

Are Christianity & Hinduism Related?

In the classification of religions, one is often confused as to what parameters are adopted and why. Often I am confounded at the superficiality of the methodologies put in motion; whether it is based upon some alleged revelations, or the number of gods, etc. Over the years that I have been involved deeply into the world of religions, I have finally realized that the functional classification of religions should be based upon whether the religion is mythology-based or not. Using this criterion, I have placed all major religions into the mythology with the exception of Sikhism. The fact is that Sikh religion is a reality based philosophy.

Both Christianity and Hinduism have sprung from common mythology. In the same vein, I also argue that Christianity is a grandchild of Hinduism—meaning that just about everything that is present in Christianity is present in more abundance in Hinduism. The alleged differences between them are not a matter of *kind* but only of a few *degrees*. In one area dealing with—sin-- I believe Christianity has outstripped Hinduism. For example in Bhagavad-Gita, chapter 9 verse 32, Krishna castigates all women, Vaisyas, and Sudras as products of sinful wombs. In other words, the majority of human beings are labeled as sinners; whereas in Christianity, the entire humanity is relegated to being sinners.

Brigadier Rawel Singh, to his credit, has taken the challenge to catalogue the similarities of Christianity and Hinduism. Even though this attempt is a beginning for a fresh attempt to link these two mythologies, I think, more scholarly input in future should shed further light. Personally I take this article by Rawel Singh as a trailblazer to truly understanding the nature of mythological- based religions – **G.B. Singh**

Hinduism and Christianity are Akin: Sikhi Stands Apart

- Rawel Singh

There are five organized world religions namely Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism in descending order of the number of adherents. As may be seen the Sikhs outnumber the Jews. However, writers belonging to other faiths rarely mention Sikhism when writing about religion. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the Sikhs have not done enough to let their religion be known. For example once a Sikh told a friend that the Sikhs are the fifth largest religious group worldwide. The friend replied “Really, then how is it that I don’t know about it”? Secondly, certain writers like W.H. McLeod, Christian missionaries and some Hindu groups refer to Sikh religion as part of Hinduism; this despite the fact the two are fundamentally different. It appears cultural similarities due to both having emanated in India have been understood as religious overlaps.

The three Semitic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam have Abraham as their Patriarch and the same basic scripture, the Old Testament – the Muslims only the Torah, its first five books. Judaism is the parent of the other two but they are accepted as separate religions.

A study of religious beliefs and practices of religions would show that Christianity is more akin to Hinduism, than the Sikh religion is made out to be by the misinformed or those with other motives. The purpose of this article is to study this aspect briefly under various headings.

Scriptures

The Hindu Vedas are considered Divine word. Many scriptures are in the form of narratives of stories of a particular age as exemplified by the Ramayana and Mahabharata including the Gita.

The Christian scriptures, the Old Testament and New Testament, are also in the form of narratives for most part.

The Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is not based on stories but teachings and has therefore the status of the living Guru, the only scripture to have that status amongst scriptures of all religions.

Immortality of the Soul

One belief that Sikhi (the Sikh faith) shares with Hinduism is immortality of the soul. This is also one of the causes of the Sikhs being treated as Hindus.

Christianity does not profess to believe in it, but a number of verses in the New Testament confirm the concept e.g:

But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:12-13).

The belief in a soul is not held by the Jews or the Muslims but a large percentage of Christians accept it, which makes Christianity more like Hinduism than the other two Semitic faiths.

Some Christians have started cremating the dead; a practice not followed by the other two Semitic religions.

Concept of God

Both Hinduism and Christianity start with the concept of one God but end up in a trinity.

The Hindu trinity comprises of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer and Mahadev also known as Mahesh and Shankar (loosely called Shiva, which really is the name for the Creator) the destroyer. As may be seen they represent different attributes of God but are treated as different gods and worshipped separately. Different pilgrimage centers and temples are dedicated to them. The Hindus also worship numerous other gods and goddesses. This makes Hinduism a polytheistic religion.

Christianity also started with One God of the Old Testament. In the New Testament Jesus is described as the son of God but he calls himself the son of man. He is also called the only begotten son of God and then upgraded to God (John 1:14).

This trinity seems to have been drawn from that in Hinduism thus:

God – Creator

Holy Ghost or Spirit – Sustainer or comforter. Jesus said “*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you* (John 14:26).

Jesus – Destroyer. He says “*I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death*” (Revelation 1: 18).

The New Testament states that after resurrection Jesus told his disciples: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*” (Matthew 28:19).

So the New Testament does not say that the three are to be treated as God. This seems to have been done to match the Hindu concept. Christianity thus became polytheistic like Hinduism.

The Sikhs strictly believe in the unity of God who alone is to be worshipped. This unity is denoted by the numeral ‘1’ in the Mool Mantar or the Root Mantra, so no division is possible. No gods or goddesses are worshipped. Even the Sikh Gurus are not to be worshipped but venerated as one guide, the embodiments of Guru Nanak, the first Guru, through the Word. The Sikh faith therefore is strictly monotheistic. Talking specifically of the Hindu trinity, Guru Nanak calls it an illusion:

Eka maaee jugti viaaeee tin chaylay parvaan.
The concept of three members of the Hindu trinity is a result of illusion (M: 1, SGGS, p 7).

Incarnation of God

The Hindus believe that Vishnu of the trinity takes human form from time to time (Gita 4:7-8) and have identified ten of them for different ages (Garuda Purana 1. 86: 10-11). Out of these ten forms nine have already appeared and the tenth, *Kaliki*, is yet to appear in the end of the current age of *Kali Yug*.

The New Testament initially says Word was God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

But then says that Word became flesh, the body of Jesus:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

And as mentioned above, Jesus became part of the trinity that is considered God. So flesh became God.

In Sikhism, God is *Ajooni* meaning, It does not incarnate. In fact Gurbani, the Guru's word, says:

So mukhu jalau jitu kahay thaakur joni.

May the tongue that says God incarnates, be burnt (M: 5, SGGS, p 1136).

Hence unlike Hindus and Christians, Sikhs do not believe in incarnation of God.

Birth of Krishna and Jesus

Both in the case of Krishna, the incarnation in the age of *Duaapar*, and Jesus it was feared by the then kings that they would be killed by the respective babies when they grew up and hence had ordered killing of the new born babies; however, both escaped death.

In the case of Krishna his uncle the King Kansa had all the babies born to his sister Devki killed but with Divine help Krishna's father took him away and replaced him with a girl whom Kansa spared.

In the case of Jesus the New Testament says King Herod wanted to have Jesus killed:

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14).

There are no such stories in Sikh history.

Places of Worship

A Hindu temple is named after the deity whose image is installed therein. Most of the deities are gods and goddesses. The Arya Samaj also has its own temples with no images. No uniform practices for worship have been laid down for temples.

The Christian Churches are named generally according to the denominations that run them. Some of them are also named after saints and apostles. The practices in different churches are not uniform.

The Sikh place of worship is called Gurduara meaning the abode of, or gate to, the Guru. All Gurduaras have uniform practices with the Divine word in the form of Sri Guru Granth Sahib installed therein. Since the Sikh faith is the youngest with its historicity well verified some Gurduaras have been established at places associated with the Gurus or other distinguished personalities and bear their names. No images of the Gurus or any one else are installed therein. Most Gurduaras not connected with history are named "Sri Guru Singh Sabha" the historical movement that obtained control of Gurduaras from government appointed priests in the 1920's.

Caste System

The Hindus have a well-established caste system as laid down by Manu and is called the *Varanashram*. Social contacts like marriages among Hindus are restricted within each of the four castes namely *Brahmin* the priestly class, *Kashatriyas* the nobles and warriors, *Vaishis* the traders and farmers and *Shudras* the menial workers who serve the upper castes. The *Shudras* are considered untouchables and not allowed to enter temples.

The Christians have no laid down caste system but the different denominations treat one another the same way as the castes in Hindus. They have different churches and marry within their denominations. Efforts are also made to obtain conversions from other denominations. Inter-denomination antagonism is exemplified by the violence between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland until recently.

No caste distinction is observed amongst the Sikhs. The Gurduaras are open to all including those of other faiths. Motivated attempts have been made to call certain groups like the *Nirankaris* and *Radhaswamis* as sects of the Sikhs. However they are not Sikhs.

Lights, Incense and Bells

Lighting lamps or candles, burning of incense and ringing of bells are common practices in temples and churches.

In Hindu temples lights in the form of oil lamps or candles are lit. In *Aarti*, a standing prayer, a salver with lamps and incense in one hand and a hand bell in the other are pre-requisites.

Use of lights in Christian churches is based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

*Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:15-16).*

Similarly use of incense is based on:

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11).

There is no such practice in the Gurduaras as taught by Guru Nanak. He went to the Hindu temple town of Jagannath Puri in the state of Orissa in India and was asked to participate in the *Aarti* before the deity's idol. He declined saying nature is performing *Aarti* of the Lord all the time and he participates in that:

*Gagan mai thaal ravi chan Deepak banay taarika mandal janak moti;
Dhoop malyaanlo pavan chviro karay sagal banraai phoolaant joti.*

Sky is the salver, the sun and moon the lights;
The stars are the jewels in the salver,
The fragrance of the sandalwood is the incense; the wind waves the fan,
All the vegetation is the flowers.
This is the Aarti I participate in (M: 1, SGGS, p 663).

Praying on the Mountains

The Hindus have most of their sacred temples on top of the mountains. The more famous ones in the Himalayan ranges are Kedarnath, Badrinath and Amarnath. Devout Hindus visit these temples when they are accessible after the snow melts.

Whenever Jesus wanted to pray he went to a mountain. He gave the Sermon on the Mount from a mountain (Matthew 5:1-2). When his followers wanted to know about his second coming they went to him on a mountain (Matt 24:3). Similarly after the last supper when his arrest seemed imminent he went to the Mount of Olives to pray (Matt 26:30).

There is no practice of going to the mountains amongst Sikhs. However seeing what others do, in the recent past a practice of going to a place called Hemkunt Sahib in the Himalayas has started. It is believed that the Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, performed penance at this place in his previous birth but there is no historical evidence for this claim.

Havan, Burnt offerings

Sacrifices are sanctioned both by the Hindu and Christian scriptures.

Sacrifice is called *Yajna* in Hindu parlance and is considered virtuous:

All these performers who know the meaning of sacrifice become cleansed of sinful reactions, and, having tasted the nectar of the results of sacrifices, they advance toward the supreme eternal atmosphere (Gita 4:30).

The Hindus do this either by performing *Havan*, which entails burning Saamagri, or in some cases offering animal sacrifices.

The Bible exhorts people to make burnt offerings:

*If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.
And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. (Leviticus 1:3-4).*

Some Christians are of the opinion that this was applicable in the times of the Old Testament. However Jesus fully endorsed that law:

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matthew 5:18).

There is no place for any sacrifices in Sikh beliefs. This practice is rejected forthright because the one being sacrificed also has God's light in it:

*Jau sabh mehi ayk khuda kahat ho tu kio murgi maarai.
When you say one God abides in all then why do you sacrifice birds? (Kabir, SGGS, p 1350).*

Circumcision

The Hindus do not follow the practice of circumcision.

Circumcision on the eighth day after birth of the male child is laid down in the Old Testament which is applicable to the descendents of Abraham i.e. Jews, Christians and Muslims:

*And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.
This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee;
Every man child among you shall be circumcised (Genesis 17:9-10).*

However, Christians do not follow it, as is the Hindu practice, while Jews and Muslims do. In the New Testament Paul questions circumcision thus:

What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision? (Romans 3:1).

In Sikh religion there is no provision for circumcision. In fact it is forbidden because it is linked with satisfying lust and has nothing to do with faith:

*Jau ray khudaaey mohi turk karayga aapan hi kati jaae.
If God wanted me to be a Muslim I would have been automatically circumcised (Kabir, SGGGS, p 477).*

Covering the head when praying

It is not compulsory for Hindus to cover the head when praying.

Amongst the Semitic faiths the Jews and Muslims cover their head when praying but the Christians follow the Hindu way.

All Sikh men and women keep their head covered when praying and even otherwise.

Baptism

There is no baptism in the Hindu faith. They however visit pilgrimage centers on special occasions for baths, which are believed to purify.

The Christian baptism is given to those who repent and wish to be purified. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist by way of a dip in the river Jordan:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him (Matthew 3:13).

The Hindu and Christian procedures for purification are thus similar.

In the Sikh faith pilgrimage means cleaning the inner self. Guru Nanak said:

*Teerath naavan jaaoo teerath naam hai;
Teerath sabad veechaar antar giaan hai.*

My pilgrimage is remembering God;
It is contemplation on the Divine Word that enlightens the mind (Guru Nanak, SGGS, p 687)

The Sikh ceremony of baptism is one of drinking nectar prepared while praying, as a double-edged dagger called the *Khanda* is moved through it. This is meant to give a life of a saint-soldier with strict discipline and responsibilities.

Idol Worship

The Hindus worship the idols of gods and goddesses installed in the respective temples and at home.

The Ten Commandments which form the basis of Semitic belief say:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; (Exodus 20:4-5).

This is strictly followed by the Jews and Muslims but some Christians like the Roman Catholics worship the Cross, Jesus' mother Mary and Jesus himself, like the Hindu practice.

The Sikh religion rejects idol worship:

Jo paathar ko kehtay dev; ta ki birtha havai sev.
Those who treat stone images as God, their worship goes waste (M: 5, SGGS, p 1160)

Renunciation

The Hindu scriptures divide human life into four phases each of 25 years. They are *Brahmacharya* or remaining celibate and learning, *Grihstha* or life of a householder, *Vanaprastha* or teaching and guiding younger generations, and *Sanyasa* or renunciation. In the last phase man or woman breaks with the activities of the world, gives up what he or she has and spends time in meditation and contemplation.

The Bible also teaches complete renunciation. The Bible shows that when a couple sold off their belongings but kept a portion of money for their use, they were chided by the apostle Peter:

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? (Acts: 5:1-3).

This practice is not being followed in modern times.

Sikhism does not favor renouncing the world but being useful to the society. It exhorts people to renounce evils instead:

*Prathmay chhodee praaee ninda; utari gae sabh mann kee chinda;
Lobhu mohu sabhu keeno doori; parm baisno prabh paykh hajoori:1:
Aisay tiaagee virvaa koay; Hai Hari naamu japai janu soay.*

First give up slandering others; you will then be at peace;
Shed greed, attachment and other vices; this way you will purify yourself and have a
vision of God;
Such renounees always remember God but are rare (M: 5, SGGS, p 1147).

Also, even if one renounces the world the body still needs food, clothes, and a place to stay. For
this one has to look to others:

*Haath kamandal kaapreea mani trisnaa upjee bhaaree.
Istree taji kari kaam viaapiaa chitu laiaa par naaree.*

A renounee displays a begging bowl and tattered clothes but his mind has strong
craving;
He leaves his own wife but gripped by lust thinks of other women (M: 1, SGGS, p 1103).

Priestly Classes

Both the Hindus and Christians have powerful priestly classes. No religious functions can be held
in their absence. They conduct all family functions like births, weddings and deaths.

There is no priestly class in Sikh religion. Any one can conduct a functions as long as he or she
knows how to do it as laid down in the *Sikh Reht Maryada* or Code of Conduct.

Count of Twelve

The Hindu Yogis have 12 groups.

Jesus also had 12 disciples. This was also to match with the 12 tribes of the Jews.

This number has no importance for the Sikhs.

Status of Women

The status of a woman in Hinduism shows dichotomy. Spiritually she is accorded the status of
Devi or *Shakti* and worshipped. Socially she is considered lower than man. For example she is
called *Ardhaangni* or half body of man. Also as per the old tradition a woman was required to
commit sati i.e. enter the pyre on which her husband was being cremated. In other words she has
no independent status. She is expected to accept the husband as *Pati Parmeshwar*, the husband-
God.

The Bible says exactly the same thing:

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord (Ephesians5:22).
Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands (1 Peter 3:1)*

According to the Bible the woman owes her existence to man because Eve was created from Adam's rib:

*And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Genesis 2:22-23).*

In Gurbani a husband and wife are treated as equal. Guru Nanak says:

Naari purakh sirjeeai bikh maaiiaa mohu piaaro.
God created females and males and with it attachment to things transitory (M: 1, SGGS, p 580).

Fasts

The Hindus observe many fasts according to the lunar calendar. Some also do so on a particular day in a week or on other occasions. Married women observe the fast of *Karva Chauth*, praying for the welfare of their husbands.

The Bible also considers fasting virtuous:

*But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; (Matt 6:17).
And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting (Mark:9:29).
I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess (Luke 18:12).*

Gurbani does not approve of fasting:

*Iki ann na khaaey moorakh tinaa kia keejaee;
Trisna hoee bahutu kiva na dheejaae*
It is unwise not to eat food; how to tell them that such rituals do not please God;
It only increases craving which is not satisfied with any thing else (M:3, SGGS, p 1285).

Dogmas

Dogma is a religious doctrine that is proclaimed as true without proof.

The Hindus believe in the *Ramayana*, the story of Rama's army crossing the sea to Lanka on a bridge made by throwing stones with 'Rama' written on them.

The Old Testament similarly says the Red Sea parted to make way for Moses and his people when they left Egypt:

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided (Exodus 14:21).

There are no dogmas in Sikhism.

Conclusion

As may be seen Christianity follows the Hindu practices even when they conflict with the directions of the Semitic faiths. This is in contrast to the Jews and Muslims who follow them diligently. How exactly this came to be is not clear?

The Sikh faith follows an independent path and is therefore unique. It follows a path devoid of rituals and dogmas, which is the case with Hinduism and also with Christianity.