel exclusivism and opposition to religious freedom. In this sourcebook, we note some of the arguments for curtailing religious freedom that have emerged from within the Hindu tradition at various points in its long and complex history. At the same time, we highlight the fact that many Hindu leaders have embraced a far-reaching religious pluralism, arguing that all paths to the divine or to spiritual enlightenment are valid and worthy of respect and protection on the broad grounds of spiritual and religious freedom.

**TEXTUAL TRADITION**

At the heart of the Hindu textual tradition are the four Vedas—*Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*. Composed in Sanskrit between 1500 and 500 BCE, these are considered revealed texts, or Shruti, and authoritative sources of dharma by most Hindus. A central focus of the Vedas was the relationship between ritual purity and the preservation of social order, including the cosmos. The Upanishads, composed between 800 and 500 BCE, are complex commentaries on the Vedas and part of the Shruti canon. Other texts, called Smriti, are considered non-revealed but nonetheless significant sources of moral guidance. These texts include the Laws of Manu or *Manu Smriti* and the *Vagnvalka Smriti*.

A prevalent motif in Smriti texts is that caste is one aspect of maintaining social order. These texts assert that society has a divine order that is traditionally divided into four castes or classes: Brahmanas, who are the priests, religious leaders, and intellectuals; Kshatriyas, the rulers; Vaisyas, the merchants; and Shudras, the working class. Only the first three castes are “twice-born” because they are eligible to participate in the sacred thread ceremony, a holy ritual in which males are initiated or reborn into a second and purer life as strict followers of Hindu teaching.

Smriti texts and their teachings about caste have sometimes inspired religio-political mobilization and social critique. One element of caste teaching that has proven an ongoing focus of intense controversy concerns the status and religious freedom of Dalits, a fifth caste known as the “untouchables” (Dalit literally
means “broken”). Dalits are seen as ritually unclean and therefore confined to the margins of society and unable to enter certain temples or perform certain religious ceremonies. The Laws of Manu is one example of a Smriti text that accentuates the distinctions—ritual and social—between higher castes and lower castes, particularly the Dalits.

In contrast, other texts in the Smriti tradition present a more liberal and inclusive view of the relationship between God and humanity. The period between 500 BCE and 500 CE produced the great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. A portion of the Mahabharata known as the Bhagavad Gita rose to prominence as a central spiritual text. The Gita is a detailed dialogue between a prince, Arjuna, and his divine charioteer, Krishna. It delineates the distinctions between liberation and action and presents a synthesis of dharma (sacred duty) and bhakti (personal devotion). This dialogue is of enormous significance because the Gita is a central source of moral teaching for many Hindu reformers, and the concept of bhakti it valorizes is central to spiritual freedom or liberation for most Hindus.8

The vast variety of Hindu texts, rituals, and practices has created varying degrees of tension between the inclusive potential of Hindu concepts of spiritual liberation on one hand, and the sociopolitical restrictions on religious freedom on the other. Some political and religious authorities have advocated for the latter in the name of Hindu tradition, while many modern reformers challenge such teachings about purity, pollution, and caste.

SPIRITUAL FREEDOM AND LIBERATION

A central feature of Hindu spiritual practice focuses on personal freedom or liberation. For many Hindus, this liberation, known as moksha, is a significant spiritual goal. To this end, practicing Hindus seek liberation from desire, attachment (physical and psychological), and the cycle of action (karma) and rebirth (samsara). The rules for moksha are guided by precepts of duty, law, obligation, and social order through a complex system called dharma.

The Shruti texts, including the Vedas and Upanishads, contain contradictory messages regarding moksha. For example, not all Hindus can or should seek moksha. A Hindu in the householder stage of his life is not encouraged to seek moksha because he must tend to his duties as father, husband, and provider. Such restrictions on moksha stem from asrama—or the stage of one’s life in the Hindu ritual tradition. Battles over ritual purity have at times also complicated
the path to moksha for many Hindus. These restrictions are based on varna, or caste identity. Even today, there is dispute as to whether moksha is available to all Hindus or only to upper castes. The Laws of Manu, in particular, delineate several caste-related precepts that effectively restrict low-caste Hindus from engaging in sacred study and, in some cases, from temple and ritual worship.

As a spiritual counterpoint to the emphasis on caste distinctions and formal religious ritual, the Hindu bhakti, or tradition of personal religious devotion, emerged. Though its origins are ancient, bhakti flourished in the Medieval Period (500 CE-1500 CE). In contrast to external religious forms or rituals as guarantors of purity and cosmic order, bhakti stresses the essential importance of personal love and devotion to the divine and its various manifestations. For some, bhakti means devotion to the various devas or deities, or to the powerful governors of universal forces (such as the god of the sun or the god of fire). For others, the ultimate goal is to experience Brahman, the absolute divine being and ground of the universe, unmediated by anthropomorphic or iconic expressions. This philosophy, known as Advaita Vedanta (“not two”), holds that Brahman, the supreme god of the universe, is one, whole, and complete, and that human selves or souls (atman) are not ontologically distinct from Brahman. Advaita plays a critical role in the thought of many modern Hindu reformers, some of whom utilize this concept to assert that all religions are valid and equal paths to Brahman, akin to multiple rivers flowing to the same ocean. As the Rigveda proclaims, “Truth is one; sages call it by various names.”

The most revered Hindu text treating the relationship between bhakti and moksha is the Bhagavad Gita. As noted above, the Gita chronicles the conversation between Krishna, an avatara or manifestation of Lord Vishnu, and Arjuna, a prince. The dialogue occurs on the eve of a great battle, when Arjuna stands frozen and is unable to act because of his unwillingness to fight an opposing army comprised of family members and teachers. His divine charioteer, Lord Krishna, teaches Arjuna that there are three paths (margas) to moksha: karma, bhakti, and jnana. Karma is the path of action, bhakti is the path of devotion, and jnana is the path of knowledge. Krishna teaches that each marga is valid and reveals that Arjuna’s proper path is to find fulfillment through acting and devotion (bhakti). Therefore, he encourages him to fight. He also teaches Arjuna to “[be] intent on action, not on the fruits of action.” This concept is of particular significance in the Hindu spiritual tradition. The “fruits of action” in this context are those things from which Hindus seek liberation, including attachment to worldly desires or needs. The lesson Krishna imparts is that moksha can be achieved only when actions are embraced and undertaken
out of spiritual duty (dharma) and not out of concern for their consequences, whether positive or negative. This is not “indifference,” but instead a worldview in which all freely chosen human action is, or can be, a form of devotion to God.

Apart from the Gita, the devotional pursuit of moksha finds other expressions in Hindu traditions and practices. Each selection in this sourcebook amplifies the dynamic relationship between moksha, the individual Hindu, and the three paths described in the Gita. Some texts focus on personal devotion or bhakti to Brahman, while others are mystical hymns to the goddess Kali. For example, the Mundaka Upanishad states: “Self-luminous is Brahman, ever present in the hearts of all. He is the refuge of all, he is the supreme goal.” This text illustrates the development of Advaita Vedanta philosophy, which states that Brahman is the one ultimate reality underlying all thoughts, words, and deeds. Similarly, bhakti is evident in Ramprasad’s hymns to the goddess Kali: “Drive me out of my mind, O Mother! […] In the stormy ocean without boundary, pure love, pure love, pure love.” Bhakti is also an integral feature in the poetry of the mystic poet-saint Kabir.11 “When I am parted from my Beloved [god], my heart is full of misery. […] There is no other satisfaction, save in the encounter with the Beloved.” Such hymns and poetry reinforce the teachings of the Gita that individuals can find spiritual liberation through a determined yet freely chosen physical and psychological detachment from the fruits of action.

Other traditions in Hinduism speak of moksha through the path of jnana, or knowledge. The jnana tradition stresses that while objects are real, attachment to them is illusory. This relationship is expressed in the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam: “Thus the incessant sojourns in this wheel of Samsara, the constant rounds of births and deaths never end. O Knower of everything! Thus, without jnana, mukti (liberation) never comes to men.” Such devotional texts indicate that one path to moksha is through a kind of higher knowledge that rises above physical and psychological attachment to material objects and karmic action.

However, this exploration of moksha raises questions about inclusivity and exclusivity. On one hand, there are many paths to spiritual liberation in the Hindu tradition. A crucial factor in many of them is bhakti. This form of devotion is deeply personal, individual, and affective. By its nature, therefore, it must be embraced in freedom to be effectual and cannot be elicited or enhanced by external coercion or manipulation. Through personal, focused devotion, the individual Hindu learns that all actions can become forms of voluntary sacrifice that raise self-awareness about the intricate relationship between God and
humanity. And some parts of the Hindu tradition emphasize that this devotion through voluntary sacrifice is available to everyone, regardless of social status or gender. As the Gita explicitly affirms:

The leaf or flower or fruit or water that he offers with devotion, I take from the man of self-restraint in response to his devotion (9:26).

If they rely on me, Arjuna, women [striyos], commoners [vaisyas], men of low rank [shudras], even men born in the womb of evil, reach the highest way (9:32).\(^\text{12}\)

On the other hand, according to some forms of traditional Hinduism, moksha may not be ritually accessible to everyone. For example, as noted earlier, Hindu tradition sometimes excluded low-caste Hindus, Dalits, and most women from Vedic study and religious rituals considered essential for spiritual devotion and liberation.

In some cases, furthermore, ancient Hindu tradition laid down the clear expectation that political rulers and legal institutions enforce religious restrictions and forms of exclusivity, which were often related to caste. In pre-modern India, kings could lose their sacrosanct status if they failed to safeguard the order of society as laid down in the sacred texts, including the enforcement of caste distinctions. “If [the king] infringed sacred custom too blatantly he incurred the hostility of the brahmanas, and often of the lower orders also.” The Mahabharata authorized rebellion against any king who failed to protect society’s sacred structure. This was not mere theory. “More than one great dynasty, such as the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas, fell as a result of brahmanic intrigue.”\(^\text{13}\) Historically, in other words, some features of the Hindu tradition placed significant pressure on political rulers to recognize and enforce religious restrictions and caste hierarchies with the force of law.

**Sociopolitical Dimensions of Religious Freedom**

As the preceding sketch of ancient Hindu tradition vis-à-vis religious freedom already suggests, a complete understanding of the relationship between Hinduism and religious freedom requires some attention to the social and political contexts in which this relationship has unfolded across history. Attention to social and political context requires, in turn, special attention to
the Indian subcontinent, which has always been, and continues to be, home to the vast majority of the world’s Hindus.

In properly focusing attention on India, however, one must guard against conflating the Indian nation-state with Hinduism, or equating India’s approach to religious freedom with that of the Hindu tradition. Rather than assume a one-to-one correspondence between India and Hinduism, one must acknowledge that the interplay of law, politics, and Hinduism on the subcontinent has played an important role in influencing the ideas and practices of many important Hindu leaders and Hindu movements vis-à-vis religious freedom. One must also recognize that Hindu ideas and movements play an ongoing role in shaping India’s legal and political development.

One important example of the decisive interplay of Hinduism and political dynamics on the Indian subcontinent was the explosion of modern Hindu reform movements. These movements exercised a significant influence on India’s religious and political life as well as on the understanding and practice of religious freedom in the subcontinent.

Emerging in the nineteenth century and growing in vitality and influence in the twentieth century, Hindu reform movements attempted to reinvigorate both Hinduism and Indian society after centuries in which non-Hindus dominated the subcontinent’s religious, cultural, and political life. By the time the East India Company took control of the subcontinent in 1757, many of the region’s Hindus had lived under Islamic rule for some 700 years. Under the rule of the East India Company (1757-1857) and then the British Raj (1858-1947), as well as under colonial rulers like France and Portugal in some regions going back to the sixteenth century, Hinduism was increasingly confronted by Western missionary efforts as well as by Orientalist critique and condescension. To many Westerners, the Hindu tradition was saturated with superstition, cruelty, and backwardness, including idol worship, widow burning (sati), and child marriage. Westerners also criticized caste-related social exclusion and marginalization.

This growing Hindu vulnerability and defensiveness helped to catalyze a variety of Hindu reform movements. In response to the domination and critique they faced from non-Hindus, one strategy many Hindu reformers favored was to reinterpret Hindu texts and traditions in order to accommodate and incorporate modern liberal principles of equality and freedom, including religious freedom. For example, they criticized and re-interpreted sacred texts
in the Hindu canon they judged to be restrictive, exclusivist, and hierarchical, such as those prescribing caste regulations and those privileging upper caste status instead of bhakti.

One major focal point of reinterpretation was the Laws of Manu, which privileged members of the highest priestly caste—the Brahmanas or Brahmins (not to be confused with Brahman, the absolute divine being and ground of the universe). According to the Laws of Manu, the priestly caste legitimately claimed a higher social status because they possessed greater purity than the lower castes and controlled access to religious rituals. In Manu’s cosmology, social order was hierarchically arranged, and high-caste Hindus occupied a position superior to that of low-caste Hindus. This arrangement appears to enjoy a theological basis in the Laws of Manu, because the text suggests that caste duties and occupations are assigned at birth and divinely sanctioned. Manu states, “For the protection of this whole creation, the One of dazzling brilliance assigned separate activities for those born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet. To Brahmins, he assigned reciting and teaching the Veda, offering and officiating at sacrifices, and receiving and giving gifts. To the Ksatriya, he allotted protecting the subjects, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda and avoiding attachment to sensory objects. And to the Vaisya, looking after animals, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, trade, moneylending, and agriculture.” One traditional Brahmanical interpretation of this text is based on interdependence. In this system, the liberation of high-caste Hindus depends on the subservience of low-caste Hindus.

However, Hindu reformers from both low-caste and high-caste backgrounds challenged this reading. The issue, they claimed, was that the spiritual value of interdependence should not be used to justify religious or social doctrines of inherent inequality and ritual pollution premised on a fixed boundary between pure and impure castes. Moreover, Hindu reformers pointed out that questionable theological interpretations of many Brahmanical texts played a role in defining and reinforcing caste consciousness in Indian society. Dalit communities argue that religio-social discrimination is based at least partly on concepts of purity and pollution expounded in Brahmanical texts, particularly Manu.

The Indian Constitution, the Nepali Constitution, and international law ban religious and social discrimination on grounds of “untouchability,” and caste-based prejudice and exclusion are showing some signs of dissipating. However, in the experience of many low-caste Hindus and Dalits, caste-related
marginalization remains significant. Even today, there is evidence that Dalits face significant segregation and discrimination in some parts of India.\textsuperscript{15}

In response, many reformers have proposed specific strategies—\textit{theological}, social, and political—to ameliorate the religious and social divisiveness in Hindu society. In the process of critique and reform, Hindu thought about the sociopolitical dimensions of religious freedom has also shifted. Some Hindu reformers have challenged norms of social inequality and fought against caste-based discrimination. These thinkers have utilized methods to reform, unify, and invigorate Hinduism from within.

Meanwhile, other reformers have focused on threats and challenges external to Hinduism. They have sought to reform Hinduism in large part by strengthening its capacity to resist and combat these external challenges, by assertive and aggressive measures if necessary. These external pressures include the expansion of non-indigenous religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, through unethical methods of proselytism or evangelism. In this section, we “map” these movements and their significance to the changes in sociopolitical religious freedom in modern Hinduism.

One of the most significant Hindu reformers was Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). Roy was a Hindu from a Bengali Brahman family who was influenced by Sufism, missionary Christianity, and the secular European Enlightenment. Roy was distressed that Hinduism was seen by most colonials as a ritualistic and primitive tradition. He believed in a transcendent and ineffable God and devalued the worship of the divine being through images. He fought to abolish practices such as child-marriage and widow-burning (sati). “Idolatry,” wrote Roy, “as now practiced by our countrymen… is not only rejected by the \textit{Shastra}s [scriptural texts] universally, but must also be looked upon with great horror by common sense.” In place of a tradition-bound Hinduism that Roy considered antithetical to freedom and progress, he promoted a spiritual Hinduism based on his reading of the Vedas and Upanishads. Along with Debendranath Tagore, father of the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, Roy founded a movement in Calcutta in 1828, the Brahmo Samaj.

After Roy’s death, his teachings inspired another movement, the Arya Samaj, founded by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883). Like Roy, Saraswati tried to cleanse Hinduism of ritual worship. The Arya Samaj initially focused on reforming the caste system and democratizing the tradition by educating a wider circle of Hindus—including women and members of some lower castes—in the
Shruti texts. Saraswati bemoaned the fact that “the Brahmans, who were the custodians of the Vedas, forbade its recital before a Shudra or women,” whereas he sought to make the Vedas “public property.”

While such reform movements were successful in reevaluating the significance of ritual and caste in the tradition, some also engendered more exclusivist interpretations of Hinduism. For example, after Saraswati’s death, the Arya Samaj continued its reform project through sometimes aggressive proselytizing known as “Sanskritization.” This agenda sought to place Hinduism at the center of the nation-state—as a centripetal force for both religious and national allegiance. The Arya Samaj was instrumental in launching a campaign by Hindu revivalists to promote the use of the shuddhi, or purification ceremony. Importantly, part of the reformist and egalitarian impulse behind the use of the shuddhi ceremony among Dalit Hindus was that it would “purify” them so that they would not be treated as inferior. However, the ritual was also used to Hinduize many Dalits who had converted out of Hinduism to Christianity or Islam (often many generations before) as well as tribal peoples who had never been Hindu. Such use of the shuddhi ceremony as an instrument of proselytization became a new trend for conservative Hinduism, partially because of a fear that conversions to other faiths would foster the division and disintegration of the Indian polity.

These issues of conversion and proselytism remain a major source of tension in India, particularly for Dalits, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims. In general, Hinduism is not a missionizing or proselytizing religious tradition. However, revivalist organizations are re-evaluating the need to proselytize. For example, the World Hindu Council (Vishva Hindu Parishad or VHP) founded in 1964 has periodically attempted to oppose and limit conversionary efforts by non-Hindu groups through legal and political efforts as well as through social and cultural mobilization.

Several reform movements were also influenced by political issues such as colonialism and the demand for Indian independence. In many ways, India’s growing self-assertion at a political level was inevitably intertwined with questions about Indian national identity and its relationship to Indian religion and culture. This is evident in the philosophy espoused by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), a revolutionary Hindu and fierce opponent of British rule. Savarkar was a nationalist; he outlined his particular form of nationalism in a 1928 pamphlet entitled Hindutva, or “Hindu-ness.” The term Hindutva emerged from Savarkar’s patriotism and his fervent desire to unite all Indians, regardless of sect or caste.
For Savarkar, national identity was not separate from Hinduism. At the same time, Hinduism was not primarily a matter of confession or theological doctrine. Probably an atheist himself, Savarkar promoted the view that Hindus comprise all those who consider India their *pitribhumi*, or “fatherland,” and their *punyabhumi*, or “holy land.” To be a true Indian, in other words, one needed a sense of personal and even quasi-religious devotion to the Indian nation-state.

While this definition of Hindutva appears inclusive, it places adherents of religious traditions that do not originate in India and whose holy lands lay elsewhere—particularly Muslims and Christians—in a defensive position. While ostensibly cultural or political, Savarkar’s conception of nationalism leaves little room to respect the equal citizenship of non-Hindus whose highest religious allegiance may lie somewhere outside—or above—the *punyabhumi* of India. It is not clear, in other words, that a nation organized around Savarkar’s Hindu nationalism could fully respect the religious freedom of non-Hindu Indians.¹⁶

The Hindutva ideology that emerged from the modern Hindu reformation continues to have sociopolitical influence on contemporary India. Just like Savarkar, the modern Hindu-nationalist movement—represented by organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founded in 1925, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) founded in 1980, and the VHP—contends that India and Indians are Hindu at their core, at least culturally. Unity is possible if Indians and the government respect the nation’s essential “Hindu-ness.”

Hindu-nationalist groups have sometimes engaged in direct and violent attacks on non-Hindu individuals, communities, and sacred sites. Perhaps most provocative was the 1992 destruction of a mosque that many believed was built on the birthplace of Ram, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. The attack triggered violence between Hindus and Muslims throughout India. Hindu-nationalist inspired individuals or organizations have also periodically engaged in other forms of violence. Churches and Christian institutions in southeastern Gujarat were destroyed in 1998; Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons were murdered in Odisha in 1999; a pogrom killed some 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, in Gujarat in 2002; and widespread attacks on Christian homes and churches killed dozens of people and left many thousands homeless in Odisha in 2007 and 2008.

In recent years, Hindu-nationalist politicians have successfully promoted measures in some Indian states (such as Gujarat and Rajasthan) to regulate
and restrict proselytization and conversion. Many of those who promote such anti-conversion laws argue that they are needed to prevent the use of coercion, fraud, or material inducement to convert poor and vulnerable members of “scheduled castes” (Dalits that can receive affirmative action benefits from the Indian government) and “scheduled tribes” (indigenous or tribal communities of low socioeconomic status). Such state-level anti-conversion laws criminalize efforts to convert someone by coercion or inducement—terms that are not clearly defined—and in some versions also require that any conversion from Hinduism be registered with local government officials. A 1950 presidential order had already greatly disincentivized conversions by low-caste individuals from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity. The decree notes that only Hindu Dalits (or religions connected to Hinduism such as Buddhism and Sikhism) are eligible for “scheduled caste” status to receive government benefits, and that Hindu Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam are no longer eligible.

In contrast to these movements, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi also promoted a reformed Hinduism. Like Savarkar, Gandhi fused religion, politics, and social progress. “I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics,” Gandhi declared in his publication Harijan in 1938. “The whole gamut of man’s activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into watertight compartments.” Among other aims, Gandhi attempted to end untouchability as well as traditional restrictions on the freedom and dignity of lower castes. However, his efforts had limited success. Gandhi attracted criticism when he opposed the efforts of Dalits to secure reserved seats in the Indian Parliament, fearing the measure would augment caste division. Eschewing top-down institutional change, Gandhi believed that it was the responsibility of every individual Hindu to end caste discrimination. This conservative strain in Gandhi’s outlook also led him to criticize religious conversion, which he saw as divisive. Gandhi was hostile to Dalit conversions to Christianity even when Indian Anglican Bishop V.S. Azariah confronted him with evidence that such conversions were voluntary and enhanced the dignity of many untouchables. Gandhi even declared in 1935 that “[i]f I had power and could legislate, I should certainly stop all proselytizing.”

In response to these sociopolitical tensions, one Indian leader who fought for freedom—including freedom of religious conversion—was the Dalit reformer B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956). Born into an untouchable family in Maharashtra,
Ambedkar earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University, where he studied with philosopher John Dewey. After graduating, Ambedkar returned to India and played a central role in drafting the constitution of post-independence India. In this capacity, he helped draft a provision for the protection of religious freedom, which eventually became Article 25: “[A]ll persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise [sic] and propagate religion.” He also sought to reform the caste system and ultimately urged low-caste Hindus to convert to another religion. Through conversion, Ambedkar argued, “the Untouchables will be members of a community whose religion has universalized and equalized all values of life. Such a blessing is unthinkable for them while they are in the Hindu fold.” Ambedkar’s ideas of religious freedom were not popular among many traditional, high-caste Hindus, who found conversion subversive. The controversy came to a head in 1956 when Ambedkar and some 500,000 Dalits converted to Buddhism in a public ceremony in Nagpur. Millions of Dalits have since followed Ambedkar’s example, converting out of Hinduism to Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam.

In 2013, Narendra Modi was selected to lead the campaign of the Hindu-nationalist BJP in India’s 2014 national parliamentary elections. Modi is a stalwart, self-declared Hindu nationalist and long-time leader of the hardline RSS, which he joined as a boy. His candidacy became particularly controversial when some claimed that, as chief minister of Gujarat state in western India, he was complicit in severe religious violence that occurred there in 2002—violence in which Muslims constituted the majority of the victims. Modi’s alleged involvement in anti-Muslim violence led the United States to revoke Modi’s visa in 2005 under a new provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act (Section 212 (a) (2) (G)), which came into effect pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. According to the provision, “Any alien who, while serving as a foreign government official, was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom, as defined in section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6402), is inadmissible.” The definition of “particularly severe” includes “flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty or security of persons.”

In May 2014, the BJP won a landslide national electoral victory, securing an outright majority in India’s lower house of parliament, or Lok Sabha, and Modi was sworn in as the fifteenth prime minister of the Indian Republic. Many observers credited Modi for downplaying Hindu-nationalist themes during the electoral campaign to focus on economic growth, development, and governance. However, others expressed concern about the impact a Modi-led
BJP government might have on religious minorities. For example, a report by a coalition of civil society activists and organizations claims that some 600 violent incidents against religious minorities occurred in the one-year period following Modi’s swearing-in as prime minister (May 26, 2014 to May 13, 2015). On the other hand, at an event honoring Indian Catholic saints in February 2015, Modi declared, “My government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence.” He added, “My government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly.” Significantly, however, the prime minister’s remarks pointedly declined to make any reference to the notion that religious freedom might include the right to propagate one’s religion (as expressly recognized in Article 25 of the Indian Constitution) or to try to convert others to one’s religion by peaceful, non-coercive means.

As mentioned earlier, conversion is also a pertinent concern in modern Nepal, a country that has recently embraced democratic reforms after centuries of living under a Hindu monarchy. In addition, diaspora communities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada are altering the demography of Hindus overseas and in some instances engaging in their own forms of proselytism. These movements, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have engendered new conversations in the tradition about religious conversion to Hinduism by people who are unconnected to the Indian subcontinent. Whether these conversions are permissible in light of traditional doctrine and what new challenges they pose to the concept of dharma have become live and controversial questions. The issue of conversion to Hinduism stems again from the ongoing influence of the concept of caste. Orthodoxy maintains that one cannot convert into a caste, and without caste membership one is not fully Hindu. At the same time, it is indisputable that many western people are converting to Hinduism because of their interaction with diaspora communities. Whether the frequently absorptive quality of Hinduism will enfold these new converts into the tradition remains unresolved for now.

These and a host of other issues in modern India indicate that the dynamic relationship between Hinduism and religious freedom will play a crucial role in defining the future of the world’s largest democracy. While modern India is not a Hindu nation in a constitutional or juridical sense, many legal restrictions, reform movements, and religio-social changes have occurred because of
Hinduism’s powerful and perennial influence on the political environment. From Gandhi to Ambedkar, from Savarkar to Modi, Hindus and Indians alike have struggled with a host of questions that have a direct bearing on religious freedom, including the nature and availability of spiritual liberation, the legitimacy of the caste system, the permissibility of proselytism and conversion, and the proper relationship between national identity, religion, and politics. Drawing on the rich diversity of their religious and cultural traditions, Hindus have developed powerful arguments, traditions, and practices that justify a robust conception of religious freedom, but they have also articulated strong reasons to restrict its meaning and scope. Ultimately, the beliefs and practices of Hindus—who constitute some 15 percent of the world’s population—will continue to pose immense opportunities and challenges for the protection of this fundamental freedom in the twenty-first century and beyond.
Hinduism refers to the wide range of sacred, scriptural, and ritualistic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism has no founder, no single sacred text, and no central authority structure. There are two competing theories about the origins of Hinduism: the Indo-Aryan Migration Theory and the Cultural Transformation Thesis. According to the Indo-Aryan Migration Theory, several tribes collectively known as the Aryans (“nobles” in Sanskrit) migrated from Central Asia into the Indus Valley and brought their culture and traditions with them. In this view, the Aryans brought Hinduism into the subcontinent, where it subsequently blended with indigenous traditions that the Aryans encountered there. In contrast, the Cultural Transformation Thesis argues that Aryan culture developed out of the Indus Valley or Harappan culture; it claims there were no Aryan migrations to the subcontinent.

Regardless of the debate, historians date the sacred texts that emerged during this period through both archeology and language. Historical evidence suggests that the central sacred texts of Hinduism, the Vedas, were compiled during the early Harappan period. The four Vedas—Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samurveda, and Atharaveda—are considered revealed texts. As such, they are considered Shruti (“that which is heard”) texts and are distinguished from other sacred texts in the Hindu canon that are composed by humans and are known as Smriti (“that which is remembered”). These Vedas were orally transmitted and preserved until 1000 CE, when they were first collected in written form.

As the texts collected here suggest, the Vedic period (500 BCE-500 CE) focused largely on ritual and sacrifice and is thus marked by orthopraxy instead of orthodoxy. In other words, belief was secondary to ritual obligation. The gods of the Vedic period were closely identified with the forces of nature, including Agni (fire), Surya (sun), and Apas (water). During this period, a focus on purity of ritual and sacrifice to these gods tended to outweigh an emphasis on more personal encounters with the divine or individual liberation (moksha). In the terms of this sourcebook, religious freedom—whether in its spiritual or sociopolitical sense—did not receive extensive or systematic treatment during this period. At the same time, the Rigveda propounded a clear teaching of religious pluralism and religious tolerance. It even implied a form of religious freedom by affirming, “They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. / To what is One, sages
give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan” (1.164.46). As the nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar and translator Ralph T. H. Griffith glosses this verse, “All these names, says the poet, are names of one and the same Divine Being, the One Supreme Spirit under various manifestations.”

After the Vedic period, a more personal and individual relationship with God developed, nourished in part by the composition of an array of significant Smriti texts. These texts include the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The Bhagavad Gita, which is a portion of the Mahabharata, emerged as a seminal text of the Hindu sacred corpus and underscored a more individual and personal relationship between God and humanity. During this period, the emphasis on ritual and sacrifice was displaced somewhat by devotional worship (puja) to deities and images. A stress on a form of religious or spiritual freedom as a preeminent end—moksha—emerged as an essential feature of a more personal, intimate relationship between God and the individual, or bhakti.
Book 1, Hymn CLXIV: Visvedevas

37. What thing I truly am I know not clearly: mysterious, fettered in my mind I wander. When the first-born of holy Law approached me, then of this speech I first obtain a portion.

38. Back, forward goes he, grasped by strength inherent, the Immortal born the brother of the mortal. Ceaseless they move in opposite directions: men mark the one, and fail to mark the other.

39. Upon what syllable of holy praise-song, as twere their highest heaven, the Gods repose them—Who knows not this, what will he do with praise-song? But they who know it well sit here assembled. […]

45. Speech hath been measured out in four divisions, the Brahmans who have understanding know them. Three kept in close concealment cause no motion; of speech, men speak only the fourth division.

46. They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. To what is One, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.
Book 4, Hymn LIV: Savitar

1. Now must we praise and honour Savitar the God: at this time of the day the men must call to him, him who distributes wealth to Manu’s progeny, that he may grant us here riches most excellent.

2. For thou at first producest for the holy Gods the noblest of all portions, immortality: Thereafter as a gift to men, O Savitar, thou openest existence, life succeeding life.

3. If we, men as we are, have sinned against the Gods through want of thought, in weakness, or through insolence, absolve us from the guilt and make us free from sin, O Savitar, alike among both Gods and men.

4. None may impede that power of Savitar the God whereby he will maintain the universal world. What the fair-fingered God brings forth on earth’s expanse or in the height of heaven, that work of his stands sure.

Document Title: The Hymns of the Rigveda
Date: 1700-1100 BCE

Book 10, Hymn XC: Purusa

11. When they divided Purusa how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?

12. The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced.

13. The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth; Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and Vayu from his breath.

14. Forth from his navel came mid-air the sky was fashioned from his head; Earth from his feet, and from his car the regions. Thus they formed the worlds.
4. Now, Yagnavalkya spake, “We went to choose a place of worship for Varshnya.” Satyayagna then said, “Verily, this whole earth is divine: on whatever part thereof one may sacrifice (for any one), after enclosing (and consecrating) it with a sacrificial formula, there is a place of worship.”

5. “It is, however, the officiating priests that constitute the place (or medium) of worship: wheresoever wise and learned Brahmans, versed in sacred lore, perform the sacrifice, there no failures take place: that (place of worship) we consider the nearest (to the gods).” [...]

9. Not everyone may enter it, but only a Brahman, or a Raganya, or a Vaisya, for these are able to sacrifice.

10. Let him not commune with everyone; for he who is consecrated draws nigh to the gods, and becomes one of the deities. Now the gods do not commune with everyone, but only with a Brahman or a Raganya, or a Vaisya; for these are able to sacrifice. Should there be occasion for him to converse with a Shudra, let him say to one of those, “Tell this one so and so! Tell this one so and so!” This is the rule of conduct for the consecrated in such a case.

2.18.11-15: Vasishtha

The wicked Shudra race is manifestly a burial-ground. Therefore (the Veda) must never be recited in the presence of a Shudra.

4.20.4-6: Gautama

Now if he listens intentionally to a recitation of the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac. If he recites (Vedic texts), his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain.
**Document Title:** The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam  
**Date:** 1400-600 BCE  

*Book 1, Chapter 1*

O knower of Dharma! By your faith and devotion to your Guru, you have become Sattvik and thus have thoroughly known the Purana Samhitas spoken by Veda Vyas. O Omniscient one! Therefore it is that we have heard many Puranas from your mouth; but we are not satisfied as the Devas are not satisfied with the drinking of the nectar.

O Suta! Fie to the nectar even as the drinking of nectar is quite useless in giving Mukti. But hearing the Bhagavata gives instantaneous Mukti from this Samsara or round of birth and death. O Suta! We performed thousands and thousands of Yajnas for the drinking of the nectar (Amrita), but never we got the full peace. The reason being that Yajnas lead to heaven only; on the expiry of the period of punya (good merits), the heavenly life ceases and one is expelled, as it were from the Heavens. Thus incessant sojourns in this wheel of Samsara, the constant rounds of births and deaths never end. O Knower of everything! Thus, without Jnana (knowledge, wisdom) Mukti (liberation) never comes to men, wandering in this wheel of Time (Kalachakra) eternally.

*Book 3, Chapter 6*

The wise persons, knowing all the laws, declare that there is the One God attributeless, inactive, without any object in view, without any upadhis or adjunct without any parts, who is the witness of Thy widely extended Leela, “One alone exists; and that is Brahman, and there is nothing else.” This is the saying of the Vedas. Now I feel in my mind a doubt as to the discrepancy with this Veda saying. I cannot say that the Veda is false. So I ask Thee: Art Thou the Brahman, the one and the secondless that is mentioned in the Vedas? Or Is the other Person Brahma? Kindly solve this doubt of mine. My mind is not completely free from doubts; this little mind is still discussing whether the Reality is dual or one; I cannot solve myself. So dost Thou say from Thy mouth and cut my doubts asunder. Whether Thou art male or female, describe in detail to me. So that, knowing the Highest Sakti, I be freed from this ocean Samsara.

Brahma said: “When I thus asked with great humility, the Devi Bhagavati, the Prime Sakti, She addressed me thus in the following sweet words: ‘There is oneness
always between me and the Purusa; there is difference whatsoever at any time
between me and the Purusa (Male, the Supreme Self). Who is I, that is Purusa;
who is Purusa, that is I. The difference between force and the receptacle of force
is due to error. He who knows the subtle difference between us two, is certainly
intelligent; he is freed from this bondage of Samsara; there is no manner of doubt
in this. The One Secondless Eternal ever-lasting Brahma substance becomes dual
at the time of creation. As a lamp, though one, becomes two by virtue of adjuncts;
as a face, though one, becomes two, as reflected in a mirror; as one man becomes
double by his shadow, we become reflected into many, by virtue of different Antah
Karanas (mind, buddhi, and ahankara) created by Maya.”

Book 7, Chapter 33

The Devi said, “O Giriraja! This whole universe, moving and unmoving, is
created by my Maya Sakti. This Maya is conceived in Me. It is not, in Reality,
different or separate from Me. So I am the only Chit, Intelligence. There is no
other intelligence than Me. Viewed practically, it is known variously as Maya,
Vidya, bit viewed really from the point of Brahman, there is no such thing as
Maya; only one Brahman exists. I am that Brahma, of the nature of Intelligence.
I create this whole world on this Unchangeable Eternal (Mountain-like) Brahma,
(compensed of Avidya, Karma, and various Samskaras) and enter the first as Prana
(vital breath) within it in the form of childbirth.”

Document Title: The Ramayana of Valmiki
Date: 400-300 BCE
Translation: Ralph T. H. Griffith
Source: Max Muller, ed., Sacred Books of the East (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1900); http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rama/index.htm

Rama’s Promise: Book 2, Canto XIX

Calm and unmoved by threatened woe
The noble conqueror of the foe
Answered the cruel words she spoke,
Nor quailed beneath the murderous stroke:
Yea, for my father’s promise sake
I to the wood my way will take,
And dwell a lonely exile there
In hermit dress with matted hair.
One thing alone I fain would learn,
Why is the king this day so stern?
Why is the scourge of foes so cold,
Nor gives me greeting as of old?
Now let not anger flush thy cheek:
Before thy face the truth I speak,
In hermit’s coat with matted hair
To the wild wood will I repair.
How can I fail his will to do,
Friend, master, grateful sovereign too?
One only pang consumes my breast.
That his own lips have not expressed
His will, nor made his longing known
That Bharat should ascend the throne. […]
Gently, unmoved in mind, he said:
“I would not in this world remain
A groveling thrall to paltry gain,
But duty’s path would fain pursue,
True as the saints themselves are true.
From death itself I would not fly
My father’s wish to gratify.
What deed soe’er his loving son
May do to please him, think it done.
Amid all duties, Queen, I count
This duty first and paramount,
That sons, obedient, aye fulfill
Their honoured fathers’ word and will.
Without his word, if thou decree,
Forth to the forest will I flee,
And there shall fourteen years be spent
Mid lonely wilds in banishment.”

Document Title: The Mahabharata
Date: c. 300 BCE

Book 17, Mokshadharma Parva
Section CLXXXVII

There is no destruction of the living creature, or of what is given, or of our other acts. The creature that dies only goes into another form. The body alone dissolves
The living creature, though depending upon the body, does not meet with destruction when the body is destroyed. It is not seen after the destruction of the physical frame just as fire is not seen after the consumption of the fuel with which it was ignited. [...] 

The whole universe is composed of water. Water is the form of all embodied creatures. In that water is the Soul which is displayed in the mind. That Soul is the Creator Brahman who exists in all things. When the Soul becomes endued with vulgar attributes, it comes to be called Kshetrajna. When freed from those attributes, it comes to be called Paramatman or Supreme Soul. Know that Soul. He is inspired with universal benevolence. He resides in the body like a drop of water in a lotus. Know well that which is called Kshetrajna and which has universal benevolence. 

Section CLXXXIX

[...] All things that can be perceived by the senses are called Manifest. All, however, that is Unmanifest, that is beyond the ken of the senses, that can be ascertained only by the subtle senses, should be sought to be known. If there be no faith, one will never succeed in attaining to that subtle sense. Therefore, one should hold oneself in faith. The mind should be united with Prana, and Prana should then be held within Brahma. By dissociating oneself from all attachments, one may obtain absorption into Brahma. There is no need of attending to any other thing. A Brahmana can easily attain to Brahma by the path of Renunciation. The indications of a Brahmana are purity, good behavior and compassion unto all creatures.

Section CCI

[...] It is by liberating oneself from acts that one succeeds in entering into Brahma. The ordinances about acts have flowed for that very end. The ordinances about acts tempts only those whose hearts are not free from desire. By liberating oneself from acts (as already said) one acquires the highest state.

One desirous of felicity (Emancipation), betaking oneself to religious rites, becomes purified (from attachments) by acts having for their object the purification of the soul, and at last wins great splendour. By liberating oneself from acts, one acquires the highest end, Brahma, which is very much above the reward that acts give. Creatures have all been created by Mind and Act. These again are the two best paths adored by all. Outward acts produce fruits that are transitory as also eternal. For acquiring the latter there is no other means than abandonment of fruits by the mind.
Section CCIV

[...] He who casts off those objects, as also all that are manifest, he who liberates himself from all things that arise from primordial matter, being so freed, enjoys immortality. The Sun rising diffuses his rays. When he sets, he withdraws unto himself those very rays that were diffused by him. After the same manner, the Soul, entering the body, obtains the fivefold objects of the senses by diffusing over them his rays represented by the senses. When, however, he turns back, he is said to set by withdrawing those rays unto himself. Repeatedly led along the path that is created by acts, he obtains the fruits of his acts in consequence of his having followed the practice of acts.

Desire for the objects of the senses keeps away from a person who does not indulge in such desire. The very principle of desire, however, leaves him who has beheld his soul, which, of course, is entirely free from desire. When the Understanding, freed from attachment to the objects of the senses, becomes fixed in the mind, then does one succeed in attaining to Brahma, for it is there that the mind with the understanding withdrawn into it can possibly be extinguished. Brahma is not an object of touch, or of hearing, or of taste, or of sight, or of smell, or of any deductive inference from the Known. Only the Understanding (when withdrawn from everything else) can attain to it.

Document Title: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
Date: 200-150 BCE
Translation: Bon Giovanni

Part Two: On Spiritual Disciplines

2.1 Austerity, the study of sacred texts, and the dedication of action to God constitute the discipline of Mystic Union.

2.2 This discipline is practiced for the purpose of acquiring fixity of mind on the Lord, free from all impurities and agitations, or on One’s Own Reality, and for attenuating the afflictions.

2.3 The five afflictions are ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and the desire to cling to life. [...]
2.12 The impressions of works have their roots in afflictions and arise as experience in the present and the future births.

2.13 When the root exists, its fruition is birth, life and experience.

2.14 They have pleasure or pain as their fruit, according as their cause be virtue or vice. [...] 

2.20 The indweller is pure consciousness only, which though pure, sees through the mind and is identified by ego as being only the mind.

2.21 The very existence of the seen is for the sake of the seer.

2.22 Although Creation is discerned as not real for the one who has achieved the goal, it is yet real in that Creation remains the common experience to others.

2.23 The association of the seer with Creation is for the distinct recognition of the objective world, as well as for the recognition of the distinct nature of the seer.

2.24 The cause of the association is ignorance.

2.25 Liberation of the seer is the result of the disassociation of the seer and the seen, with the disappearance of ignorance.

2.26 The continuous practice of discrimination is the means of attaining liberation. [...] 

2.43 Through sanctification and the removal of impurities, there arise special powers in the body and senses.

2.44 By study comes communion with the Lord in the Form most admired.

2.45 Realization is experienced by making the Lord the motive of all actions. [...] 

4.23 The mind is said to perceive when it reflects both the indweller (the knower) and the objects of perception (the known).

4.24 Though variegated by innumerable tendencies, the mind acts not for itself but for another, for the mind is of compound substance.
4.25 For one who sees the distinction, there is no further confusing of the mind with the self.

4.26 Then the awareness begins to discriminate, and gravitates towards liberation. [...] 

4.29 To one who remains undistracted in even the highest intellection there comes the equal minded realization known as The Cloud of Virtue. This is a result of discriminative discernment.

4.30 From this there follows freedom from cause and effect and afflictions.

4.31 The infinity of knowledge available to such a mind freed of all obscuration and property makes the universe of sensory perception seem small.

4.32 Then the sequence of change in the three attributes comes to an end, for they have fulfilled their function.

4.33 The sequence of mutation occurs in every second, yet is comprehensible only at the end of a series.

4.34 When the attributes cease mutative association with awarenessness, they resolve into dormancy in Nature, and the indweller shines forth as pure consciousness. This is absolute freedom.

Document Title: The Bhagavad Gita
Date: 200 BCE-200 CE

The First Teaching: Arjuna’s Dejection

26. Arjuna saw them standing there: fathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and friends.

27. He surveyed his elders and companions in both armies, all his kinsmen assembled together.
28. Dejected, filled with strange pity, he said this: “Krishna, I see my kinsmen gathered here, wanting war.

29. My limbs sink, my mouth is parched, my body trembles, the hair bristles on my flesh.” [...]

31. “I see omens of chaos, Krishna; I see no good in killing my kinsmen in battle. [...]”

39. How can we ignore the wisdom of turning from this evil when we see the sin of family destruction, Krishna?

40. When the family is ruined, the timeless laws of family duty [dharma] perish; and when duty [dharma] is lost, chaos overpowers the family.”

The Second Teaching: Philosophy and Spiritual Discipline

Lord Krishna:

11. You grieve for those beyond grief, and you speak words of insight; but learned men do not grieve for the dead or the living.

12. Never have I not existed, nor you, nor these kings; and never in the future shall we cease to exist.

13. Just as the embodied self enters childhood, youth, and old age,
so does it enter another body; this does not confound a steadfast man.

14. Contacts with matter make us feel heat and cold, pleasure and pain. Arjuna, you must learn to endure fleeting things—they come and go! [...]

16. Nothing of nonbeing comes to be, nor does being cease to exist; the boundary between these two is seen by men who see reality.

17. Indestructible is the presence that pervades all this; no one can destroy this unchanging reality.

18. Our bodies are known to end, but the embodied self is enduring, indestructible, and immeasurable; therefore, Arjuna, fight the battle!

19. He who thinks this self a killer and he who thinks it killed, both fail to understand; it does not kill, nor is it killed.

20. It is not born, it does not die; having been, it will never not be; unborn, enduring, constant and primordial, it is not killed when the body is killed. [...]

31. Look to your own duty; do not tremble before it;
nothing is better for a warrior [kshatriya] than a battle of sacred duty [dharma].

32. The doors of heaven open for warriors who rejoice to have a battle like this thrust on them by chance. [...]

47. Be intent on action, not on the fruits of action; avoid attraction to the fruits and attachment to inaction!

48. Perform actions, firm in discipline [yoga], relinquishing attachment; be impartial to failure and success—this equanimity is called discipline [yoga].

49. Arjuna, action is far inferior to the discipline of understanding; so seek refuge in understanding—pitiful are men drawn by fruits of action.

The Third Teaching: Discipline of Action

Lord Krishna:

19. Always perform with detachment any action you must do; performing action with detachment, one achieves supreme good. [...]

23. What if I did not engage relentlessly in action? Men retrace my path at every turn, Arjuna.

24. These worlds would collapse if I did not perform action; I would create disorder in society, living beings would be destroyed. [...]

HINDUISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 33
29. Those deluded by the qualities of nature are attached to their actions; a man who knows this should not upset these dull men of partial knowledge.

30. Surrender all actions to me, and fix your reason on your inner self; without hope or possessiveness, your fever subdued, fight the battle!

*The Fourth Teaching: Knowledge*

Lord Krishna:

5. I have passed though many births and so have you; I know them all, but you do not, Arjuna.

6. Though myself unborn, undying, the lord of creatures, I fashion nature, which is mine, and I come into being through my own magic.

7. Whenever sacred duty decays and chaos prevails, then, I create myself, Arjuna.

8. To protect men of virtue and destroy men who do evil, to set the standard of sacred duty, I appear in age after age.

9. He who really knows my divine birth and my actions, escapes rebirth when he abandons the body—and he comes to me, Arjuna.
10. Free from attraction, fear, and anger, filled with me, dependent on me, purified by the fire of knowledge, many come into my presence.

11. As they seek refuge in me, I devote myself to them; Arjuna, men retrace my path in every way. [....]

14. I desire no fruit of actions, and actions do not defile me; one who knows this about me is not bound by actions.

15. Knowing this, even ancient seekers of freedom performed action—do as these seers did in ancient times. [....]

20. Abandoning attachment to fruits of action, always content, independent, he does nothing at all when he engages in action.

21. He incurs no guilt if he has no hope, restrains his thought and himself, abandons possessions, and performs actions with his body only.

22. Content with whatever comes by chance, beyond dualities, free from envy, impartial to failure and success, he is not bound even when he acts.

23. When a man is unattached and free, his reason deep in knowledge, action only in sacrifice, his action is wholly dissolved.
The Fifth Teaching: Renunciation of Action

Lord Krishna:

11. Relinquishing attachment, men of discipline perform action with body, mind, understanding, and senses for purification of the self.

12. Relinquishing the fruit of action, the disciplined man attains perfect peace; the undisciplined man is in bondage, attached to the fruits of his desire.

13. Renouncing all actions with the mind, the masterful embodied self dwells at ease in its nine-gated fortress—it neither acts nor causes action.

The Sixth Teaching: The Man of Discipline

Lord Krishna:

1. One who does what must be done without concern for the fruits is a man of renunciation [sannyasin] and discipline, not one who shuns ritual fire and rites.

2. Know that discipline [yoga], Arjuna, is what men call renunciation [sannyasin]; no man is disciplined without renouncing willful intent. [...] 

14. The self tranquil, his fear dispelled, firm in the vow of celibacy, his mind restrained, let him sit with discipline, his thought fixed on me, intent on me. [...] 

30. He who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me
will not be lost to me,
and I will not be lost to him.

31. I exist in all creatures,
so the disciplined man [yogi] devoted to me
grasps the oneness of life;
wherever he is, he is in me.

32. When he sees identity in everything,
whether joy or suffering,
through analogy with the self [atman],
he is deemed a man of pure disciplines.

The Ninth Teaching: The Sublime Mystery

Lord Krishna:

3. Without faith in sacred duty,
men fail to reach me, Arjuna;
they return to the cycle
of death and rebirth.

4. The whole universe is pervaded
by my unmanifest form;
all creatures exist in me,
but I do not exist in them.

5. Behold the power of my discipline;
these creatures are really not in me;
my self quickens creatures,
sustaining them without being in them. [....]

17. I am the universal father,
mother, granter of all, grandfather,
object of knowledge, purifier,
holy syllable OM, threefold sacred lore.

18. I am the way, sustainer, lord,
witness, shelter, refuge, friend,
source, dissolution, stability,  
treasure, and unchanging seed.

19. I am heat that withholds  
and sends down the rains;  
I am immortality and death;  
both being and nonbeing am I. [...]

26. The leaf or flower or fruit or water  
that he offers with devotion,  
I take from the man of self-restraint  
in response to his devotion. [...]

28. You will be freed from the bonds of action,  
and the fruit of fortune and misfortune;  
armed with the discipline of renunciation,  
your self liberated, you will join me.

29. I am impartial to all creatures,  
and no one is hateful or dear to me;  
but men devoted to me are in me,  
and I am within them.

30. If he is devoted solely to me,  
even a violent criminal  
must be deemed a man of virtue,  
for his resolve is right.

31. His spirit quickens to sacred duty,  
and he finds eternal peace;  
Arjuna, know that no one  
devoted to me is lost.

32. If they rely on me, Arjuna,  
women [strīyās], commoners [vaśyās], men of low rank [śudrās],  
even men born in the womb of evil,  
reach the highest way.

33. How easy is it then for holy priests  
and devoted royal sages—
in this transient world of sorrow, devote yourself to me!

34. Keep me in your mind and devotion, sacrifice to me, bow to me, discipline your self toward me, and you will reach me!

_The Thirteenth Teaching: Knowing the Field_

Lord Krishna:

7. Knowledge means humility, sincerity, nonviolence, patience, honesty, reverence for one’s teacher, purity, stability, self-restraint;

8. Dispassion toward sense objects and absence of individuality, seeing the defects in birth, death, old age, sickness, and suffering;

9. Detachment, uninvolvment with sons, wife, and home, constant equanimity in fulfillment and frustration;

10. Unwavering devotion to me with singular discipline; retreating to a place of solitude, avoiding worldly affairs;

11. Persistence in knowing the self, Seeing what knowledge of reality means—all this is called knowledge, the opposite of ignorance.

12. I shall teach you what is to be known; for knowing it, one attains immortality;
it is called the supreme infinite spirit, beginningless, neither being or nonbeing.

_The Fourteenth Teaching: The Triad of Nature’s Qualities_

Lord Krishna:

26. One who serves me faithfully, with discipline of devotion, transcends the qualities of nature and shares in the infinite spirit [Brahman].

27. I am the infinite spirit’s foundation, immortal and immutable, the basis of eternal sacred duty [dharma] and of perfect joy.

_The Eighteenth Teaching: The Wondrous Dialogue Concludes_

Lord Krishna:

65. Keep your mind on me be my devotee, sacrificing, bow to me—you will come to me, I promise, for you are dear to me.

66. Relinquishing all sacred duties to me, make me your only refuge; do not grieve, for I shall free you from all evils.

**Document Title:** Vishnu Purana  
**Date:** c. 400 CE  
**Source:** Horace Hayman Wilson, trans., _The Vishnu Purana: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition_ (London: John Murray Press, 1840); http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/vp/vp156.htm

_Book VI, Chapter I: Of the dissolution of the world: the four ages: the decline of all things, and deterioration of mankind, in the Kali age._
Parasara—Hear, Maitreya, an account of the nature of the Kali age, respecting which you have inquired, and which is now close at hand. The observance of caste, order, and institutes will not prevail in the Kali age, nor will that of the ceremonial enjoined by the Saama, Rg, and Yajur Vedas [...]

A regenerate man will be initiated in any way whatever, and such acts of penance as may be performed will be unattended by any results. Every text will be scripture that people choose to think so: all gods will be gods to them that worship them; and all orders of life will be common alike to all persons. [...] 

Shudras, seeking a subsistence by begging, and assuming the outward marks of religious mendicants, will become the impure followers of impious and heretical doctrines. [...] 

In the Kali age, Maitreya, men, corrupted by unbelievers, will refrain from adoring Vishnu, the lord of sacrifice, the creator and lord of all; and will say, “Of what authority are the Vedas? What are gods or Brahmans? What need is there of purification with water?” [...] 

Endowed with little sense, men, subject to all the infirmities of mind, speech, and body, will daily commit sins; and everything that is calculated to afflict beings, vicious, impure, and wretched, will be generated in the Kali age. Then shall some places follow a separate duty devoid of holy study, oblations to fire, and invocations of the gods.

Document Title: Garuda Purana
Date: unknown

Chapter I: An Account of the Miseries of the Sinful in this World and the Other

1. The tree Madhusudana—whose firm root is Law, whose trunk is the Vedas, whose abundant branches are the Puranas, whose flowers are sacrifices, and whose fruit is liberation—excels. [...] 

12. Tell me, then, O Lord, to what condition the sinful come, and in what way they obtain the miseries of the Way of Yama.
13. The Blessed Lord said: Listen, O Lord of Birds, and I will describe the Way of Yama, terrible even to hear about, by which those who are sinful go in hell.

14-16. O Tarksya, those who delight in sin, destitute of compassion and righteousness, attached to the wicked, averse from the true scriptures and the company of the good,

Self-satisfied, unbending, intoxicated with the pride of wealth, having the ungodly qualities, lacking the divine attributes,

Bewildered by many thoughts, enveloped in the net of delusion, reveling in the enjoyments of the desire-nature—fall into a foul hell.

Chapter IV: An Account of the Kinds of Sins which lead to Hell

1. Garuḍa said: For what sins do they go on that great Way? Why do they fall into the Vaitarani? Why do they go to hell? Tell me this, O Kesava. [...] 

9. Those who despise places of pilgrimage, good men, good actions, teachers and Shining Ones; those who disparage the Puranas, the Vedas, the Mimamsa, the Nyaya and the Vedanta; [...] 

36. Those who, self-indulgent, do not worship Siva, Hari, Surya, Ganesa, the wise, and the good teachers—these certainly go to hell.

Chapter XVI: An Account of the Law for Liberation

85-86. Having practiced the Vedas and the Sastras, and having known the Truth, the wise man should abandon all the scriptures; just as one rich in grains abandons the straw.

Just as there is no use for food to one who is satisfied with nectar, so is there not use for the scriptures, O Tarksya, to the knower of the Truth.

87-88. There is no liberation by the study of the Vedas, nor by the reading of the Sastras. Emancipation is by knowledge alone, not otherwise, O son of Vinata.

The stages of life are not the cause of liberation, nor are the philosophies, nor are actions—knowledge only is the cause. [...]

98-99. So long as one does not reach Truth, so long should he do austerities, vows, pilgrimage to sacred waters, recitations, oblations, worship and reading of the prescribed texts of the Vedas and Sastras.

Therefore, if one desires liberation for himself, O Tarksya, he should every effort, always, and under all circumstances he attached to Truth.

100. One who is tormented by the three miseries and the rest, should resort to the shade of the tree of Liberation, whose flowers are righteousness and knowledge, and fruits are heaven and liberation.

101. Therefore from the mouth of the Blessed Teacher the Truth of the self should be known. By knowledge the being is easily released from the awful bondage of the worlds of change.

102. Listen! I will tell you now about the final actions of the knower of the Truth, by which he obtains liberation, which is called the Nirvana of Brahman.

103-107. His last days approaching, the man, rid of fear, should cut off, with the sword of unattachment, the desires connected with the body. [...] 

108. He who, when leaving the body, utters the one-syllabled Brahman, “Om,” remembering me, goes to the Highest Goal [...] 

111-114. He who bathes in the water of the Manasa, which removes the impurities of attraction and repulsion, in the lake of knowledge, in the waters of Truth—he verily attains liberation.

He who, firm in non-attachment, worships me, thinking of no other, full-visioned, with tranquil self—he verily attains liberation.

He who, expecting to die, leaning his home, dwells at a sacred bathing-place, or dies in a place of liberation, he verily attains liberation [...] 

116. Knowers of Truth attain liberation; righteous men go to heaven; sinners go to an evil condition; birds and others transmigrate.
Isa-Upanishad: Verses 9-12

All who worship what is not real knowledge (good works), enter into blind darkness: those who delight in real knowledge, enter, as it were, into greater darkness.

All who worship what is not the true cause enter into blind darkness: those who delight in the true cause, enter, as it were, into greater darkness.

One thing, they say, is obtained from (knowledge of) the cause; another, they say, from (knowledge of) what is not the cause. Thus we have heard from the wise who taught us this.

He who knows at the same time both the cause and the destruction (the perishable body), overcomes death by destruction (the perishable body), and obtains immortality through (knowledge of) the true cause.

Amritabindu Upanishad: Verses 12-15

For, one only is the Self in all beings,
Appearance different in different beings. As one,
And also as many, is He seen,
Like the moon in the water.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: Part Two, Chapter 5, Verse 15

And verily this Self is the Ruler of all beings, the King of all beings. Just as all the spokes are fixed in the nave and the felloe of a chariot wheel, so are all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs and all these individual creatures fixed in this Self.
**Kena Upanishad**

He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks
that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the
wise know him to be beyond knowledge.

He who realizes the existence of Brahman behind every activity of his being—
whether sensation, perception, or thought—he alone gains immortality. Through
knowledge of Brahman comes power. Through knowledge of Brahman comes
victory over death.

Blessed is the man who while he yet lives realizes Brahman. The man who realizes
him not suffers his greatest loss. When they depart this life, the wise who have
realized Brahman as the Self of all beings, becomes immortal.

**Mundaka Upanishad**

Thus Brahman is all in all. He is action, knowledge, goodness supreme. To know
him, hidden in the lotus of the heart is to untie the knot of ignorance.

Self-luminous is Brahman, ever present in the hearts of all. He is the refuge of all,
he is the supreme goal. In him exists all that moves and breathes. In his exists all
that is, He is both that which is gross and that which is subtle. […]

By the pure heart he is known. The self exists in man, within the lotus of his heart
and is the master of his life and of his body. With mind illumined by the power
of meditation, the wise know him, the blissful, the immortal.

The knot of the heart, which is ignorance, is loosed and all doubts are dissolved. All
evil effects of deeds are destroyed, when he who is both personal and impersonal
is realized. […]

When death overtakes the body, the vital energy enters the cosmic source, the
senses dissolve in their cause, the karmas and the individual soul are lost in
Brahman, the pure, the changeless, the infinite.
As rivers flow into the sea and in so doing lose name and form, even so the wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Supreme Being, the Self-Luminous, the Infinite.

He who knows Brahman, becomes Brahman. No one ignorant of Brahman is ever born into the family. He passes beyond all sorrow. He overcomes evil. Freed from the fetters of ignorance. He becomes immortal.

Let the truth of Brahman be taught only to those who obey his law, who are devoted to him, and who are pure in heart. To the impure let it never be taught.

**Document Title:** The Dharmasastra: Manu Smriti (Laws of Manu)
**Date:** 200 BCE-200 CE

*Chapter 1*

87. For the protection of this whole creation, the One of dazzling brilliance assigned separate activities for those born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.

88. To Brahmans, he assigned reciting and teaching the Veda, offering and officiating at sacrifices, and receiving and giving gifts.

89. To the Ksatriya, he allotted protecting the subjects, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda and avoiding attachment to sensory objects;

90. And to the Vaisya, looking after animals, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, trade, moneylending, and agriculture.

91. A single activity did the Lord allot to the Shudra, however: the ungrudging service of those very social classes. [...] 

93. Because he arose from the loftiest part of the body, because he is the eldest, and because he retains the Veda, the Brahmin is by Law the lord of this whole creation. [...] 

98. A Brahmin’s birth alone represents the everlasting physical frame of the Law; for, born on account of the Law, he is fit for becoming Brahman.
99. For when a Brahmin is born, a pre-eminent birth takes place on earth—a ruler of all creatures to guard the storehouse of Laws. [...]

104. When a Brahmin who keeps his vows studies this treatise, he is never sullied by faults arising from mental, oral, or physical activites;

105. He purifies those alongside whom he eats, as also seven generations of his lineage before him and seven after him; he alone, moreover, has the right to this entire earth.

106. This treatise is the best good-luck incantation; it expands the intellect; it procures everlasting fame; and it is the ultimate bliss.

107. In this, the Law has been set forth in full—the good and the bad qualities of actions in the timeless norms of proper conduct—for all four social classes.

Chapter 2

2. To be motivated by desire us not commended, but it is impossible here to be free from desire; for it is desire that prompts vedic study and the performance of vedic rites.

3. Intention is the root of desire; intention is the wellspring of sacrifices; and intention triggers every religious observance and every rule of restraint—so the tradition declares.

4. Nowhere in this world do we see any activity done by a man free from desire; for whatever at all that a man may do, it is the work of someone who desired it.

5. By engaging in them properly, a man attains the world of the immortals and, in this world obtains all his desires just as he intended.

Chapter 8

20. Let a king, if he so wishes, get someone who is a Brahmin only by name to interpret the Law, or even someone who simply uses his birth to make a living, but under no circumstances a Shudra. [...]

22. The entire realm, stricken by famine and pestilence, quickly perishes, when it is teeming with Shudras overrun by infidels, and devoid of twice-born people. [...]

HINDUISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
276. In cases involving a Brahmin and Ksatriya, a discerning king should impose the following punishment: the lowest fine on the Brahmin, and the middle fine on the Ksatriya.

277. On the Vaisya and a Shudra also, exactly the same punishment, except the cutting of the tongue should be imposed according to their respective class—that is the firm conclusion. [...] 

279. When a lowest-born uses a particular limb to injure a superior person, that very limb of his should be cut off—that is Manu’s decree.

280. If he charges with his hand or a stick, his foot out to be cut off; if he strikes with his foot in anger, his foot ought to be cut off. [...] 

379. Shaving the head is prescribed as the death penalty for Brahmins, but the other social classes are actually subject to the death penalty.

380. The king should never put a Brahmin to death, even if he has committed every sort of crime; he should banish such a Brahmin from his kingdom along with all his property, without causing him hurt.

381. There is no greater violation of the Law on earth than killing a Brahmin.

Chapter 12

22. After enduring the torments of Yama Jiva, ‘the individual self,’ becomes freed from taint and enters the same five elements, each into its corresponding particle.

23. Seeing with his own intellect those transitions of this, ‘the individual self,’ resulting from righteous and unrighteous conduct, let him always set his mind on righteous conduct.

24. One should understand Goodness, Vigour, and Darkness as the three attributes of the body, attributes by which, Mahat, the ‘the Great,’ remains pervading all these existences completely.

25. When one of these attributes thoroughly suffuses the body, it makes the embodied self, dominant in that attribute.
26. Goodness is knowledge, tradition tells us: Darkness is ignorance; and Vigour is passion and hatred. These are their pervasive forms that inhere in all things.

27. Among these—when someone perceives within himself a condition full of joy, a sort of pure and tranquil light, he should recognize it as Goodness.

28. When it is full of pain and causing anguish to himself, he should understand it is Vigour, irresistible and constantly drawing embodied beings.

29. When it is full of confusion, with an unclear object, unfathomable by argument, the indiscernible, he should recognize it as Darkness.

30. I will explain to you completely the fruits arising from all these three attributes—the highest, the middling, and the lowest fruits.

31. Vedic recitation, ascetic toil, knowledge, purification, the control of the organs, righteous activity, and contemplation of the self—these mark the attribute of Goodness.

32. Delight in undertaking activities, resolve, taking up improper tasks, and constant indulgence in sensual pleasures—these mark the attribute of Vigour.

33. Greed, sloth, lack of resolve, cruelty, infidelity, deviation from proper conduct, habitual begging, and carelessness—these mark the attribute of Darkness. [...] 

94. The Veda is the eternal eye of the manes, gods, and men; the Veda-ordinance (is) both beyond the sphere of (human) power, and beyond the sphere of (human) comprehension; that is a certain fact.

95. The scriptures that are outside the Veda, as well as every kind of fallacious doctrine—all these bear no fruit after death, for tradition takes them to be founded on Darkness.

96. All those different from the Veda that spring up than flounder—they are false and bear no fruit, because they belong to recent times. [...] 

122. The ruler of all, more minute than even an atom, resplendent like gold, and to be grasped by the sleeping mind—he should know him as the supreme Person.
123. Some call him Fire, some Manu the Prajpati, others Indira, still others Breath, and yet others the eternal Brahman.

124. This one, pervading all beings by means of the five forms makes them go around like a wheel through birth, growth, and death.

125. When a man thus sees by the self all beings as the self, he becomes equal towards all and reaches Brahman, the highest state.

126. When a twice-born recites this Treatise of Manu proclaimed by Bhrgu, he will always follow the proper conduct and obtain whatever state he desires.

**Document Title:** The Dharmasastra: Yajnavalkya Smriti  
**Date:** 200-500 CE  
**Source:** Srisa Chandra, trans., Yajaavalkya Smriti (New York: AMS Press, 1974).

*Chapter VI: On the Dharma Shastras*

A learned Brahmana must carefully study them, and he must duly instruct his pupils in them, but nobody else shall do it.

The chief duty of the Ksatriya is the protection of the subject. For the Vaisya are ordained usury, agriculture, trade and tending of the cattle.

To carry arms for striking and for throwing is prescribed for Ksatriyas, to trade, to rear cattle, and agriculture (are prescribed for Vaisyas); as a means of subsistence; but their duties are liberality, the study of the Vedas, and the performance of sacrifices.

Monks, among things conditioned, the Noble Eightfold Path is reckoned the best of them all. Those who have faith in the Noble Eightfold Path have faith in the best, the best result will be theirs.

Monks, among things conditioned and unconditioned, dispassion is reckoned the best of them all: the crushing of all infatuation, the removal of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of the round (of rebirth), the destruction of craving, dispassion, Nirvana. Those who have faith in the Dharma of dispassion have faith in the best; and for those who have faith in the best, the best result will be theirs.
Monks, among all (religious) orders or communities, the Sangha of the Tathagata’s disciples is reckoned the best, that is to say, the four pairs of noble persons, the eight noble individuals; this Sangha of the Blessed One’s disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, an unsurpassed field of merit for the world. Those who have faith in the Sangha have faith in the best; and for those who have faith in the best, the best result will be theirs.

These, O’ monks, are the four kinds of faith.
The Medieval Period in Hinduism witnessed the further development of a focus on spiritual religious freedom through the cultivation of rituals and personal devotion (bhakti) to the major deities most commonly associated with the tradition: Vishnu, Shiva, and the Devi (the goddess). In addition, the Medieval Period saw the composition of a great corpus of secondary literature written in both Sanskrit and the Tamil language prevalent in southern India. This literature largely took the form of devotional hymns and poetry spanning a range of emotions, from an absorbing love for God to a sense of the hopelessness of humanity in its separation from God’s love. The poet-saints of Hinduism expressed the innermost feelings of the devotee who lives solely to achieve communion with God. Through hymns and poetry, these Hindu devotees found what they considered the path of authentic worship: turning all actions, thoughts, and deeds into acts of personal, heartfelt bhakti. This focus on bhakti, first expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, was further developed in the Medieval Period through a renewed emphasis on spiritual religious freedom through moksha.

Many thinkers and philosophers influential in this period founded their own theological schools to develop bhakti styles of devotional literature and practice. Some found students and devotees of their own, and thus gained prominence as gurus, or spiritual teachers. Among the most prominent were Shankara and Ramanuja. Ramanuja, an eleventh-century philosopher, was a proponent of a “qualified non-dualism,” which later came to be known as the Vishishtadvaita school of Vedanta. Like Shankara’s Advaita theology, Ramanuja agreed that Brahman is the complete oneness of all things, but he maintained there is also an individuality and plurality among individuals, qualities, and moral values. He was one of the great teachers of bhakti and advocated that the atman (self) is ultimately the servant of the Supreme Lord Narayana (Vishnu).

Shankara, through his philosophical investigations, reestablished the relevance of the Vedic texts in Hinduism and propounded a theology of non-dualism, Advaita. This philosophy holds that Brahman, the supreme God of the universe, is the complete oneness and wholeness of all things, apart from whom there is nothing. Furthermore, he popularized the idea that there are two forms of Brahman. One is the God worshipped through deities and images, known as saguna Brahman (“Brahman with attributes”). The other is
the authentic Brahman, who is pure Being and known as nirguna Brahman (“Brahman without attributes”). The highest goal of the devotee is to relate to nirguna Brahman and hence experience complete union with the cosmos. In Shankara’s view, this union represents authentic bhakti and is the acme of spiritual liberation.

Another important development in this period is that Hindus faced their first major challenge from a rival, proselytizing religious tradition: Buddhism. Buddhism preached a message of universality and the idea that the highest spiritual and moral dharma is ultimately the same for all people. Buddhism also critiqued the caste system, which was central to the ritual purity of the Hindu tradition. Thus, conflict emerged as the common mode of interaction with Buddhism. Ultimately, Buddhism declined as Hinduism experienced a revival, and some Brahmanas persuaded Indian kings to withdraw their support from Buddhist monasteries and other institutions.

Later in the Medieval Period, Islam represented another challenge to Hinduism. Islam not only made definite, universal theological claims but also questioned the devotional and ritual elements of the Hindu tradition, often seeing them as idolatrous departures from the radical monotheism of Islamic orthodoxy. Perhaps the earliest encounters Hindus had with Muslims were positive; Hindus are believed to have sheltered some Shi’ite Muslims fleeing persecution. Later, however, Muslim armies conquered large swaths of the Indian subcontinent, as early as the time of the Rajput kingdoms in the seventh century but more extensively from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Some Muslim rulers treated their Hindu subjects as “people of the book,” a protected category for religious believers. Other Muslim rulers took a harsher line against non-Muslims in the subcontinent, destroying Hindu temples and Buddhist monasteries and promoting and even compelling conversions to Islam.
Document Title: The Prabodhacandrodaya of Krsna Misra (play in the eleventh-century Chandela court)

Date: c. 1000


4. Anti-Vedic doctrines warded off

After he is freed of the affections by Discrimination, Purusa is prepared for the struggle against Delusion. Now that the moral obstacles are removed, the first step towards intellectual enlightenment can be undertaken. At this stage all those schools and sects who are acknowledged as Vedic are Man’s allies. With their assistance, Man has to convince himself that the non-Vedic schools do not bring him final emancipation.

Learning comes to Man’s rescue. He takes refuge with all the Brahmanical schools in order to escape the claims of the heterodox schools. […]

Faith says that good comes out of it when the schools that have their origin in the Vedas join together to overthrow the common enemy, the materialist, even though they are mutually opposed. […] Thus the Lord of the Universe can be attained through various good systems which are based on the Vedas and have taken diverse paths, just as the ocean is reached by streams of water. […] Now Man’s external enemies, i.e. the heretical schools, are all destroyed. For the time being he is free from Delusion.

Samsara, which is caused by ignorance, cannot be annihilated by actions which are themselves a result of ignorance. One cannot destroy pitch darkness through darkness. Knowledge and not action is the means of attaining freedom from worldly existence, from bhava and samsara.
The Hindu calls on Ram,
The Muslim on Khuda,
The Yogi calls on the Invisible One,
In whom there is neither Ram nor Khuda.

The pot is a God. The winnowing
fan is a God. The stone in the
street is a God. The comb is a
God. The bowstring is also a
God. The bushel is a God and the
spouted cup is a God.

Gods, gods, there are so many
there's no place left
for a foot.

There is only
one God. He is our Lord
of the Meeting Rivers (Shiva).

He is the One in many,
countless are His shapes and forms.
He pervades all that exists; wherever I look, He is there. But very few perceive this reality, for Maya ever enchants us with her multiple reflections of color and alluring beauty.

Everything is Gobind [name of God], Gobind is everything. Nothing that exists is without Gobind: the one thread strings innumerable beads—Prabhu [name of God] Himself is the thread, the reader, the threaded. [...]

**Document Title:** The Heart is the Garland  
**Author:** Bhagat Namdev  
**Date:** 1270-1350  
**Source:** Winand Callewaert, trans., *The Hindi Songs of Namdev* (Louvain: Peters Press, 1989).

The heart is the garland  
The heart is Gopal [name of God].  
The heart is the Gracious One Merciful to the Meek. [...]

You cannot tell  
The Self from the Other  
Your mind deluded by what it sees.

People dance before an idol  
Not knowing  
The Self-born.

If you but knew how to serve  
The Self-born  
Your divine vision  
Could see all.
I worship only
God-within
Nothing else
says Namdev.

Document Title: The Mani Manjari
Date: 1287-1350
Translation: S. Narayana Rao

5.1. Having been taught by Sri Krishna and Bhimasena, Durvasa, the son of Atri Rsi, and others spread Vedas and treatises of philosophical theology with the authority of Sri Vedavyasa.

5.2. Having realized that they could not defeat Krsna and Bhimasena with muscle power, the Demons made up their mind with much more hatred, to spoil the real meaning of the Vedas and other related scriptures with wrong interpretations.

5.3. Those perverted men assembled in a secret place and had deliberations as to how they could destroy the valid knowledge, derived from Vedas. They went on discussing the ways and means as they liked. [...] 

5.6. For all devotees, Krishna is God, Bhima is Spiritual master, Draupadi, the daughter of Prsada, is the patron deity of all Vedas and sacred scriptures. If this knowledge is destroyed in the mind of devotees, they (Krishna and others) will be in distress. This is how we can take revenge on them.

5.7. Therefore some of us should take birth on the earth and enter the minds of scholars, who are commentators of the Vedas. Let the Vedas be destroyed by wrong interpretation.

5.8. Let the right knowledge of Vedas be distracted by interpreting the scriptures illogically, resulting in many schools of thought, confusing the valid knowledge. [...] 

5.12. Buddha, the god Incarnate, deceived them (tripasuras), stating that the Vedas were ‘apramana’ having no verbal testimony. He made them believe in His words; they could not follow the implied meaning of His teachings. Thus, having been deluded they spread the philosophy as spread by them.
5.13. These Buddhists who had no code of Vedic conduct but who decried the Vedas were censured by the Brahmanas who had full faith in the Vedas and Sri Hari.

5.14. Jaina and Saivites who opposed supremacy of Lord Vishnu were also censured by the Brahmins. Although they do not accept the validity of the Vedas, they do not know the device to propagate the same. [...] 

5.29. At the same time, Buddhism was pervading on earth and it abused the custom of Vedas (i.e. Varna, Asrama, Gurukala system, sacrifices, etc.).

5.30. Buddhists mesmerized their King by witchcraft and taught him that Sunya (Nothingness) was the only tatva and this world is illusive. Through him, they overthrew the wise men and made them devoid of Vedic culture. [...] 

5.37. When the Vedic customs (such as Varna, Asrama dharmas) suffered due to onslaught of Buddhism, Kumara Bhatta in consultation with Narayana, served a Buddhist as his pupil to know the philosophy. [...] 

5.45. O King, if you are pleased, we will win over the Buddhists and defeat them in arguments; if not, you may put us into fire immediately without any hesitation. 

5.46. On hearing Bhatta Kumara, the King with all confidence announced that if the Buddhists were defeated, they would be put into fire. [...] 

5.48. As the King was impartial, Kumara Bhatta wrote a sub commentary on Sabra bhasya (the main commentary on Jaimini sutras by Sabara, his father). His commentary consisted of ‘Dusnanumanas’ which condemned Buddhism completely. 

5.49. Once, Kumara along with Narayana Bhatta exhibited a poster on an elevated place at the entrance of the town (announcing that he would censure Buddhism by argument with the Buddhist scholars). 

5.50. The stakes being that the defeated person would be burnt alive as punishment, Kumara Bhatta condemned outright the argument of the Buddhist that the Vedas are not verbal testimony; as a result many Buddhists lost their lives, by being burnt alive at once. 

5.51. Some Buddhists left this country along with foreign traders, some of them (i.e. Bakkasami and others) were hiding in the kitchens and other places and
escaped the garb of theists and concealed their own customs. They went on traveling along the border of the country. [...]

6.1. When the opponents of the Vedas were driven out of the country, Vedic customs such as Varnasrama dharma and Brahmacharya sacrifices flourished. Brahmins were very happy and sacrifices were freely performed in the country.

**Document Title:** Songs of Kabir  
**Author:** Kabir  
**Date:** 1440-1518  
**Source:** Rabindranath Tagore and Evelyn Underhill, trans., *Songs of Kabir* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

*I.13.*

O servant, where dost thou seek Me?  
Lo! I am beside thee.  
I am neither in temple nor in mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:  
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.  
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.  
Kabir says, “O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath.”

*I.79.*

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak:  
I know, for I have cried aloud to them.  
The Purana and the Koran are mere words:  
Lifting up the curtain, I have seen.

The soul’s union with Him is a love union, a mutual inhabitation; that essentially dualistic relation which all mystical religion expresses, not a self-mergence which leaves no place for personality.

*I.85.*

When He Himself reveals Himself, Brahma brings into manifestation. That which can never be seen.
As the seed is in the plant, as the shade is in the tree, as the void is in the sky, as infinite forms are in the void—
So from beyond the Infinite, the Infinite comes; and from the Infinite the finite extends.

The creature is in Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature: they are ever distinct, yet ever united.
He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.
He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.
He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.
He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.
He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space;
He is the breath, the word, and the meaning.
He Himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being.
He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature.

The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul,
The Point is seen within the Supreme Soul,
And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.
Kabir is blest because he has this supreme vision!

I.130.

When I am parted from my Beloved, my heart is full of misery: I have no comfort in the day, I have no sleep in the night. To whom shall I tell my sorrow?
The night is dark; the hours slip by. Because my Lord is absent, I start up and tremble with fear.
Kabir says: “Listen, my friend! there is no other satisfaction, save in the encounter with the Beloved.”

II.45.

My Lord hides Himself, and my Lord wonderfully reveals Himself:
My Lord has encompassed me with hardness, and my Lord has cast down my limitations.
My Lord brings to me words of sorrow and words of joy, and He Himself heals their strife.
I will offer my body and mind to my Lord: I will give up my life, but never can I forget my Lord!
That dark Dweller in Braj  
Is my only refuge.  
O my companion,  
Worldly comfort is an illusion,  
As soon you get it, it goes.  
I have chosen the Indestructible for my refuge,  
Him whom the snake of death  
Will not devour.  
My Beloved dwells in my heart,  
I have actually seen that Abode of Joy.  
Mira’s Lord is Hari, the Indestructible.  
My Lord, I have taken refuge with Thee,  
Thy slave.

I am true to my Lord,  
O my companions, there is nothing to be ashamed of now  
Since I have been seen dancing openly.

In the day I have no hunger  
At night I am restless and cannot sleep.  
Leaving these troubles behind, I go to the other side;  
A hidden knowledge has taken hold of me.

My relations surround me like bees.  
But Mira is the servant of her beloved Giridhar,  
And she cares nothing that people mock her.
The most important background condition shaping the interplay of Hinduism and religious freedom in the Modern Period was the advent of British colonial rule. The British Raj began with the gradual expansion of power of the British East India Company in the eighteenth century and was consolidated across most of India in the early nineteenth century. Some scholars suggest that British rule had the effect of making some Hindu traditions and practices such as the caste system more rigid. For the purpose of ruling over their mostly Hindu subjects, British administrators often defined Hindu laws and customs in terms of the texts and practices of the Vedic and Brahmanical ritualistic traditions. This process helped to invent our modern understanding of “Hinduism” as a cohesive religious system. There is considerable evidence of caste rigidity before the advent of British colonialism. However, the British simplified a system based on thousands of castes and subcastes in favor of the four main hereditary castes: Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras as expressed in the Laws of Manu.

During roughly the same period, Christian missionary activity exercised an important influence on the relationship between Hinduism and religious freedom. Christianity in India long predates modern Western colonialism or foreign missionary activity. In fact, there is solid historical evidence that Christian communities were present in India beginning in the third or fourth centuries, if not earlier. Many Indian Christians believe that St. Thomas, one of Christ’s 12 apostles, was the first to bring Christianity to India and that he was ultimately martyred in Madras (present-day Chennai). In the sixteenth century, Portuguese colonialism facilitated the introduction of Roman Catholic missionaries, including the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier, along India’s western and southern coasts. Though British authorities and the East India Company initially prevented missionary activity in territories under their control, the British Parliament reversed this policy in 1813, which greatly accelerated the introduction of Protestant missionaries throughout the subcontinent.

Pressure from missionary religions combined with the importation of ideas from both Christianity and the secular enlightenment generated a modernist and reformist movement within Hinduism in the nineteenth century that became known as the “Hindu Renaissance.” Beginning with Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), a series of Hindu scholars drew on the Advaita doctrine of non-dualism to argue that all religions are valid paths to God. Many of these reformers also
sought to demonstrate that caste rigidity was not authentically Hindu, but did not propose abolishing the caste system itself. At the same time, most modernist Hindus—including Mohandas Gandhi—rejected the idea that religion could be separated from public life. Beginning with Roy, reformers also reinterpreted Hinduism as a rational, ethical religion free from ritual and superstition.

Other significant reformers during the Modern Period were Paramahamsa Ramakrishna (1836-1886) and his disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Both promoted Hinduism as an inclusive religion. These reformers believed that a highly spiritual understanding of Hinduism was capable of weakening caste boundaries. They also believed that it formed the basis of nationalism that could liberate India from colonial subjugation. Similar ideas were later adopted and developed by Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), who thought reformed Hinduism was essential to the unification of India and to its spiritual and moral reawakening. Gandhi used the Bhagavad Gita and its emphasis on bhakti and truth (sat) to promote nonviolence (satyagraha) as well as sociopolitical religious freedom and equality. At the same time, Gandhi strongly criticized conversionary and missionary efforts as inherently unethical and predatory, particularly when they were directed at the poorest and most vulnerable people, such as Dalits, whom he called Harijans or “children of God.”

As the selections below demonstrate, some later Hindu thinkers would radicalize and extend Gandhi’s critique of religious conversion. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930-2015) was a proponent of Advaita Vedanta Hinduism who developed a sweeping attack on religious conversion that he directed especially at Christian leaders, churches, and missionaries. On the eve of Pope Saint John Paul II’s visit to India in November 1999, Swami Saraswati wrote an open letter to the pope decrying even ostensibly peaceful proselytization as a form of violence. Proselytism necessarily involves, he argued, a one-sided assault undertaken by “aggressive” missionary religions against “non-aggressive,” non-missionary religions—an assault that can only lead to the destruction of peaceful religions and cultures and the elimination of the world’s rich diversity. When the adherent of a missionary religion insists that religious freedom includes a right to proselytize and convert, according to Saraswati, it becomes impossible for the adherent of a non-missionary faith to enjoy “the freedom to practise [sic] his or her religion without interference… Religious freedom does not extend to having a planned programme of conversion.” Only if there is a “freeze on conversion” will it be possible for all religious cultures to “live and let live.”

Also during this period, reform and Hindu-nationalist organizations developed the concept of Hindutva or “Hindu-ness” into a highly sophisticated and
influential ideology of cultural and religious nationalism. On the basis of this ideology, they advocate a privileged position for the Hindu majority as well as Hindu beliefs and symbols in Indian society and politics. The texts in this section betray this tension between sociopolitical religious freedom and Hindu nationalism. Excerpts from a variety of thinkers reveal how these ideas are negotiated and how religious freedom has assumed a new intensity and relevance in contemporary India.
Drive me out of my mind, O Mother!
What use is esoteric knowledge
Or philosophical knowledge?
Transport me totally with the burning wine
Of your all-embracing love.
Mother of mystery, who imbues with mystery
The hearts of those who love you,
Immerse me irretrievably
In the stormy ocean without boundary,
Pure love, pure love, pure love.

Wherever your lovers reside
Appears like a madhouse
To common perception.
Some are laughing with your freedom,
Others weep tears of your tenderness,
Still others dance, whirling with your bliss.
Even your devoted Gautama, Moses,
Krishna, Jesus, Nanak and Muhammad
Are lost in the rapture of pure love. [...]

The Agony of Death Will Vanish Instantly

O foolish tongue, continuing to shape
the sacred sound, Ma Kali, Ma Kali.
O limited poet, meditate ceaselessly
on her limitless name, 
fountain of timeless awareness 
for those who truly thirst.

Sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, 
teachers and students, daughters and sons, 
those most intimate friends will not be 
earthly companions forever O mind. 
At the Moment death overcomes the body of the lover, 
there remains only the radiant space of Mother. 
Call out Ma Tara, Ma Tara. 
Her name will be ample provision 
for the mysterious journey beyond death 
that has already begun.

The cyclic flow of existence is a careless procession 
of events with no abiding reality. 
Why do you fail to meditate deeply, 
O singer of Mother's heart-melting songs? 
Your precious life is wasted in forgetfulness. 
Open your eyes and look clearly. 
There is Death, standing at your door!

“Dying poses no obstacle, presents no limit,” 
this inebriated poet sings. 
“Simply utter Kali, Kali, Kali. 
The agony of death will vanish instantly.”

Document Title: Vedanta Essays 
Author: Ram Mohan Roy 
Date: 1817 
Source: Bruce Carlisle Robertson, ed., The Essential Writings of Raja Ram Mohan Ray (Oxford University Press, 1999).

A Defence of Hindoo Theism

 [...] The learned gentleman states, that “The first of the Veda prescribes the mode of performing Yagam or sacrifice, bestowing daneem or alms; treats of penance, fasting, and of worshipping the incarnations, in which the Supreme Deity has appeared on the earth for divine purposes. The ceremonies performed according to
these modes, forsaking their fruits are affirmed by the Vedas to be mental exercises and mental purifications necessary to obtain the knowledge of the divine nature.’ I, in common with the Vedas and the Vedanta, and Munoo (the first and best of Hindu lawgivers) as well as with the most celebrated Sankarcarya, deny these ceremonies being necessary to obtain the knowledge of the divine nature; as the Vedant positively declares, in text 36, section 4, chapter 3d: ‘Man may acquire the true knowledge of God, even without observing the rules and rites prescribed by the Ved for each class; as it is found in the Ved that many persons who neglected the performance of the rites and ceremonies, owing to their perpetual attention to the adoration of the Supreme Being, acquired the true knowledge respecting the Supreme Spirit.’ [...]

A Second Defense of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas

[...] Idolatry, as now practiced by our countrymen, and which the learned Brahmun so zealously supports as conducive to morality, is not only rejected by the Shastras universally, but must also be looked upon with great horror by common sense, as leading directly to immorality and destructive of social comfort. There can be but one opinion respecting the moral conduct to be expected of a person, who has been brought up with sentiments of reverence to such beings, who refreshes his memory relative to them almost every day, and who has been persuaded to believe, that a repetition of the holy name of one of these deities, or a trifling present to his image or to his devotee, is sufficient, not only to purify and free him from all crimes whatsoever, but to procure to him future beatitude. [...]
and every other is false. Know for certain that God without form is real and that God with form is also real. Then hold fast to whichever faith appeals to you.

**Document Title:** The Sayings of Ramakrishna  
**Author:** Ramakrishna  
**Date:** 1833-86  

4. Many are the names of God, and infinite the forms that lead us to know Him. In whatsoever name or form you desire to call Him, in that very form and name you will see Him. [...]

6. As the same sugar is made into various figures of birds and beasts, so one sweet Mother Divine is worshipped in various climes and ages under various names and forms. Different creeds are but different paths to reach the Almighty.

7. As with one gold various ornaments are made, having different forms and names, so one God is worshipped in different countries and ages, and has different forms and names. Though He may be worshipped variously, some loving to call him Father, others Mother [et cetera], yet it is one God that is being worshipped in all these various relations and modes.

8. Q. If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that the God is painted differently by different religionists?  
   A. God is one, but His aspects are different: as one master of the house is father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by these different names by those different persons, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

9. In a potter’s shop there are vessels of different shapes and forms—pots, jars, dishes, plates [et cetera]—but all are made of one clay. So God is one, but is worshipped in different ages and climes under different names and aspects. [...]

32. God is formless, and is with form too, and He is that which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone can say what else He is.

33. At a certain stage of his path of devotion, the devotee finds satisfaction in God with form; at another stage, in God without form.
Chapter 6: The Science of Government

Let all other people of the earth—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, Dasyus and Mlecchas—learn arts and sciences suitable to them from the learned people born in this country (Manu 2:20). This is my firm opinion: even if there be many different sectarian beliefs prevalent in India, if only they all acknowledge the Vedas, then all those small rivers will reunite in the ocean of Vedic Wisdom, and the unity of dharma will come about. From that unity of dharma there will result social and economic reform, arts and crafts and other human endeavors will improve as desired, and man’s life will find fulfillment: because, by the power of that dharma all values will become accessible to him, economic values as well as psychological ones, and also the supreme value of moksha.

Document Title: Bhakti or Devotion
Author: Swami Vivekananda
Date: 1863-1902
Source: http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_2/bhakti_or_devotion.htm

All of you have been taught to believe in an Omnipresent God. Try to think of it. How few of you can have any idea of what omnipresence means! If you struggle hard, you will get something like the idea of the ocean, or of the sky, or of a vast stretch of green earth, or of a desert. All these are material images, and so long as you cannot conceive of the abstract as abstract, of the ideal as the ideal, you will have to resort to these forms, these material images.

It does not make much difference whether these images are inside or outside the mind. We are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good, because it is in the nature of man. Who can get beyond it? Only the perfect man, the God-man. The rest are all idolaters. So long as we see this universe before us, with its forms and shapes, we are all idolaters. This is a gigantic symbol we are worshipping. He who says he is the body is a born idolater. We are spirit, spirit that has no form or shape, spirit that is infinite, and not matter. Therefore, anyone who cannot grasp the abstract, who cannot think of himself as he is, except in and through
matter, as the body, is an idolater. And yet how people fight among themselves, calling one another idolaters! In other words, each says, his idol is right, and the others’ are wrong.

Therefore, we should get rid of these childish notions. We should get beyond the prattle of men who think that religion is merely a mass of frothy words, that it is only a system of doctrines; to whom religion is only a little intellectual assent or dissent; to whom religion is believing in certain words which their own priests tell them; to whom religion is something which their forefathers believed; to whom religion is a certain form of ideas and superstitions to which they cling because they are their national superstitions. We should get beyond all these and look at humanity as one vast organism, slowly coming towards light—a wonderful plant, slowly unfolding itself to that wonderful truth which is called God—and the first gyrations, the first motions, towards this are always through matter and through ritual. [...]

Thus we come to what is called supreme Bhakti, supreme devotion, in which forms and symbols fall off. One who has reached that cannot belong to any sect, for all sects are in him. To what shall he belong? For all churches and temples are in him. Where is the church big enough for him? Such a man cannot bind himself down to certain limited forms. Where is the limit for unlimited love, with which he has become one? In all religions which take up this ideal of love, we find the struggle to express it. Although we understand what this love means and see that everything in this world of affections and attractions is a manifestation of that Infinite Love, the expression of which has been attempted by sages and saints of different nations, yet we find them using all the powers of language, transfiguring even the most carnal expression into the divine.

**Document Title:** Swami Vivekananda’s Message to the World Parliament of Religions  
**Author:** Swami Vivekananda  
**Date:** 1893  
**Source:** http://www.swamij.com/swami-vivekananda-1893.htm

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very
year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation.

I will quote to you brethren a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest childhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: “Whosoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.”

**Document Title:** Christ, the Messenger  
**Author:** Swami Vivekananda  
**Date:** 1900  
**Source:** http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_4/lectures_and_discourses/christ_the_messenger.htm

(Delivered in Los Angeles, California)

In India they have the same idea of the Incarnations of God. One of their great Incarnations, Krishna, whose grand sermon, the Bhagavad-Gita, some of you might have read, says, “Though I am unborn, of changeless nature, and Lord of beings, yet subjugating My Prakriti, I come into being by My own Maya. Whenever virtue subsides and immorality prevails, then I body Myself forth. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma, I come into being, in every age.” Whenever the world goes down, the Lord comes to help it forward; and so He does from time to time and place to place. In another passage He speaks to this effect: Wherever thou findest a great soul of immense power and purity struggling to raise humanity, know that he is born of My splendour, that I am there working through him.

Let us, therefore, find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great Ones that have preceded him, in all that came after him, and all that are yet to come. Our worship is unbounded and free. They are all manifestations of the same Infinite God. They are all pure and unselfish; they struggled and gave up their
lives for us, poor human beings. They each and all suffer vicarious atonement for every one of us, and also for all that are to come hereafter.

**Document Title:** Caste and Democracy  
**Author:** Sri Aurobindo  
**Date:** 1907  
**Source:** http://incarnateword.in/sabcl/01/caste-and-democracy

The division of classes in Europe had its root in a distribution of powers and rights and developed and still develops through a struggle of conflicting interests; its aim was merely the organization of society for its own sake and mainly indeed for its economic convenience. The division of castes in India was conceived as a distribution of duties.

A man’s caste depended on his dharma, his spiritual, moral and practical duties, and his dharma depended on his swabhava, his temperament and inborn nature. A Brahman was a Brahman not by mere birth, but because he discharged the duty of preserving the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the race, and he had to cultivate the spiritual temperament and acquire the spiritual training which could alone qualify him for the task. The Kshatriya was a Kshatriya not merely because he was the son of warriors and princes, but because he discharged the duty of protecting the country and preserving the courage and manhood of the nation, and he had to cultivate the princely temperament and acquire the strong and lofty Samurai training which alone fitted him for his duties. So it was with the Vaishya whose function was to amass wealth for the race and the Shudra who discharged the humbler duties of service without which the other castes could not perform their share of labor for the common good.

This was what we meant when we said that caste was a socialistic institution. [...] For Hindu civilization being spiritual based its institutions on spiritual and moral foundations and subordinated the material elements and material considerations. Caste therefore was not only an institution which ought to be immune from the cheap second-hand denunciations so long in fashion, but a supreme necessity without which Hindu civilization could not have developed its distinctive character or worked out its unique mission. [...]  

There is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental
tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material and thus lost most of its meaning. The spirit of caste arrogance, exclusiveness and superiority came to dominate it instead of the spirit of duty, and the change weakened the nation and helped to reduce us to our present condition. It is these perversions that we wish to see set right.

Document Title: The Unhindu Spirit of Caste Rigidity
Date: 1907
Source: Sri Aurobindo, On Nationalism: Selected Writings and Speeches (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1996); http://suras.net/aurobindo/on_nation/unhindu_caste_rigidity.htm

The baser ideas underlying the degenerate perversions of the original caste system, the mental attitude which bases them on a false foundation of caste, pride and ignorance, of a divinely ordained superiority depending on the accident of birth, of a fixed and intolerant inequality, are consistent with the supreme teaching, the basic spirit of Hinduism which sees the one invariable and indivisible Divinity in every individual being. Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realization of that Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal. In the ideal of Nationalism which India will set before the world, there will be an essential equality between man and man, between caste and caste, between class and class. Different but equal and united parts of the Virat Purusha as realized in the nation. [...] We are intolerant of autocracy because it is the denial in politics of this essential equality, we object to the modern distortion of the caste system because it is the denial in society of the same essential equality. [...] We must educate every Indian, man, woman and child, in the ideals of our religion and philosophy before we can rationally expect our society to reshape itself in the full and perfect spirit of the Vedantic gospel of equality.

Document Title: The Glory of God in Man
Date: 1908

God in man is the whole revelation and the whole of religion. What Christianity has taught dimly, Hinduism made plain to the intellect in Vedanta. When India
remembers the teaching she received from Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Madhava, when she realizes what Sri Ramakrishna came to reveal, then she will rise. Her very life is Vedanta.

If anyone thinks we are merely intellectual beings, he is not a Hindu. Hinduism leaves the glorification of intellectuality to those who have never seen God. She is commissioned by Him to speak only of His greatness and majesty and she has so spoken for thousands of years. [...] 

Whoever has once felt the glory of God within him can never again believe that the intellect is supreme. There is a higher voice, there is a more unfailing oracle. It is in the heart where God resides. He works through the brain, but the brain is only one of His instruments. Whatever the brain may plan, the heart knows first and whoever can go beyond the brain to the heart, will hear the voice of the Eternal.

Document Title: From Yeravda Mandir (Ashram Observances)  
Author: Mohandas Gandhi  
Date: 1921  

Truth

The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat which means ‘being.’ Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God, In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say God is Truth. On deeper thinking, however it will be realized that Sat or Satya is the only correct and fully sign fact name for God.

And where there is Truth, there is also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there also is knowledge which is true. Where there is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word Chit or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge, there is always bliss (Ananda). There sorrow has no place. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as Sat-Chit-Ananda, one who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.

Devotion to this Truth is the sole justification for our existence. All our activities should be centered in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When
once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it is impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

But how is one to realize this Truth, which may be likened to the philosopher's stone or the cow of plenty? By single minded devotion (abhyasa) and indifference to all other interests in life (vairagya) replies the Bhagavad Gita.

In spite, however of such devotion, what may appear as Truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree. Does not God himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Yet we know that He is one. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth it will be automatically set right. [...] 

In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore the pursuit of Truth is true bhakti (devotion). It is the path that leads to God.

**Document Title:** Hinduism  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1921  

I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Zend Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu Scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every sense as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the Scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. [...] 

The four divisions, the Brahmin, Kshattriya, Vaishya, Shudra, define a man's calling; they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties; they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to
arrogate to oneself a higher status, or to assign to another a lower status. All are born to serve God’s creation—a Brahmin with his knowledge, a Kshattriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability, and a Shudra with his bodily labor. [...] 

This, however, does not mean that a Brahmin is absolved from bodily labor, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmin predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing, again, to prevent the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only he will best serve with his body, and need not envy others their special qualities for service. But a Brahmin who claims superiority of his knowledge falls, and has no knowledge. And so with the others, who pride themselves upon their special qualities. Varnashrama implies self-restraint, conservation, and economy of energy. [...] 

Hinduism tells everyone to worship God according to his own faith, and so it lives at peace with all the religions.

**Document Title:** My God  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1921-1927  
**Source:** Mohandas Gandhi, *My God* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing, 1962);  
http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/my_god.pdf  

*Chapter 2: Reality of God*

This belief in God has to be based on faith, which transcends reasons. Indeed, even the so-called realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. In the very nature of things it must be so. Who can transgress the limitations of his being?

I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings. God is not outside this earthly case of ours. Therefore, exterior proof is not of much avail, if any at all.

We must ever fail to perceive Him through the senses, because He is beyond them. We can feel Him if we will but withdraw ourselves from the senses. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music, which is unlike and infinitely superior to anything we can perceive or hear with our senses.
Chapter 7: Realization of God

I believe it to be possible for every human being to attain to that blessed and indescribable, sinless state in which he feels within himself the presence of God to the exclusion of everything else.

Chapter 18: What God has Meant to Me

It is an unbroken torture to me that I am still so far from Him, who, as I fully know, governs every breath of my life, and whose offspring I am. I know that it is the evil passions within that keep me so far from Him, and yet I cannot get away from them.

What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end.

Document title: Gandhi and Communal Harmony
Author: Mohandas Gandhi
Date: 1924

The message is to spiritualize political life and the political institutions of this country. Politics is essential to them as religion... Politics cannot be divorced from religion. Politics divorced from religion becomes debasing. Modern culture and civilization are such politics. My views may not be acceptable to you, I know. All the same I can only give you what is stirring me to my very depths. [...

If I were a dictator, religion and State should be separate. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it. The State would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody’s personal concern.

Document Title: Hindu Sangathan: Savior of the Dying Race?
Author: Swami Sradhananda
Date: 1924
The Hindu Sabha has also resolved that those non-Hindus who have faith in Hindu Samskars and Hindu Dharma should be taken within the fold of the Hindu Dharma. This means that every non-Hindu has a right to be absorbed in Hinduism if he has faith in the Hindu religion and culture; in short it means that every Christian, Muhammadan, Jew and co., can be converted to the Hindu Dharma without any hindrance according to the dictum of the Hindu Mahasabha. Thus, moral sanction of the Hindu community as a whole is with the reformers in this respect. [...] 

In the first place all distinctions of sub-castes must cease, and no non-caste sects among Hindus should be recognized. I realize the difficulty in remodeling the Hindu Samaj according to the ancient Varnadharma at once. But there should be no difficulty in all the sub-castes, and even non-castes consisting of the so-called untouchables, being absorbed in the four principal castes.

**Document Title:** Gandhi’s statement to a Baptist congregation in Cuttack  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1925  

If a person discards his country, his customs and his old customs and manners when he changes his religion, he becomes all the more unfit to gain a knowledge of God. For a change of religion means really a conversion of the heart. When there is a real conversion, the man’s heart grows. In my view your object in changing your religion should be to bring about the prosperity of your country.

**Document Title:** Yeola Declaration (Ambedkar’s address to the Mahars at the Conference of the Depressed Classes in Nasik, Maharashtra)  
**Author:** B.R. Ambedkar  
**Date:** 1926  
**Source:** *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol. 5* (Government of Maharashtra, 1995).

*Chapter 1: Away From the Hindus*

[...] The point to which it is necessary to draw particular attention and to which the foregoing discussion lends full support is that it is an error to look upon religion as a matter which is individual, private and personal. Indeed as will be seen from what follows, religion becomes a source of positive mischief if not
danger when it remains individual, private and personal. Equally mistaken is the view that religion is the flowering of special religious instinct inherent in the nature of the individual. The correct view is that religion like language is social for the reason that either is essential for social life and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society. [...] 

The opponents of conversion are determined not to be satisfied even if the logic of conversion was irrefutable. They will insist upon asking further questions. There is one question which they are always eager to ask largely because they think it is formidable and unanswerable; what will the Untouchables gain materially by changing their faith? The question is not at all formidable. It is simple to answer.

It is not the intention of the Untouchables to make conversion an opportunity for economic gain. The Untouchables it is true will not gain wealth by conversion. This is however no loss because while they remain as Hindus they are doomed to be poor. Politically the Untouchables will lose the political rights that are given to the Untouchables. This is, however, no real loss. Because they will be entitled to the benefit of the political rights reserved for the community which they would join through conversion. Politically there is neither gain nor loss. Socially, the Untouchables will gain absolutely and immensely because by conversion the Untouchables will be members of a community whose religion has universalized and equalized all values of life. Such a blessing is unthinkable for them while they are in the Hindu fold.

Chapter 2: Caste and Conversion

[...] The Hindus feel that they must save their people from being lost to them and their culture. Herein lies the origin of the Shudhi Movement or the movement to reclaim people to the Hindu faith. Some people of the orthodox type are opposed to this movement on the ground that Hindu religion was never a proselytising religion and that Hindu must be so by birth. There is something to be said in favour of this view. [...] 

Is there any place in the Hindu society for a convert to the Hindu faith? Now the organisation of the Hindu society is characterized by the existence of castes. Each caste is endogamous and lives by antagony. In other words it only allows individuals born in it to its membership and does not allow any one from outside being brought into it. The Hindu Society being a federation of castes and each caste being self-enclosed there is no place for the convert for no caste will admit him. The answer to the question why the Hindu Religion ceased to be a
missionary religion is to be found in the fact that it developed the caste system. Caste is incompatible with conversion. So long as mass conversion was possible, the Hindu Society could convert for the converts were large enough to form a new caste which could provide the elements of a social life from among themselves. But when mass conversions were no more and only individual converts could be had, the Hindu Religion had necessarily to cease to be missionary for its social organisation could make no room for the incoming convert.

I have not propounded this question as to why the Hindu Religion ceased to be missionary simply to find an opportunity for obtaining credit for originality of thought by offering a novel explanation. I have propounded the question and given an answer to it because I feel that both have a very important bearing upon the Shudhi movement. [...]  

If the Hindu society desires to survive it must think not of adding to its numbers but increasing its solidarity and that means the abolition of caste.

**Document Title:** The Gospel of Faith  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1927  
**Source:** [http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_god_meaning.htm](http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_god_meaning.htm)

Belief, therefore, in prophets or incarnations who have lived in remote ages is not an idle superstition, but a satisfaction of an inmost spiritual want.

**Document Title:** The Spirit of Hindutva  
**Author:** Vinayak Damodar Savarkar  
**Date:** 1927  

Oh Hindu! Wherever you are and perhaps alone you may be, without waiting for others, pledge that you shall touch millions and millions of your untouchable brethren, that you will accept those re-converted and be assured that the twin momentous national tasks of ‘liberation of untouchables and re-conversion’ have been achieved!

Say, my hand that I use to caress my dog with affection, I shall with brotherly love place on the back of he who has been called untouchable, my brother in Hindu Dharma, my brother in nation, my blood brother! Say I will touch! And lo! Untouchability shall be dead.
Chapter II: Religion and Truth

After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that [1] all religions are true; [2] all religions have some error in them; [3] all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one’s own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible.

When does ‘change of dharma’ (conversion) constitute ‘change of nationality’?

It is necessary to clarify the meaning of the words ‘dharma’ and ‘change of dharma’ (*conversion) in the above formulation. These words have not been used in the case of an individual who embraces a creed after a comparative study of different religions and decides to accept what he thinks is suitable for him. A religion that polemically preaches that such and such book is divinely inspired, that what is written between its two covers alone is pious and that everything else is false and sinful; a religious institution that seeks to spread not just its so-called philosophy but also its customs, thoughts, laws and language on other religionists with persuasion, failing which it seeks to impose them if necessary by fraud, wickedness and force, and considers such religious force itself as being pious; such is the religion that is implied in the words ‘change of dharma’ in the above formulation. A change of dharma brought about by such extreme religious creeds in the followers of other religions causes a change of nationality in those converted.

It is slanderous to claim that shuddhi breeds hatred?

If shuddhi supposedly breeds hatred, then why corruption (*conversion) is not deemed to breed hatred? In fact, it is because the mullahs and missionaries first
embark on a campaign of conversion that we are forced to do shuddhi. If shuddhi breeds hatred, then first shut shops of the Muslims and Christians who convert Hindus by fair or foul means and initiate hatred in the first place. Then the campaign of shuddhi shall stop automatically. If you give freedom to the mullah and missionaries to convert under the pretext of propagation of religion, then the Hindus must also have the right to their shuddhi. To claim that the homecoming of those who have strayed into a foreign religion breeds hatred whilst reserving one’s own right to convert is like a thief who guards his right to steal and claims that hatred will breed if his victims take back what he has stolen from them.

**Document Title:** Anasakti Yoga  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1931  
**Source:** Ronald Duncan, ed., *Gandhi: Selected Writings* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005), 36.

All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God’s greatness, and there is no violence done to Truth. [...]

This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man’s lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. And this self-realization is the subject of the Gita, as it is of all scriptures.

**Document Title:** Life and Teachings of Swami Dayanand  
**Date:** 1935  
**Source:** Vishwa Prakash, *The Life and Teachings of Swami Dayanand* (Kala Press: Allahabad, 1935); http://www.archive.org/stream/swamidayaand00prakuoft#page/n15/mode/2up

*Divine Revelation for All*

God makes no distinctions of class, race or colour. Distinctions are the outcome of ungodly people. God’s creation is not a monopoly—the sun, air, water, is for every one of the race and so is the divine revelation. [...]
There is a Vedic Text, “As I have been given the word (the Vedas) which is the word of salvation for all making—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, women, servants even the lowest of the low, so should you all do (i.e. teach and preach the Veda).”

But the Brahmans, who were the custodians of the Vedas, forbade its recital before a Shudra or women. There was a dark period in the history of Hinduism, when molten lead was filled in the sockets of ears, if any Shudra even heard the Vedic hymns. [...] 

But swami ji has made the Vedas a public property. They can be purchased in a few rupees and even the disciples drawn from the lowest strata of the society sing the hymns.

Doors of Hinduism Opened

For ten centuries, Hinduism was a prey to foreign religions. Mohammedans came and conquered this country. Later they began their conversion work. By threats of life or baits of officialdom they succeeded in converting more than a quarter of the Hindu population. When English came to this country they brought Christian missionaries in their lap. These Christian missionaries were educated people and they had a sufficient backing from their countries. They obtained very little success amongst the educated classes, so they shifted their energies to the people of lower strata of society. Untouchables and hill tribes were converted to their faith.

But what for Hinduism? Hinduism was not a proselytizing religion. It could easily lose its own men, but no one could be brought back into its fold. Swami Dayanand saw that this was the weakest point of Hinduism. A society, however large it may be, will surely be extinct from the face of the earth, if it allows its people to go away, but do not allow others to come in. So he opened the portals wide, he began the conversion work which was taken up by his disciples and today it is settled fact that Hinduism has become a proselytizing religion. Thus Swami Dayanand infused life into the dead body. The stupor of long is vanished, and it has began to guard what was his.

Arya Samaj Founded at Bombay

On the 10th April 1875, the Samaj was established at Bombay and the following rules were formulated:
16. In the schools of the Samajas persons of each sex shall be received and instructed in the true knowledge contained in the philosophy of the Vedas and the works of the ancient sages—Arsha-grantha. [...]

18. As it is the Vedas only which teach doctrines which can bear the test of logical examination and scientific demonstration and they alone which are propounded by the founders of Arya Samaj therefore it is required that every member shall follow out so far at least as lies in his power the religious practices contained in these and these only. No tenets of other so called religions which conflict therewith shall be deemed as of any authority whatever.

19. The Samaja shall embrace every opportunity of sending forth in all directions upon lecturing tours such of its members as are qualified to instruct in the Vedic philosophy and deserving of confidence.

*Swami Dayanand—A Man of the World*

Swami wanted to propagate the religion of the Vedas. And what sort of that religion that is, “I believe in a religion based on universal and all embracing principles which have always been accepted as true by mankind, and will continue to command the allegiance of mankind, in the ages to come. Hence it is that the religion in question is called the primeval eternal religion, which means that it is above the hostility of all human creeds whatsoever. Whatever is believed in by those who are steeped in ignorance or have been led astray by sectaries is not worthy of being accepted by the wise. That faith alone is really true and worthy of acceptance which is followed by Aptas, i.e. those who are true in word, deed and thought, promote public good and are impartial and learned; but all that is discarded by such men must be considered as unworthy of belief and false.”

**Document Title:** Why Go For Conversion?  
**Author:** B.R. Ambedkar  
**Date:** 1936  
**Translation:** Vasant Moon  
**Source:** http://www.ambedkartimes.com/ambedkar.htm

*Revolution—Not Reform*

If we can gain freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion? And why should we sacrifice our strength and property for that? None should misunderstand the object of our movement
as being Hindu social reform. The object of our movement is to achieve social freedom for the untouchables. It is equally true that this freedom cannot be secured without conversion.

*Conversion Alone Liberates Us*

I am simply surprised by the question, which some Hindus ask us as to what can be achieved by conversion alone? Most of the present day Sikhs, Muslims and Christians were formerly Hindus, majority of them being from the Shudras and Untouchables. Do these critics mean to say that those, who left the Hindu fold and embraced Sikhism or Christianity, have made no progress at all? And if this is not true, and if it is admitted that the conversion has brought a distinct improvement in their condition, then to say that the untouchables will not be benefited by conversion, carries no meaning. [...] 

After giving deep thought to the problem, everybody will have to admit that conversion is necessary to the Untouchables as self-government is to India. The ultimate object of both is the same. There is not the slightest difference in their ultimate goal. This ultimate aim is to attain freedom. And if the freedom is necessary for the life of mankind, conversion of Untouchables which brings them complete freedom cannot be called worthless by any stretch of imagination.

**Document Title:** The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna  
**Date:** 1942  
**Source:** Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942).

If a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path. God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.

With sincerity and earnestness one can realize God through all religions. The Vaishnavas will realize God, and so will the Saktas, the Vedantists and the Brahmans. The Mussalmans and the Christians will realize him too. All will certainly realize God if they are earnest and sincere.

I had to practice each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths
are different. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. A brahmin without this love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with the love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti an untouchable becomes pure and elevated.

Truth is one; only It is called by different names. All people are seeking the same Truth; the variance is due to climate, temperament, and name. A lake has many ghats. From one ghat the Hindus take water in jars and call it “jal.” From another ghat the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it “pani.” From a third the Christians take the same thing and call it “water.” Suppose someone says that the thing is not “jal” but “pani,” or that it is not “pani” but “water,” or that it is not “water” but “jal.” It would indeed be ridiculous. But this very thing is at the root of the friction among sects, their misunderstandings and quarrels. This is why people injure and kill one another, and shed blood, in the name of religion. But this is not good. Everyone is going toward God. They will all realize Him if they have sincerity and longing of heart.

**Document Title:** Gandhi and the Challenge of Religious Diversity: Religious Pluralism Revisited  
**Author:** Mohandas Gandhi  
**Date:** 1946  

Call Him Ishvara, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master. [...] 

To each man according to his faith is all that I can say. If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. [...] This matter of Rama is one which transcends reason. [...] 

Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.
Your Holiness,

On behalf of many Hindus whom I know personally, I welcome your visit to Bharat. This is a country with an ancient civilisation and unique religious culture which accommodates many religious traditions that have come to this country throughout the centuries.

Being the head of the Vatican State and also the Catholic Church with a great following all over the world, you enjoy a highly venerable position and can play a significant role in defusing religious conflicts and preserving the world’s rich cultures. You have in your Apostolic Letter tertio millennio adveniente, 38 (November 10, 1994) voiced your intention to convocate a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia. After seeing the report of the Pre-Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Asia appointed by you, I want to bring to your kind notice the concerns of many Hindus in this country about religious conversion. In the Second Vatican Council, the status accorded to the world religions was that of a means of preparing them for Christ. We all understand that the Catholic religion does not accommodate other religions, except in this context. But I am appealing to you here to accept that every person has the freedom to pursue his or her own religion.

In the recent past, you mentioned that reason should be respected. On the basis of reason, no non-verifiable belief is going to fare any better than any other non-verifiable belief. Therefore, according to reason, there is no basis for conversion in matters of faith.

Apart from reason, there is another important issue which I request you to consider. Among the world’s religious traditions, there are those that convert and those that do not. The non-converting religious traditions, like the Hindu, Jewish and Zoroastrian, give others the freedom to practise their religion whether they agree with the others’ tenets or not. They do not wish to convert. I would characterise them as non-aggressive. Religions that are committed by their theologies to convert, on the other hand, are necessarily aggressive, since conversion implies a conscious intrusion into the religious life of a person, in fact, into the religious person.
This is a very deep intrusion, as the religious person is the deepest, the most basic in any individual. When that person is disturbed, a hurt is sustained which is very deep. The religious person is violated. The depth of this hurt is attested by the fact that when a religious sentiment is violated, it can produce a martyr. People connected to a converted person are deeply hurt. Even the converted person will suffer some hurt underneath.

He must necessarily wonder if he has done the right thing and, further, he has to face an inner alienation from his community, a community to which he has belonged for generations, and thus an alienation from his ancestors. I don’t think that can ever be fully healed. Religious conversion destroys centuries-old communities and incites communal violence. It is violence and it breeds violence. Thus, for any humane person, every religious sentiment has to be respected, whether it is a Muslim sentiment or a Christian sentiment or a Hindu sentiment.

Further, in many religious traditions, including the Hindu tradition, religion is woven into the fabric of culture. So, destruction of a religion amounts to the destruction of a religious culture. Today, for instance, there is no living Greek culture; there are only empty monuments. The Mayan, Roman and many other rich cultures are all lost forever and humanity is impoverished for it. Let us at least allow humanity to enjoy the riches of its remaining mosaic of cultures. Each one has some beauty, something to contribute to the enrichment of humanity.

In any tradition, it is wrong to strike someone who is unarmed. In the Hindu tradition, this is considered a heinous act, for which the punishment is severe. A Buddhist, a Hindu, a Jew, are all unarmed, in that they do not convert. You cannot ask them to change the genius of their traditions and begin to convert in order to combat conversion. Because it is the tradition of these religions and cultures not to convert, attempts to convert them is one-sided aggression. It is striking the unarmed. I respect the freedom of a Christian or a Muslim to practise his or her faith. I do not accept many of their beliefs, but I want them to have the freedom to follow their religion.

You cannot ask me to respond to conversion by converting others to my religion because it is not part of my tradition. We don’t believe in conversion, even though certain Hindu organisations have taken back some converted people. Thus, conversion is not merely violence against people; it is violence against people who are committed to non-violence.
I am hurt by religious conversion and many others like me are hurt. Millions are hurt. There are many issues to be discussed regarding conversion, but I want to draw your attention to only the central issue here which is this one-sided violence. Religious conversion is violence and it breeds violence. In converting, you are also converting the non-violent to violence.

Any protest against religious conversion is always branded as persecution, because it is maintained that people are not allowed to practise their religion, that their religious freedom is curbed. The truth is entirely different. The other person also has the freedom to practise his or her religion without interference. That is his/her birthright. Religious freedom does not extend to having a planned programme of conversion. Such a programme is to be construed as aggression against the religious freedom of others.

During the years of your papal office, you have brought about certain changes in the attitude and outlook of the church. On behalf of the non-aggressive religions of the world, the Hindu, the Parsi, the Jewish and other native religions in different countries, I request you to put a freeze on conversion and create a condition in which all religious cultures can live and let live.

**Document Title:** Conversion Is an Act of Violence: Aggressive religions have no God-given right to destroy ancient faiths and cultures  
**Author:** Swami Dayananda Saraswati  
**Date:** November 1999  
**Source:** http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=4308

Religious conversion is a widely discussed topic in the Indian media these days. I think this issue needs to be thoroughly understood by all the people that count in every religion.

The world’s religions can be categorically said to be either aggressive or nonaggressive. Each religion has a certain promise in the form of an ultimate goal. Their faithful people try to live the prescribed life and reach the promised goal. Neither they nor their clergy are out to bring the people of other religions to their flock. Zoroastrians follow their religious tradition without attempting to convert anybody to their religion. This is true with the followers of the Jewish tradition, Vedic religion (now known as Hinduism), Shintoism, Taoism and the many other religions of various tribes in the world. I call these religious traditions nonaggressive because they do not believe in aggressive conversion.
Then there are religions like Christianity, whose theologies, containing a number of basic nonverifiable beliefs, advocate conversion. Evangelism and proselytization are sacred commitments of the entire cadre of the highly organized clergy. The clergy-inspired laity are not any less committed to conversion. They are zealous in their mission of preaching and conversion. In their zeal, the end more often than not justifies the means. From the days of the Inquisition, every attempt recorded in history to stop their program of conversion only stoked their flame of zeal.

As a result, many religions with their unique cultures have disappeared, leaving behind only mammoth relics, like the ones in Greece and Mexico. The loss of such great living cultures of the world is the mark of success for the zealous of the aggressive religions. The truth is that where there should be a sense of guilt and remorse, there is a sense of achievement and pride. Many leaders of nonaggressive traditions think that the charity of the missionaries is designed to neutralize any protest from the native religious community. One cannot totally dismiss their thinking.

Religious conversion by missionary activity remains an act of violence. It is an act of violence because it hurts deeply, not only the other members of the family of the converted, but the entire community that comes to know of it. One is connected to various persons in one’s world. The religious person in every individual is the innermost, inasmuch as he or she is connected to a force beyond the empirical. The religious person is connected only to the force beyond he has now accepted. That is the reason why the hurt caused by religion can turn into violence. That is why a religious belief can motivate a missionary to be a martyr. When the hurt of the religious becomes acute, it explodes into violence. Conversion is violence. It generates violence.

Aggressive religions and nonaggressive religions are not on the same plank. Conversion is, therefore, a rank, one-sided aggression. The genius of the nonaggressive traditions cannot change, and therefore, they cannot be asked to do the same thing as the aggressive religions do.

Humanity cannot afford to lose any more of its existing living religious traditions and cultures. We want to enjoy the religious cultures of both Christianity and Islam as we also want to enjoy the cultures of Jews, Parsis, Taoists, Shintoists, Hindus and others. Humanity will not let a pyramid be razed to the ground by the Egyptian government to create a housing complex. Even though they are in Egypt, the pyramids are too ancient to be the property of that country. They are standing monuments of human genius—they belong to the whole of humanity.
Religion and culture are not often separable. This is especially true with the Hindu religious tradition. The greeting word, namaste, is an expression of culture as well as religion. Even though a religious mark on the forehead is purely religious, it is looked upon as a part of Hindu culture. Rangoli [patterns drawn on the ground with rice flour] at the entrance of a Hindu house is not just cultural; it is also religious. Indian music and dance cannot separate themselves from the Hindu religious tradition. There is no classical dance, bharata natyam, without Siva Nataraja being there. The classical, lyrical compositions of Meera, Tyagaraja, Purandara, Dikshitar and many others are intimately connected to the Hindu religious traditions. Therefore, conversion implies destruction of this entire culture. A committed Christian will not wear a tilakam, much less have rangoli in front of the house. If there is no rangoli at the entrance to a Tamil Nadu house, we immediately know that it doesn't belong to a Hindu. A converted Christian woman ceases to wear Indian traditional clothes, like saris, etc. No Christian woman will wear a nose ring. It is amazing how easily cultures disappear by the program of conversion through various means, leaving only dead monuments to be preserved for posterity. The living religious traditions, intimately woven into the fabric of their respective cultures, have to be allowed to live and thrive. Religious conversion should stop—the aggressive religions should realize that they are perpetrating violence when they convert. We want them to live and let others live.

LEGAL AND POLITICAL TEXTS

The post-colonial period when India secured her independence from the British is significant for the development of both Hindu and Indian thought. After several hundred years of political subjugation, Hinduism has been shaped by encounters with conquerors and invaders of the Indian subcontinent. However, there is contradictory evidence about Hinduism’s engagement with the British and with Western religions. Some colonials and Christian missionaries interpreted Hinduism as a primitive tradition replete with superstition and ritual such as widow burning (sati) and child marriage. Others evaluated it as an idolatrous religion seeped in inequality primarily because of the way the caste system at the time separated the upper and lower castes.

In contrast, many scholars were interested in the vast Hindu theological and philosophical expressions—the ineffability of God as manifest in Brahman; the creation and sustenance of the cosmos; and the human journey in the cycle of life.
and rebirth. Because of sustained interest in these areas, some Hindu texts were read and revered in the West. The Bhagavad Gita found appreciative readers in Henry David Thoreau, T.S. Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The theological and philosophical recognition for some Hindu texts notwithstanding, the overarching understanding of Hinduism was refracted through the lens of ritual, myth, and social inequality. This tension was apparent in the ethos of the Hindu reform movements, as most reformers focused on reinterpreting the challenging parts of the Hindu tradition: namely, the stringent orthopraxy of the tradition. For the most part, reformers re-contextualized the ritualistic aspects of Hinduism and its rules and regulations in the Brahmanical texts, thereby emerging as powerful sources of internal critique and pluralism. Some reformers, such as Mohandas Gandhi, emphasized Advaita, the non-dualist philosophy focused on Brahman as the ultimate divine source of creation and as a counternarrative to the inequality of caste. Others, such as Ram Mohan Roy, focused on de-mythologizing ritual in favor of a more “rational” approach to religion. However, there remained challenges, such as Hinduism's relationship with proselytizing traditions and religious conversion. Both challenges were filtered through Hinduism's distinct experiences with both Islam and colonial missionary movements.

These two issues are the focal point of much religio-political consternation in the contemporary Indian polity. While India is not a Hindu nation, these legal selections do indicate the ways that Hindu nationalism, which aspires to protect Hindu traditions and values, found articulation in constitutional texts of the modern nation-state. We include these selections to draw attention to the trajectory of Hindu self-reflection—theologically, politically, and socially—as the Hindu tradition is mediated and negotiated in the context of the modern democratic state. There is a clear tug-of-war between the decision to protect Indian citizens and their diverse religious beliefs and the fear that conversion out of Hinduism will create a divisive sociopolitical environment with national and dharmic consequences. We include these texts to highlight the impact of religious traditions, perspectives, and worldviews on sociopolitical realities of a modern nation with the potential to restrict or prescribe the individual freedom(s) of her citizens. These texts also demonstrate that the dynamic between spiritual and sociopolitical religious freedom in Hinduism continues to be negotiated.

Document Title: Constitution of India
Date: 1949 (amended in 1976)
Preamble

We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

Part III—Fundamental Rights

15. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—
   (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or
   (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public. [...] 

16. (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
(2) No citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State. [...] 
(5) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any law which provides that the incumbent of an office in connection with the affairs of any religious or denominational institution or any member of the governing body thereof shall be a person professing a particular religion or belonging to a particular denomination.

17. “Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.
Right to Freedom of Religion

25. (1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

(2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law—
   (a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice.
   (b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

Explanation I—The wearing and carrying of kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion.

Explanation II—In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

26. Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right—
   (a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes;
   (b) to manage its own affairs in matters of religion;
   (c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and
   (d) to administer such property in accordance with law.

27. No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.

28. (1) No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.

(2) Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the State but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instruction shall be imparted in such institution.

(3) No person attending any educational institution recognized by the
State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.

**Cultural and Educational Rights**

30. (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

**Document Title:** Secularism, the Indian Concept  
**Author:** Atal Bihari Vajpayee  
**Date:** 1992  
**Source:** Christophe Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism: A Reader (New Jersey: Princeton, 2007).

Indian political ideology has accepted the supremacy of the political system but they have never supported autocratic dictatorship. There is a need to put some check on the political authority. This check is that of law. Even during the Vedic period, the importance of law was recognized. The cycle of seasons, as conceived during the Vedic period, was based on the concept of law which regulates the entire world. It is said in the Rigveda that the earth remains firm in its position because of the law (niyam), the same law keeps the sun in its position in the sky. Similarly, the State has no function according to the law or niyam. These laws provide the foundation for the concept of Dharma. The moral and material well-being of the people can be ensured by the State by acting according to Dharma.

We find that Dharma is used in the Indian thought in a much broader sense and in different contexts than the word ‘religion,’ though often Dharma and religion are used as synonyms. The word Dharma has been derived from ‘Dhri/dhatu,’ which means something ‘to hold.’ Thus we can say that anything that helps to keep something in its original form is its Dharma. The natural tendency of any object (or an individual) and its qualities denote its Dharma. Dharma is also used in the sense of duty. Therefore, in the social context, Dharma is important. [...] Dharma allows freedom of thought and faith but as long as you
are following your Dharma or act according to your Dharma, you are on the right track.

We must realize the difference between Dharma and religion. Religion is related to certain definite beliefs. As long as one shares those beliefs, he remains a member of that faith, religion or ‘mahzab.’ No sooner does one give up those beliefs than he ceases to be a member of that religion. Dharma is not entirely dependent upon beliefs. A person may not have any religious faith but still he could be called ‘Dharmik.’ That means he has good qualities. Essentially, Dharma is a way of life. It is something more than just living according to certain beliefs. When Dharma gets associated with a particular community, it becomes a religion. It also becomes a religion when it is institutionalised. [...] 

An analysis and comparative study of the Western and Indian concept of secularism leads us to the conclusion that the European secularism is something of this world and is independent of the Dharma or religion. On the other hand, a common man in India talks of life beyond this life and takes the belief as a matter of course. [...] 

Mahatma Gandhi describes the correct attitude towards religion as ‘Sarva Dharma Sambhava,’ equal respect to all religions. The concept of ‘Sarva Dharma Sambhava’ is somewhat different from the European secularism, which is independent of religion. In fact by propounding the theory of Sarva Dharma Sambhava, Gandhiji continued the age old Indian tradition which can be traced to the ancient saying of ‘Ekam Sadavipra Bahudha Vadanti.’ We may say that the Indian concept of secularism is Sarva Dharma Sambhava. [...] 

Sarva Dharma Sambhava is not against any religion. It treats all religions with equal respect. And, therefore, it can be said that the Indian concept of secularism is more positive. It is especially suited to India as followers of different faiths had been living in India since time immemorial, long before the advent of Christianity and Islam. [...] We should not ignore the fact that the Indian society is basically oriented to Dharma and has faith in it. [...] 

The correct interpretation of the Secular State would be that all dharmas or religious faiths are treated with equal respect. [...] 

In principle, it was accepted that the Indian concept of secularism would draw its inspiration from the Sarva Dharma Sambhava—equal respect for all religions. It would not be anti-religion. Still the Government followed such policies and
implemented them in such a manner that gave rise to the apprehension that the State wanted to keep away from religion and treated it as a hurdle in the way of progress. The equality of all religions and also of their followers was not put into practice. [...] 

In the absence of the correct understanding of the secular concept, some elements adopt a negative approach on some emotive issues placing a question mark on the concept itself. Practices like lighting a lamp at the inauguration of State functions or breaking a coconut at the time of launching a new ship are not connected with the rituals of any religion but are a part of Indian culture and tradition. ‘From darkness to light’—*Tamso Ma Jyotir Gamaya*—is the guiding spirit of man’s progress. Right from ancient times, man has challenged the forces of darkness by lighting a small lamp. Lighting of a lamp at public functions is thus symbolic. Similarly, I would pose a question to those who oppose chanting of Vedic hymns on such occasions. Could there be any objection to any mantra which exhorts to walk hand in hand and to speak and think with a feeling of oneness? [...] 

We have to differentiate between the religious practices and rituals which have gotten associated with festivals and their social aspects to facilitate their transformation into national festivals.

**Document Title:** Persuading Thy Neighbor to be as Thyself: Constitutional Limits on Evangelism in the United States and India  
**Date:** 1994  

The Orissa [Freedom of Religion] Act [of 1967] prohibited forcible conversion, stating that “[no] person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.” Conversion was defined as “renouncing one religion and adopting another” and force constituted “a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication.” In addition, the Orissa Act defined fraud as embracing “misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance,” and inducement encompassed “the offer of any gift or gratification either in cash or in kind…includ[ing] the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise.” [...]

HINDUISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
The Madhya Pradesh [Freedom of Religion] Act [of 1968] prohibited forcible conversion through the use of force, fraud, or allurement. Allurement was defined as including an “offer of any temptation in the form of (i) any gift or gratification either in cash or kind; (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise.” The Act stated that force meant “a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure and social excommunication.” It defined fraud as embracing “misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance.” As with the Orissa Act, the Madhya Pradesh Act provided for increased punishment if the forcible conversion involved a minor, a woman, or a person who was a member of a scheduled caste or tribe.

In addition, the Madhya Pradesh Act required that a person overseeing the religious ceremony of a convert inform the district magistrate by completing a form prescribed in the Act. The informant had to specify the name of the person changing her religion, the faith from which and to which she was being converted, her father’s name, address, age, occupation, income, and marital status. This form also required date regarding whether the convert had dependents, whether she was a member of a scheduled tribe, the date of the conversion, the place of the conversion, and the names of at least two people present at the ceremony. Moreover, the person performing the conversion ceremony had to identify herself. If the persuader failed to file the proper forms or otherwise comply with the Act’s provisions, she could be convicted of a crime.

Adopting arguments presented in *Hyde v. State*, Father Stainislaus argued that the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act was *ultra vires* because only Parliament could legislate in this area, and the state law violated his constitutional rights. The High Court of Madhya Pradesh rejected his arguments. After carefully evaluating a number of the same precedents reviewed by the Orissa High Court, the Court concluded that the state’s Freedom of Religion Act primarily focused on “public order.” Since Indian states can pass legislation to promote public order, the Madhya Pradesh High Court held that this state legislation was constitutional. [...]

The Indian Supreme Court concluded, in effect, that the right to transmit or spread the tenets of one’s religion is subordinated where that right conflicts with the public order, defined as the “state of tranquility which prevails among members of a political society as a result of internal regulations enforced by the government which they have established.”
**Document Title:** The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance (India)

**Date:** 2002


Whoever converts any person from one religion to another either by performing any ceremony by himself for such conversion as a religious priest or by taking part directly or indirectly in such a ceremony shall, within such period as may be prescribed, send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the district in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion in such form as may be prescribed.

**Document Title:** The Gujarat Freedom of Religion Bill No. 24 (India)

**Date:** 2003

**Source:** www.emw-d.de/fix/files/indien-religionsgesetz.pdf

*To provide freedom of religion by prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for the matters incidental thereto.*

**Definitions**

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,

(a) “allurement” means offer of any temptation in the form of
   (i) any gift or gratification, either in cash or kind;
   (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise;
(b) “convert” means to make one person to renounce one religion and adopt another religion;
(c) “force” includes a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasures or social ex-communication;
(d) “fraudulent means” includes misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance;
(e) “minor” means a person under eighteen years of age.

**Prohibition of Forcible Conversion.**

3. No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet such conversion.
Punishment for Contravention of Provisions of Section 3.
4. Whoever contravenes the provision of section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and also be liable to fine, which may extend to rupees fifty thousand:

Provided that whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to four years and also be liable to fine which may extend to rupees one lakh.

Prior permission to be taken from District Magistrate with respect to conversion.
5. (1) Whoever converts any person from one religion to another wither by performing any ceremony by himself for such conversion as a religious priest or takes part directly or indirectly in such ceremony shall take prior permission for proposed conversion from the District Magistrate concerned by applying in such form as may be prescribed by rules.

(2) The person who is converted shall send an intimation to the District Magistrate of the District concerned in which the ceremony has taken place of the fact of such conversion within such period and in such form as may be prescribed by rules.

Statement of Objects and Reasons
Reports have been received by the Government that conversions from one religion to another are made by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means. Bringing in a legislation to prohibit such conversions will act as deterrent against anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belonging to depressed classes and will enable people to practice their own religion freely. It will also be useful to maintain public order and to nip in the bud the attempts by certain subversive forces to create social tension. The Government has, therefore, decided to enact a law to prevent conversion of religion by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means.

Document Title: Freedom of Religion Bill Passed (India)
Date: 2006
Source: Tribune News Service; http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20061230/himachal.htm#2

[Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh] Virbhadra [Singh] said the Bill was intended to prevent forcible conversions. Conversions created resentment among
several sections of the society and also inflame religious passions leading to communal clashes, he said. He claimed the Bill was meant to prevent exploitation of the depressed classes.

He said it has been observed that there was a rise in conversions based on allurement. “Unless checked well in time this practice may erode the confidence and mutual trust between the different ethnic and religious groups in the state,” the Chief Minister said.

According to this Bill, No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

With regard to the provision of punishment, Any person contravening the provisions contained in Section-3 (as mentioned above) shall, without prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment of either description which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to Rs 25,000 or with both.

Further, Provided that in case the offence is committed in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to scheduled caste or scheduled tribes, the punishment of imprisonment may extend to three years and fine may extend to Rs 50,000.

As per the Bill, the offence has been made a cognisable one and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of police.

Document Title: Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (India)  
Date: 2006  

A bill to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. [...] 

2. Definitions
In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires
(a) “conversion” means renouncing one religion and adopting another;
(b) “force” shall include show of force or threat of injury or threat of
divine displeasure or social ex-communication;
(c) “fraud” shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent
contrivance;
(d) “inducement” shall include the offer of any gift or gratification,
either in cash or in kind or grant of any benefit either pecuniary or
otherwise; and
(e) “minor” means a person under eighteen years of age.

3. Prohibition of forcible conversion
No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any
person from one religion to another by the use of force or by inducement or by
any other fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion:

Provided at any person who has been converted from one religion to another, in
contravention of the provisions of this section, shall be deemed not to have been
converted.

4. Notice of intention
   (1) A person intending to convert from one religion to another shall give
prior notice of at least thirty days to the District Magistrate of the district
concerned of his intention to do so and the District Magistrate shall get
the matter enquired into all by such agency as he may deem fit:

Provided that no notice shall be required if a person reverts back to his
original religion.

   (2) Any person who fails to give prior notice, as required under sub-
section (1), shall be punishable with fine which may extend to one
thousand rupees.

5. Punishment for contravention of the provision of section 3
Any person contravening the provisions contained in section 3 shall, without
prejudice to any civil liability, be punishable with imprisonment of either
description which may extend to two years or with fine may extend to twenty five
thousand rupees or with both:

Provided that in case the offence is committed in respect of a minor, a woman or
a person belonging to Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribes, the punishment of
imprisonment may extend to three years and fine may extend to fifty thousand rupees.
6. Offence to be cognizable
An offence under this Act shall be cognizable and shall not be investigated by an
officer below the rank of an Inspector of Police.

7. Prosecution to be made with the sanction of District Magistrate
No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be made without the sanction
of the District Magistrate or such other authority, not below the rank of a Sub-
Divisional Officer, as may be authorized by him in that behalf.

**Document Title:** Rajasthan Dharma Swatantraya Act (Freedom of Religion Bill, India)
**Date:** 2006

A Bill for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of
force or allurement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto:
Be it enacted by the Rajasthan State Legislature in the Fifty-seventh year of the
Republic of India as follows:

1. Short Title, extent and commencement:
   (1) This Act may be called the Rajasthan Swatantrya Act, 2006.
   (2) It extends to the whole State of Rajasthan.
   (3) It shall come into force at once.

2. Definitions—In this Act, unless this otherwise requires,
   (a) “unlawful” means which is in contravention of the provisions of
       this Act
   (b) “allurement” means offer of any temptation in the form of
       (i) any gift or ratification, either in cash or kind;
       (ii) grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise;
   (c) “conversion” means renouncing one’s own religion and adopting
       another (explanation: own religion means religion of one’s forefathers);
   (d) “force” includes show of force or threat of injury of any kind, including
       threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication;
   (e) “fraudulent” means and includes misrepresentation or any other
       fraudulent contrivance.

3. Prohibition of conversion—No person shall convert or attempt to convert
either directly or otherwise any person from one religion to another by use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet such conversion.

4. Punishment for contravention of provisions of section 3—Whoever contravenes the provisions of section 3 shall, without prejudice to any other criminal liability, be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than two years but which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to a fine, which may extend to fifty thousand rupees.

5. Offence to be cognisable and non-bailable—Any offence under this Act shall be cognisable and non-bailable and shall not be investigated by an office below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

6. Power to make rules—

   (1) The State government may make rules for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.
   (2) All rules made under this act shall be laid, as soon as may be, after they are so made, before the House of the State legislature, while it is in session, of a period of not less than fourteen days which may be comprised in one session or in two successive sessions and if, before the expiry of the session in which they are so laid or the session immediately following, the House of the State Legislature makes any modification in any of such rules or resolves that any such rule should not be made, such rule shall, thereafter, have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be, so however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done thereunder.

Document Title: Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal
Date: 1990
Source: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/np00000_.html

11. Right to Equality

   (1) All citizens shall be equal before the law. No person shall be denied the equal protection of the laws.

   (2) No discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the
application of general laws on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or ideological conviction or any of these.

(3) The State shall not discriminate citizens among citizens on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or ideological conviction or any of these. [...] 

(4) No person shall, on the basis of caste, be discriminated against as untouchable, be denied access to any public place, or be deprived of the use of public utilities. Any contravention of this provision shall be punishable by law.

12. Right to Freedom

(1) No person shall be deprived of his personal liberty save in accordance with law, and no law shall be made which provides for capital punishment.

(2) All citizens shall have the following freedoms:

a) freedom of opinion and expression
b) freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms;
c) freedom to form unions and associations;
d) freedom to move throughout the Kingdom and reside in any part thereof;
e) freedom to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, or trade. [...] 

18. Cultural and Educational Right

(1) Each community residing within the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, and culture.

(2) Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.

19. Right to Religion

(1) Every person shall have the freedom to profess and practice his own religion as handed down to him from ancient times having due regard to
(1) Every person shall have the right to profess, practise and preserve his/her own religion as handed down to him or her from ancient times paying due regard to social and cultural traditions.

Provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another, and no person shall act or behave in a manner which may infringe upon the religion of others.

(2) Every religious denomination shall have the right to maintain its independent existence, and for this purpose to manage and protect its religious places and trusts, in accordance with law.

Document Title: Constitution of Nepal
Date: September 20, 2015

Part 1: Preliminary

4. State of Nepal:

(1) Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican state.

Explanation: For the purposes of this Article, “secular” means religious,
cultural freedoms, including protection of religion, culture handed down from the time immemorial. [...] 

**Part 3: Fundamental Rights and Duties**

18. Right to equality:

(1) All citizens shall be equal before law. No person shall be denied the equal protection of law.

(2) No discrimination shall be made in the application of general laws on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, physical condition, condition of health, marital status, pregnancy, economic condition, language or region, ideology or on similar other grounds.

(3) The State shall not discriminate citizens on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language, region, ideology or on similar other grounds. [...] 

24. Right against untouchability and discrimination:

(1) No person shall be subjected to any form of untouchability or discrimination in any private and public places on grounds of his or her origin, caste, tribe, community, profession, occupation or physical condition.

(2) In producing or distributing any goods, services or facilities, no person belonging to any particular caste or tribe shall be prevented from purchasing or acquiring such goods, services or facilities nor shall such goods, services or facilities be sold, distributed or provided only to the persons belonging to any particular caste or tribe.

(3) No act purporting to demonstrate any person or community as superior or inferior on grounds of origin, caste, tribe or physical condition or justifying social discrimination on grounds of caste, tribe or untouchability or propagating ideology based on untouchability and caste based superiority or hatred or encouraging caste-based discrimination in any manner whatsoever shall be allowed.
(4) No discrimination in any form shall be allowed at a workplace with or without making untouchability on the ground of caste.

(5) Any act of untouchability and discrimination in any form committed in contravention of this Article shall be punishable by law as a severe social offence, and the victim of such act shall have the right to obtain compensation in accordance with law. […]

26. Right to freedom of religion:

(1) Every person who has faith in religion shall have the freedom to profess, practice and protect his or her religion according to his or her conviction.

(2) Every religious denomination shall have the right to operate and protect its religious sites and religious Guthi (trusts).

Provided that nothing shall be deemed to prevent the regulation, by making law, of the operation and protection of religious sites and religious trusts and management of trust properties and lands.

(3) No person shall, in the exercise of the right conferred by this Article, do, or cause to be done, any act which may be contrary to public health, decency and morality or breach public peace, or convert another person from one religion to another or any act or conduct that may jeopardize other’s religion and such act shall be punishable by law.
1. Sara Singha has a Ph.D. in religion from Georgetown University. Originally from Karachi, Singha conducts comparative research on Christianity and Islam, and she wrote her dissertation on caste and Christian Dalits in Pakistan. At the Berkley Center, she has worked on the Undergraduate Learning and Interreligious Understanding Project and on the website’s interreligious dialogue material. Singha was also a part of the “Christianity and Freedom” project headed by the Berkley Center’s Religious Freedom Project (RFP). She is currently a researcher with the “Under Caesar’s Sword” project, a study of global Christian responses to persecution co-sponsored by the Religious Freedom Research Project and the Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests include religion and politics; narratives of marginalization; and religious identity. Her current research focuses on the religio-political identity formation of Christian Dalits in India and Pakistan. As an integral part of this research project, Sara Singha will conduct field research on persecuted Christian communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

2. Among the first attempts to construct and impose such a general category were undertaken by British scholars William Jones and Edward Moor in the early nineteenth century. Both Jones and Moor conducted extensive research on Indic religious practices but tried to construct the tradition using Christian language and concepts. For example, in his book, The Hindu Pantheon, Moor describes Hindus as monotheistic people who worship one God as the “self-existing and incomprehensible spirit.” While this is true for Hindus who follow the Advaita Vedanta (non-dualistic) tradition, it is not necessarily the majority practice.

3. Indo-Aryan migration theory remains just that—a theory. Some evidence and scholarly opinion support the theory, but at the same time recent genetic and other research raise some legitimate doubts about its validity.


7. On the wide range of reasons and motives for restrictions on religious freedom in general and limits on proselytism in particular, with an emphasis on political reasons and motives,

8. An additional corpus of stories, the Puranas, also gained importance during this same period. The Puranas narrate the deeds and genealogies of various Hindu deities. Along with the Gita and the Puranas, Hindu sacred texts include forms of devotional literature such as poems and songs composed to express intense adoration to the gods.

9. This is one common translation of “Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanty,” or एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति in Sanskrit, taken from the Rigveda 1.164.46. The nineteenth-century English translation by Ralph T. H. Griffith renders the complete verse thus: “They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. / To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.” See Ralph T. H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda, Translated with a Popular Commentary, Volume I* (Benares: E.J. Lazarus and Company, 1889), 292. Griffith comments at p. 292 n. 46: “All these names, says the poet, are names of one and the same Divine Being, the One Supreme Spirit under various manifestations.” Available at http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01164.htm.

10. Most citations for quoted text in the introduction have been omitted to avoid redundancy, since the quotations are properly cited later in the sourcebook.

11. Kabir was a fifteenth-century mystic poet born into a Muslim family. He was deeply influenced by the Hindu bhakti tradition and was a wellspring of mystical devotion to the ineffable spirit and love of God. His poetry and songs are used in Hindu meditation and for many adherents of bhakti. Because of his strong influence on the tradition, his poetry and reflections on the path of true religious devotion are included in this sourcebook.


14. Article 17 of the Constitution of India declares, “‘Untouchability’ is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘Untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.” Available at http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/coi-4March2016.pdf. The Constitution of Nepal, which came into effect on September 20, 2015, also declares, “No person shall be subjected to any form of untouchability or discrimination in any private and public places on grounds of his or her origin, caste, tribe, community, profession, occupation or physical condition.” For argument and evidence that norms and practices associated with the recognition and enforcement of untouchability have declined in modern India in both rural and urban areas, see A. M. Shah, *The Structure of Indian Society: Then and Now* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 191. However, as observed in endnote 15, there is also evidence that caste-based discrimination remains widespread, particularly in rural India.
15. See, for example, Understanding Untouchability: A Comprehensive Study of Practices and Conditions in 1589 Villages (Ahmedabad: Navsarjan Trust, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, 2010). Available at http://navsarjan.org/Documents/Untouchability_Report_FINAL_Complete.pdf. Conducted over three years and based on data from 1,589 villages and 5,462 respondents in the western state of Gujarat, this largest-ever study on Dalits suggests that there is widespread caste-based discrimination in many aspects of daily life in India, particularly in rural areas. Despite Indian and international laws that ban discrimination against Dalits, the report finds that the practices of segregated housing, drinking water wells, places of worship, and seating arrangements in schools and public events remain extremely common.


22. All dates hereafter are from the Common Era (CE).

The Religious Freedom Project (RFP) at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs is the nation’s only university-based program devoted exclusively to the analysis of religious freedom, a basic human right restricted in many parts of the world. Under the leadership of Director Thomas Farr and Associate Director Timothy Shah, the RFP engages a team of international scholars to examine and debate the meaning and value of religious liberty; its importance for democracy; and its role in social and economic development, international diplomacy, and the struggle against violent religious extremism.

The RFP began in 2011 with the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation. In 2014 that support continued, while the project also began a three-year partnership with Baylor University and its Institute for Studies of Religion under Director Byron Johnson.

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

3307 M Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20007
berkleycenter@georgetown.edu
202-687-5119
http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu

Designed by Andrew Wallender