Why Hinduism Isn’t An “Ism” But A Way Of Life

Sadhguru: The term and concept of Hinduism was coined only in recent times. Otherwise, there was really no such thing. The word “Hindu” essentially comes from the word Sindhu. Anyone who is born in the land of Sindhu is a Hindu. It is a cultural and geographic identity. It is like saying “I am an Indian” but it is a more ancient identity than being an Indian. “Indian” is only about seventy years old, but this is an identity that we have always lived with.

Being a Hindu does not mean having a particular belief system. Basically, the whole culture was oriented towards realizing one’s full potential. Whatever you did in this culture was Hindu. There is no particular god or ideology that you can fulfill as the Hindu way of life. You can be a Hindu irrespective of whether you worship a man-god or a woman-god, whether you worship a cow or a tree. If you don’t worship anything you can still be a Hindu.

It is only recently and due to external influences that this geographical and cultural identity has attempted to transform itself into a religious identity called Hinduism. Hinduism, Hindu was never an “ism”, and the attempt to organize it as a religion is still not successful because the Hindu way of life which is referred to as Sanatana Dharma or universal law is all-inclusive in nature and does not exclude anything. The Hindu way of life is not an organized belief system but a science of salvation.

The science of salvation

The conflicts in the world have always been projected as good versus bad, but really, the conflict is always one man’s belief versus another man’s belief. In the past, religion was far more important to people than it is now, but still there were no theocratic states in this culture; the ruler had his religion and the subjects had the freedom to follow theirs. There was no conflict because people did not look at religion as an organized process.

Everywhere in the world, whenever anyone spoke anything other than the existing organized religion of that time, the first thing that the people said was, “Kili.” In Europe, thousands of women were burnt at the stake simply because they showed other kinds of possibilities and capabilities that were not logically understood by people. So they were labeled as witches and burnt. Persecution has always been the thing. Some of the famous ones that you know who were persecuted were Jesus, Manuvar, and Socrates. They were persecuted simply because they showed other kinds of capabilities which were not considered normal.

So, wherever spirituality happened in the West, it always happened in secrecy. It was always individual or in small groups, never as a society. But in this culture, there has never been anything called persecution for spiritual people. At the most, they called you for debates and asked you questions. Because the pursuit is truth, so people sat down and argued whether they knew what was true or what was the other person knew was true. If he was more powerful than yours, you become a part of him. If your truths were more powerful than theirs, they would become a part of you. It is a very different kind of search. People were searching to know. They were not just believing and trying to prove that their belief was right.

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There is no belief system to the Hindu way of life. Someone believes in God, someone else can choose not to believe in God. Everybody can have their own way of worship and way to salvation. If there are five people in your family, each one can worship the God of their choice, or not worship anything, and still be a good Hindu. So you are a Hindu irrespective of what you believe or don’t believe.

At the same time, there was a common thread running through all these. In this culture, the only goal in human life is liberation or moksh. Liberation from the very process of life, from everyday that you know as limitations and to go beyond that. God is not held as the ultimate thing. God is seen as one of the stepping stones. This is a Godless but a devotional nation in the sense that there is no concept of God. When I say Godless, we need to understand that this is the only culture that has given humans the freedom not just to make a choice of God, but to create the sort of God that you can relate to. You can worship a rock, a cow, your mother — you can worship whatever you feel like — because this is a culture where we have always known that God is our making. Everywhere else people believe “God created us.” Here we know we created god so we take total freedom to create whatever kind of god we can relate to. People worshiped whatever aspect of life they related to most, and that was perfectly fine.

A Godless nation

In the East, spirituality and religion were never an organized process. Organization was only to the extent of making spirituality available to everyone — not for conquest. Essentially, religion is about you, it is not about God. Religion is about your liberation. God is just one more stepping stone that you can use or skip towards your ultimate liberation. This culture recognizes human wellbeing and freedom as of paramount importance versus the prominence of God, and hence the whole technology of god-making evolved into the science of consecrating various kinds of energies and spaces.

The essential purpose of God is to create reverence in a person. What you are reverence towards is not important. Being reverential is what is important. If you make reverence the quality of your life, then you become far more receptive to life. Life will happen to you in bigger ways. There is so much misunderstanding about these things because there is a certain dialectical ethos to the culture where we want to express everything in a story or in a song. But in a way, this whole culture referred to as Hindu is rooted in the spiritual ethos of each individual working towards ultimate liberation as the inner spiritual goal in life.

If you explore mysticism in India, it is absolutely incredible and this has been possible because it does not come from a belief system. It happens as a scientific means to explore dimensions beyond the physical.

Sadhguru J. Vasudev is a contemporary mystic rooted as strongly in worldly and pragmatic matters as he is in inner experience and wisdom. Named one of India’s 50 most influential people, he has addressed prominent global forums on issues as diverse as socio-economic development, leadership and spirituality. He has served as a delegate to the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit and the World Peace Congress and has been a special invited to the World Economic Forum (2006-2008), the Australian Leadership Forum (2000) and TED (2009).

His interviews are featured in The New York Times, BBC, Bloomberg, CNN etc. He is the author of seven books and co-author of the Amazon Bestseller “Midnight with the Mystic”. His public talks frequently draw crowds of over 200,000 people.

Founded by Sadhguru, Isha Foundation is a non-religious, non-profit organization with over 200 centers worldwide and over one million volunteers. Isha Foundation offers Inner Engineering Online – a practical approach for inner transformation in a fast paced world. The course designed by Sadhguru presents simple, yet powerful tools for an individual to experience life on a deeper level with more awareness, energy, and productivity. This program is an ideal opportunity for those with time and travel constraints, who wish to experience some of the profound effects of the traditional Inner Engineering program, which has impacted millions of people over the past 25 years. To learn more, visit the free introductory Talk, or to register visit www.ishafoundation.org

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