Hinduism and Hindu Business Practices

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Abstract

The 21st century global business environment is more diverse and interconnected than ever before. As organizations continue to expand their global reach, business professionals often find themselves having to navigate challenging cultural and religious terrain, which they may not be prepared for. While it is impossible for business professionals to learn the intricacies of all cultures and religions throughout the world, one can seek to learn about some of the more prominent cultures and religions of the world – particularly those they have a high likelihood of engaging with at some point in business. This paper examines Hinduism, a prevalent religion throughout many parts of the world, and discusses how its culture and beliefs are manifested through Hindu business practices. Particular focus is placed on business in India, the country with the largest number of Hindus. The purpose of this paper is to provide business professionals with a basic understanding of the history of Hinduism, an overview of the major beliefs of Hindus, and present information that will assist business professionals in successfully navigating intercultural affairs when doing business with Hindus in India and around the world.

Keywords: global business, cross-cultural business, India, Hinduism, Hindu business practices

1. Introduction

Hinduism is one of the big four religions of the world, with over 1.1 billion followers. This represents about 15% of the global population. The other three big religions by number of followers are Christianity with 32%, Islam with 24%, and Buddhism with 7%. Countries believed to have 100,000 or more Hindus include Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, India, Italy, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, and the United States. The percentage of the total populations of India, Nepal, and Mauritius that subscribe to Hinduism is 80%, 81%, and 49%, respectively (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a; Central Intelligence Agency, 2018b; Central Intelligence Agency, 2018c; Hinduism by Country, n.d.).

Our 21st century global business environment is continually shifting, and people from various cultures interact more in the business environment than ever before. At some point, it is highly likely that global business professionals will find themselves transacting business with a Hindu. This is especially true for business professionals working in India, Nepal, Mauritius, or in any of the other countries with a large number of Hindus. Therefore, business professionals need to know about Hinduism, its history, beliefs, holidays, practices, and its influence on the business environment. The purpose of this paper is to provide an introduction to the religion of Hinduism as well as an overview of the major beliefs of Hindus in an effort to highlight how these beliefs are manifested through Hindu business practices. Conducting business in India will also be a prominent feature of this paper, as a large percentage of Indians are Hindu. This paper serves as the third paper in a series about the four big religions and their business practices. The first paper explored Islam, and discussed how Islamic beliefs and financial principles influence Islamic business practices (Dunn & Galloway, 2011). The second paper explored Judaism, and considered how Jewish religious beliefs and rituals influence Jewish business practices (Dunn & Jensen, 2018). Following this paper will be a fourth and final paper exploring Buddhism that will consider how Buddhist beliefs influence business practices.

2. History of Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest of the world's four main religions, dating as far back as 2000 BCE. There is no one founder or originating date for the religion. The religion started in the Indus Valley region, the area now known as India. The civilization of that region and era is also called the *Harappan* civilization. "Some writings of the period have been

discovered, but unfortunately in such small amounts that they have yet to be deciphered. Knowledge of this great civilization's religion must therefore be based on physical evidence alone" ("Hindu History," 2016, para. 5). The inhabitants are believed to have spoken a Dravidian language.

2.1 History of India

One hypothesis about the history of India is that around 1800 BCE the Indus Valley was invaded by an Indo-European group known as the Aryans. The Aryans are believed to be responsible for both the Sanskrit language and the Vedic religion. Their religion is thought to be related to Zoroastrianism. However, this perspective on the history of India has been largely discounted by modern scholars as being racist. Scholars say this version of history was imposed by the colonists who perpetuated the notion that nothing good arose inside India; rather, the good and advanced parts of civilization were imported from the North.

Modern scholars generally accept the notion that there was a gradual increase of people from the North moving down into India, from which a new culture emerged. From that time on there was a gradual emergence of Aryan ethnicity. During this era some of the currently known Hindu literature was written down and collected. The notions of Brahmanism arose during this period. Furthermore, the notion of a great male god and mother goddess were recognized. The Vedic texts were starting to be collected. The period from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE is sometimes referred to as the Vedic period.

The Indian caste system was well in place by the end of the Vedic period. In the caste system the people were divided into four main castes: Brahmans (Priests and Teachers), Kshatriyas (Warriors and Rulers), Vaishyas (Farmers, Traders and Merchants), and Shudras (Laborers). A fifth group, the Dalits, were viewed as outcastes; these were street sweepers and latrine cleaners. The main castes were further broken down into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes ("What is India's Caste System," 2017).

The next period, from 500 BCE to 200 BCE, is known as the Second Urbanization period. Buddha and the rise of Buddhism is attributed to this period. The theories of *samsara* and *moksha* came into being with their foci on asceticism. This is where urban life began to spread. Towns housed markets, and artisans and merchants began to emerge. During this time iron began to be used in the formation of tools and weapons (Nain, 2018).

The next period is known as the period of Classical Hinduism, from 200 BCE to 1100 CE. During this period the Vedas became the central feature of the religion of most of India. The *Bhagavad Gita* was developed in this period. Ideas about reincarnation and monastic renunciation came into prominence. Hindu temples began to be constructed. Early version of the *Puranas*, such as the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* were developed. Yoga and pilgrimages to holy sites became common.

The next identified period is known as the Islamic Period, from 1200 CE to 1750 CE. Islam pushed down from the north leading to continuing wars and enslavement of people. In the Northwest of India, particularly in the Punjab, a high majority of the people became Muslim. The leader Babur was born in 1483 and became emperor at age 12 in what is now Uzbekistan. Important Babur conquests were Kabul in 1504 and Delhi in 1526. Babur founded the Mughal Empire, which ruled India for 300 years. He died in 1530 ("Babur," 2016).

Following Babur was Akbar the Great. He was born in 1542, a direct descendent of Genghis Khan and Babur. Akbar conquered and ruled territories in what is now Afghanistan, Bengal in the East, and far south in India. He emphasized tolerance and cooperation among his conquered people. Although a Muslim, he tolerated Hindus and married several Hindu princesses. Akbar was a supporter of music and the arts. Akbar died in 1605.

In the 1750s, the British Crown gave a monopoly right to the East India Company, which began trading with Indian rulers. In 1765 the East India Company was granted *diwani* – the ability to collect revenue in parts of India. Gradually the East India Company grew so strong that it was the effective ruler over much of what is today northern India. However, growing concern over corruption led to the British Parliament's decision to end East India Company's rule in India, and British Crown rule was established in 1958 ("East India Company," n.d.).

> In 1858, British Crown rule was established in India, ending a century of control by the East India Company. The life and death struggle that preceded this formalisation of British control lasted nearly two years, cost £36 million, and is variously referred to as the 'Great Rebellion', the 'Indian Mutiny' or the 'First War of Indian Independence'. Inevitably, the consequences of this bloody rupture marked the nature of political, social and economic rule that the British established in its wake. (Kaul, 2011, para. 1)

In 1948, the Indians, under the leadership of politician Mahatma Gandhi, won their freedom from Great Britain. At the time of independence, and with the call of Muslims, the British also created the country of Pakistan in two

sections to the Northwest and Northeast of India. The area to the Northeast eventually became independent from Pakistan and was established as the country of Bangladesh.

2.1.1 Science and Mathematics

India made important contributions to the subjects of mathematics and science. Perhaps the most important was the use of a symbol for the concept of zero. This fit in with their introduction of the digital numeral system by which all numbers could be represented by the use of just ten symbols. As early as 500 BCE the Indians had symbols for the numbers one through nine. The Arabs later adopted this system and introduced it to the European world. In addition to the base 10 decimal system, the Indians started to use a binary system early on for representation of numbers whereby with just two symbols all numbers could be represented (Pal, 2016).

Several other scientific and technical advances are noted. Early on, measurement rulers were introduced by the Harappans to aid in their architectural constructions. In ancient India the scientist Kanad postulated the existence of very small particles, like atoms. These particles could join with other particles to make various substances. The scientists of ancient India knew that the earth is round, it revolves around the sun, and rotates on its own axis. These scientists were able to predict lunar and solar eclipses (Pal, 2016). Sometime around 700 AD, an Indian doctor named Madhav invented inoculation, which helped prevent the spread of smallpox among people (Carr, 2017).

Written by Sushruta in 6th Century BC, the *Sushruta Samhita* is considered to be one of the most comprehensive textbooks on ancient surgery. The text mentions various illnesses, plants, preparations and cures along with complex techniques of plastic surgery. The *Sushruta Samhita*'s most well-known contribution to plastic surgery is the reconstruction of the nose, known also as rhinoplasty (Pal, 2016).

2.2 India Today

There is still considerable tension, often violent, between the Muslims of Pakistan and the Hindus of India, much of which is centered in the area of Kashmir to the northwest of India. Some want the area to become part of Pakistan, some want it to be part of India, and others want it to be partitioned. Both India and Pakistan are parliamentary democracies with multiple political parties. In India, Hinduism is identified as a strong political force. It is often identified with Indian nationalism over and against more secular and Muslim-oriented political parties.

This brings us to today's Hinduism. Coming from modern scholarship of history, archeology, culture, and the religions of India, the modern notion of Hinduism was born. As Indians and other Asians migrated around the world, they brought with them the Hindu religion and its practices. Perhaps the most popular of these practices is Yoga. It is estimated that over 25 million people in the United States practice some form of Yoga.

Next, the authors will discuss some of the major tenants and beliefs of Hinduism in an effort to prepare business professionals to effectively engage with Hindus in the 21st century global business environment.

3. Hindu Beliefs

Aum Namah Shivaya wrote why he thinks Hinduism is the true religion.

> Hinduism is more correctly referred to as *sanatana dharma* [italics ours], which can be translated as the eternal way or the eternal law. In this post I hope to demonstrate that Hinduism can claim to be the eternal way, a claim that other religions cannot make. I will also show why Hinduism is the true religion.

> First of all I need to define what I mean by the true religion. I do not define true religion to mean the only path, or means to spiritual realisation (moksha, enlightenment or heaven). By that definition Hinduism is *not* "the true religion", there is no one true religion in that sense, people can reach enlightenment on other paths. What I mean by true religion is that Hinduism gives the clearest path, with methods and instructions for finding God, and that all that is valid in other religions can be found in Hinduism. (Shivaya, 2008, para. 1)

Hinduism is referred to by many as *Sanatana Dharma*, "the eternal law" or the "eternal way" beyond human origins. "Western scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots and no single founder" (Sandip B., 2016, para. 3). There are many variations of the Hindu faith. "Hinduism is one of the oldest known organized religions-its sacred writings date back as far as 1400 to 1500 BC. It is also one of the most diverse and complex…" (Zacharias, n.d., para. 1).

Who is a Hindu? What does one have to believe to be a Hindu? Those are hard questions to answer since there are so many variations of the Hindu religion. Hinduism can be Monistic, where only one thing exists; this is also known as Sankara's school. Hinduism can be Pantheistic, where only one divine thing exists so that god is identical to the

world; this is also known as Brahmanism. Hinduism can be Panentheistic, where the world is part of god; this is also known as Ramanuja's school. Finally, Hinduism can be Theistic, where there is only one god, distinct from creation; this is also known as Bhakti Hinduism. Hindus can be nihilistic, deistic, or atheistic (Zacharias, n.d.).

Jayaram V. wrote that,

> …Contemporary Hinduism or what people understand as popular Hinduism has a diverse range of beliefs and practices, sects and schools of philosophy, some of which may stand in their own right as religions themselves…Hinduism is difficult to define and cannot be equated with other world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. (Jayaram V., n.d.-a, para. 4)

Hinduism developed over several centuries from many sources, so it is natural that Hinduism has a variety of opinions, practices, and beliefs, some of which are contradictory.

"About the only real issue is whether or not a belief system recognizes the Vedas as sacred. If it does, then it is Hindu. If not, then it is not Hindu" (Zacharias, n.d., para. 4).

Hindus understand the complexity and contradictions of their faith and accept them as part of our existence and its diversity, polarity and duality. The world is made up of dualities. They serve as the framework of knowledge. Hence, whether it is religion, science or any other branch of knowledge, contradictions and diversity of opinion are inevitable in our world. Since knowledge is relative to the context and the perspective in which it is perceived or comprehended, we cannot consider any truth absolute, except those which are declared so in the revelatory scriptures such as the eternal and indivisible state of Brahman or the nature of Self (Jayaram V., n.d.-b).

The difficulty of finding a proper definition is that Hinduism has no central doctrinal authority (similar to the papacy in Catholicism), but it has *swamis* (teachers) or *gurus* (spiritual guides). Today, it is common to identify four different traditions of Hinduism.

3.1 Vaishnavism

Vaishnavism is one of the major traditions of Hinduism that comes out of India. People who subscribe to Vaishnavism are known as Vaishnavas, and believe that god is the supreme all-attractive person, or Krishna. South Asian culture has been greatly influenced by Vaishnava tradition, with contributions to the culture of music, dance, theater, and the arts ("What is Vaishnavism," n.d.).

3.2 Shaivism

Shaivism is another major tradition of Hinduism originating in India. Considered the oldest of the Hindu traditions, people who subscribe to Shaivism are known as Saivites, and they worship Siva as the supreme god. "Saivites believe that the entire creation is both an expression of conscious divinity and is non-different from that divinity which they call 'Siva'" ("Shaivism," 2015, para. 3). Shaivism acknowledges the existence of many other deities, and believe that these deities are expressions of Siva.

3.3 Shaktism

Shaktism is another major tradition of Hinduism and its doctrine comes primarily out of the Shaivism tradition. Starting in Northwest India and spreading to other parts of South Asia, Shaktas, or people who subscribe to the Shaktism tradition, idolize the goddess Shakti (also referred to as Devi). Devi is acknowledged in her several forms as the consort of Siva. "Since Shiva [Siva] embodies the male principle and Shakti embodies the female, the two principles of Shaivism and Shaktism are complementary" ("Shaktism," n.d., para. 2).

3.4 Smartism

Smartism is a major tradition of Hinduism that has many consistencies and comingles with the previous three traditions described. Starting in the Common Era, Smartism consists of a synthesis of four philosophical strands, including Mimamsa, Advaita, Yoga, and theism (Smarta Tradition, n.d.). Followers of Smartism are known as Smartas, and are distinguished from other Hindus by their practice of accepting all of the major Hindu gods. As such, they are considered the more liberal and nonsectarian denomination of Hindus ("Four Denominations," 2003).

The appellations are based primarily on the god worshiped as an absolute reality and the traditions that accompany worship of that god (Ramakrishna, n.d.). In spite of its many branches and beliefs, there are certain core beliefs that are common among most branches of Hinduism. These are considered next.

3.5 Brahman

The Hindu religion is anchored in the concept of Brahman. Brahman is the highest supreme god of the Hindu religion. Brahman is considered a single spirit, formless and intangible, from which all things come. "Brahman is the Indestructible and Supreme Spirit. It is present in every atom of creation, but remains there as the Viewer, not affected by creation. The individual soul is a part of *Brahman*" (Brahman, n.d., para. 1).

Hindus believe that Brahman is silent, and exists in and through all things. "In Hinduism, most adherents venerate one or more deities, but regard these as manifestations of Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality that is behind the universe and all the gods is called by different names, but most commonly Brahman" ("Hindu Beliefs," 2015, para. 4). Brahman is similar in many respects to the God of Judaism, being viewed as the single supreme being (Brahman, n.d.).

"Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic, which means they worship a single deity, known as 'Brahman,' but still recognize other gods and goddesses. Followers believe there are multiple paths to reaching their god" ("Hinduism," 2017, para. 2). Hinduism is overwhelmingly considered a polytheistic religion by outsiders. However, most Hindus would argue that their faith is monotheistic. While Brahman is considered the supreme god of the Hindu religion, Hindus recognize other gods as various forms of Brahman. "Most Hindus are devoted followers of one of the principal gods Shiva, Vishnu or Shakti, and often others besides, yet all these are regarded as manifestations of a single Reality" ("Hindu Beliefs," 2016, para. 3).

3.6 Holy Scriptures

The most ancient of scriptures of the Hindu religion are known as the *Vedas*. The Vedas were written in early Sanskrit and included philosophy, hymns, and instruction for rituals for priests. The *Agamas* are a collection of scriptures from various Hindu devotional schools. "Hindus believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end" ("9 Basic Hindu Beliefs," 2009, para. 2).

The Vedas are comprised of four texts. The *Rig-Veda* represents the knowledge of the hymns of praise for recitation. The *Sama-Veda* represent the knowledge of the melodies for chanting. The *Yajur-Veda* represents knowledge of the sacrificial formulas for liturgy. The *Atharva-Veda* represents knowledge of the magic formulas for the procedures of everyday life (Violatti, 2018).

> The Vedas are more than theology books. They contain a rich and colorful "theo-mythology," that is, a religious mythology which deliberately interweaves myth, theology, and history to achieve a story-form religious root. This "theo-mythology" is so deeply rooted in India's history and culture that to reject the Vedas is viewed as opposing India. Therefore, a belief system is rejected by Hinduism if it does not embrace Indian culture to some extent. (Zacharias, n.d., para. 5)

3.7 Souls

Hindus believe that all living plants, animals, and humans have a soul. The soul is eternal, and is part of the absolute soul. Souls have existed from the beginning and will exist forever. Souls are "eternal, indestructible, infinite, pure, all knowing, indivisible and blissful" (Jayaram V., n.d.-a, para. 8). Hindus refer to the soul, or inner self, as Atma. Hindus believe that Atma is in every being.

3.8 Karma

Karma refers to the actions a person takes and his or her thoughts during his or her lifetime. If one's actions and thoughts are good, the person has good karma. If one's actions and thoughts are bad, the person has bad karma. Karma is a cause-and-effect principle. A person's karma determines his or her destiny in the next life. "Hindus strive to achieve *dharma*, which is a code of living that emphasizes good conduct and morality" ("Hinduism," 2017, para. 2).

Interestingly, throughout the world, many people who do not subscribe to Hinduism believe in Karma. However, a westerner's view of karma is typically not consistent with the Hindu view of karma and the extent to which karma can determine a person's destiny in the next life. "…karma is often misused to denote luck, destiny, or fate. Karma is also misused as a way to explain sudden hardships" (Castro, 2013, para. 3).

3.9 Reincarnation

Reincarnation is a common theme throughout all traditions of Hinduism. Reincarnation, which is sometimes referred to as transmigration or metempsychosis, represents the rebirth of the conscious, mind, soul or other entity after bodily death (Reincarnation, 2018).

> Hinduism believes in the rebirth, reincarnation, or transmigration (punajanma) of souls. Souls are both upon earth repeatedly until they achieve liberation. Death is a temporary phase, during which the souls travel to the ancestral heaven and stay there, until they exhaust their karma. Then they fall down to earth and take rebirth. One should therefore not grieve for the dead…What dies in death is the body not the soul. The body is like a garment, which is worn afresh by the soul, whenever it takes birth. (Jayaram V., n.d.-a, para. 15)

The *samsara* concept "suggests a continuous cycle life-death-rebirth where one's current life reflects one's actions in the previous life, and where one's action in the current life reflect one's status in the next life" (Sethi & Steidlmeier, 2015, para. 2).

> Hinduism views mankind as divine. Because Brahman is everything, Hinduism asserts that everyone is divine, atman, or self, is one with Brahman. All of reality outside of Brahman is considered mere illusion. The spiritual goal of a Hindu is to become one with Brahman, thus ceasing to exist in its illusory form of "individual self." This freedom is referred to as "moksha." Until moksha is achieved, a Hindu believes that he/she will be repeatedly reincarnated in order that he/she may work towards self-realization of the truth (the truth being that only Brahman exists, nothing else). How a person is reincarnated is determined by karma, which is a principle of cause and effect governed by nature's balance. What one did in the past affects and corresponds with what happens in the future, past and future lives included. (Zacharias, n.d., para. 6)

Hinduism believes that human beings are divine and share the qualities and duties of god. Although beings in the mortal world are subject to death and rebirth, they have the opportunity to achieve liberation. Human beings are endowed with intelligence. Hence, human birth is considered precious and rare. Human beings should avail themselves of this precious opportunity and work for their self-transformation to achieve liberation from the cycle of births and deaths (Jayaram V., n.d.-a).

3.10 Heaven and Hell

A minority of Hindus believe there is no hell nor no heaven. A person's future is determined by his or her karma in this life. Persons with good karma will be promoted to a better life in the next reincarnation. Persons will bad karma will be demoted to a lesser life, perhaps even a life as a plant or animal, in the next reincarnation.

A majority of Hindus do believe in places called heaven and hell. Most Hindus believe there are several levels of each. Persons with a majority of good karma will go to one of the levels of heaven after death, while persons with a majority of bad karma will go to one of the levels of hell after death. After a period of torture in hell or bliss in heaven, and after the bad karma has been erased, the person will be reincarnated into the next life (Rajhans, 2013).

3.11 Stages of Life

In Hinduism, it is believed that human life is comprise of four stages, also called *ashramas*. The first Ashrama is known as the *Brahmacharya Ashrama*. This first stage of human life is referred to as the student stage, where one acquires knowledge from his teacher and pledges to remain celibate. The second Ashrama is known as the *Grihastha Ashrama*. This second stage of human life is when one enters marriage and has family obligations to fulfill. In this stage, one is to put into practice the skills learned from the teacher during the first stage. The third Ashrama is known as the *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. This third stage of human life is when one retires, disposes of their possessions, and enters a life of "entering the forest" – surviving on alms. The fourth Ahsrama is known as the *Sannyasa Ashrama*. This final stage of human life is marked by complete renunciation and entire dedication to spirituality (Das, 2018; "Four Stages," n.d.).

3.12 Meaning of Life

In Hinduism, there are four goals of human life. These include *moksha*, which is enlightenment, *kama*, which is enjoyment, sexuality, and desire, *artha*, which is prosperity, and *dharma*, which is living one's purpose ("Hindu Beliefs," 2015). Dharma is the ultimate goal of life, as it represents one's destiny and purpose. This can also refer to one's occupation, which is often defined by familial class. Another aspect of dharma is paying the five debts.

> Debt to the gods for their blessings; paid by rituals and offerings. Debt to parents and teachers; paid by supporting them, having children of one's own and passing along knowledge. Debt to guests; repaid by

treating them as if they were gods visiting one's home. Debt to other human beings; repaid by treating them with respect. Debt to all other living beings; repaid by offering good will, food or any other help that is appropriate. ("Meaning of Life," 2015, para. 3)

3.13 Hindu Worship and Temples

Hindus worship their gods and goddesses in many different ways and in many different places. Hindu worship, also referred to as *puja*, typically occurs in the temple, which Hindus refer to as a *Mandir*. However, Hindus may also worship in their home, with some building elaborate sanctuaries and shrines dedicated to their gods and goddesses. Hindu worship is primarily performed in an individual setting, as personal offerings play a prominent role in worship ("Worship," 2005). "The giving of offerings is an important part of Hindu worship. It is a common practice to present gifts, such as flowers or oils, to a god or goddess" ("Hinduism," 2017, para. 23).

3.14 Proselytizing

Hindus do not normally proselytize aggressively. Since all people have souls, are intelligent, and have freedom of choice, and since there are many paths to god, sincere people should practice the religion they now espouse. Hindus believe that no one should use force to get people to change their faith.

3.15 Hindu Festivals and Holidays

There are several Hindu holidays and festivals that are recognized during the year. Dates for the most popular 2019 holidays are:

March 21: Holi: Spring Festival

August 15: Raksha Bandhan: Bond between Brother and Sister

September 2: Mahashivaratri: Festival of Shiva

September 29: Navaraatri: Celebration of Fertility and Harvest

August 23: Janmashtami: Krishna's Birthday

October 27: Diwali: Festival of Lights.

These dates may be changed by a few days in individual countries ("Hindu Holidays," n.d.).

3.16 Who Is a Hindu?

Some of the main beliefs of the Hindu religion have been discussed in this section. To understand any religion fully, one must commit to a lifetime of study. The authors' goal here was to give business professionals a broad overview of Hindu beliefs for purposes of preparing them to engage in business effectively with Hindus. The lingering question that can come from this condensed description is, so who is a Hindu? Jayaram V. describes it as such:

Truly speaking, a Hindu is not just a follower of Hinduism or a particular religion. It does not even matter, whether he is a follower of Hinduism or not. Any person who is a seeker of truth and who is interested in knowing the truth of himself and his existence is a Hindu, whether he believes in God or not, whether he is a Hindu or a Buddhist or a person of some other faith. A Hindu is an individual soul who has been separated from God, is under illusion and has been in the process of rejoining God someday. No one need to force him to become a Hindu in the physical sense, because one day, in some birth, he will become aware of what he is or who he is. What he does in between is all part of a Divine Play. (Jayaram V., n.d.-a, para. 21)

Next, the authors will discuss how Hindu religion and culture manifest themselves throughout business in an effort to prepare business professionals to effectively engage with Hindus in the 21st century global business environment.

4. Hindu Business Practices

Hindu beliefs about business and government arose over the centuries; much of the basic philosophy was set at least 20 centuries ago and was extended and preserved in the ensuing years. One early writer with much influence to this day was the politician and economist Kautilya Arthashastra who wrote about 300 BCE (Gradinaru & Iavorschi, 2013).

Arthashastra laid down many principles that influence today's business and political practices. First, he thought there should be a strong government with a strong leader, and that the leader should increase the wealth of the state and his own power. Part of the manner in which that can be accomplished is for the leader to master the four sciences: state leadership, economics, the Vedas, and philosophy. This philosophy about state leadership moves over into corporate leadership, promoting strong leadership at the top of an organization.

He also promoted the idea of international trade. His concept involved the idea of comparative advantage, anticipating Smith by 2000 years. Arthashastra believed that imports were as important as exports.

Among Arthashastra's other principles included monopolies were to be discouraged; prices and profits were to be kept fair; there should be a tax system which would have reasonable rates, should be inexpensive it its administration, and does not negatively impact economic growth; and there should be high taxation on luxury goods. Another principle maintained that laborers should be given fair wages, depending on their skills and productivity.

4.1 Business Ethics

When it comes to business ethics, viewpoints vary widely throughout the business world. Business professionals derive their own personal morals and ethical beliefs from various places, a prominent one being religious beliefs (Head, 2006). Hindu business professionals are no different. Ethical considerations are highly important in Hinduism. Among other considerations, this involves making a distinction between what "is" and what "ought to be." What Chattopadhyay (2012) writes about India applies to Hinduism as a whole:

> Ethics as an institution of life has been recognized here from the very early age of the Vedas. Rather it has been recognized as the most basic element in human life. But then it has not necessarily been recognized as a social enterprise in the sense of being an instrument of the society to help guide the people living in the society. It is rather engrained in the very being of the universe. Ethics has a divine origin. Man has simply to adopt from there. (p. 114)

Ethics are determined at the individual level. If each individual in a business firm is ethical, then the firm will exhibit ethical behavior. "A man of character … is ready to give up his life, but not truth. He is prepared to die, but will not kill. He is willing to accept suffering, but not inflict it on others. He does not seal, nor takes bribes. He does not waste his time or that of others, goes on doing his duty fearlessly" (Chattopadhyay, 2012, p. 120).

The Gita, which captures the essence of Hindu teaching and philosophy, is influential in Hindu business practice.

> The Gita's essence …provides the keys for influencing contemporary management thought and global business practices. Yoga is the gaining of mastery over the body and mind through self-discipline. Dharma focuses on finding a higher calling or mission in life and a calling to fulfill one's purpose or duty…Karma refers to developing a detached involvement by doing one's duty objectively without worrying about the consequences. And Tat-Twam-Asi is the recognition of the interconnectedness of nature, the human, and the spiritual. It encourages managers to look at the big picture, a holistic view, for guidance with a realization that there can be no simultaneous winners and losers. When managers change their outlook, success is enhanced. (Natesan, Keeffe, & Darling, 2009, para. 4)

The five restraints (truthfulness, not to steal, non-violence, sexual moderation, non-possession) and the five observances (surrendering to god, satisfaction, purity, austerity, self-knowledge) of Hinduism inform the practice of business (Ramakrishna, n.d.).

Patron god of businesspersons is the Lord Ganesha, who is represented as an elephant. "Ganesha's elephant head makes him easy to identify. Ganesha is widely revered as the remover of obstacles, the patron of arts and sciences and the deva of intellect and wisdom" (Sandip B., 2016, para. 5). Each of the body parts of the typical representation of the elephant has meaning. For example, the large ears tell us to listen more. The small mouth tells us to talk less. The small eyes tell us to concentrate on our work. The large stomach reminds us to digest well all the bad and good in life. The trunk shows us to be adaptable and have high efficiency.

While Hindus pursue wealth just as do followers of other religions, it is understood that wealth does not by itself bring happiness.

> Hinduism does not specifically object to acquisition of material wealth. It is however mandatory that such wealth must be obtained righteously and it must also be shared and distributed. Personal gain is not the main purpose of work. The work done should benefit all of society and therefore when it pertains to the fruits of that work, and individual should only keep what is necessary, and distribute the rest. (Bennett, Guillen, Nelson, Olsen, Smart, & Waller, 2010, para. 38)

Respect for elders is a foundational element of Hindu culture and business practice. Juniors show deference by sitting to the left of elders, never arguing or challenging them in public, and not sitting while an elder is standing. This has implications for reporting legal and ethical issues in business, which will be discussed later.

Hindus believe purity is a requirement of a person's personal and professional life. "Purity is another vitally important trait in Hindu culture. Hindus believe that one must reach purity of three forms: mind, speech, and body or sometimes referred to as thought, word, and deed" (Bennett et al., 2010, para. 2).

In the Hindu tradition, religion and work are inextricably linked. "Religion tends to have a great effect in the way individuals approach the workforce and on the work they choose to do. For Hindus, doing work that has divine and spiritual significance generated greater satisfaction and commitment in continuing to do said work. Helping others is seen as a way to serve God" (Bennett et al., 2010, para. 36).

Helping others occurs throughout business on a regular basis. In the truest sense of customer service, business professionals engage in helping people through providing products and services to meet their needs.

> Serving the customer is equated with serving God. The Gita is neither a practical guide-book of moral efforts nor a philosophical treatise discussing the origin of immoral tendencies and tracing them to certain metaphysical principles as their courses; but, starting from the ordinary frailties of attachment and desires, it tries to show how on can lead a normal of duties and responsibilities and yet be in peace and contentment. (Chattopadhyay, 2012, p. 116)

The Gita also considers that the person and the person's job should be aligned. No single person can do all jobs. Business managers must discern the skills and abilities of each worker and assign that worker to a job the worker can handle. Workers so assigned must work with a good attitude. Managers and workers must practice the seven duties of "forgiveness, self-control, non-stealing, steadiness, truthfulness, wisdom, and learning" (Chattopadhyay, 2012, p. 117).

Business governance must exhibit the five basic human values of peace, love, truth, righteousness, and good conduct. Leaders of businesses must know him or herself, and must manage him or herself before managing other people.

Singh and Sharma (2013) in their article "India Lacks Business Ethics" paint a poor picture of business ethics in India. They particularly warn tourists to be aware that:

> From airports to taxis, hotels, shops and tour guides – all try to fleece innocent tourists (more so if they are foreigners) in a country that claims to practice *atithi devo bhava* (a guest is likeGod (sic)). It has tarnished India's image as a favoured tourist destination. Growing sexual assaults against women tourists worsen the already bad situation. (para. 7)

The following perspective on Indian business practices was shared in the article Ethics and Business (n.d.). The "… *Global Economic Crime Survey 2016*, for instance, says 94 per cent of the Indian respondents stated that their organization had a clear code of conduct, yet only 15 per cent indicated that their leaders walk the talk" ("Business and Ethics," 2016, para. 1). Next, the authors will discuss features and highlights of conducting business in India, home to a large number of Hindu.

5. Conducting Business in India

5.1 Indian History

When India achieved its independence from Great Britain in 1947 the government set up a state-centered economy based largely on socialist principles following the Soviet model. Social systems were put in place to help the poor. Heavy industry was encouraged. There were high taxes put on imports and foreign direct investment was discouraged. A burdensome state bureaucracy was put in place, which stifled entrepreneurs and the growth of business.

> During the first 45 years after independence, India's economy was divided into two distinct segments, private and public. The private sector owned and operated small to medium size businesses and industries protected by the government and the government took care of everything else. The government was in charge of most of the consumer services including transportation such as airlines, railroad and local transportation, communications services such as postal, telephone and telegraph, radio and television broadcasting, and social services such as education and health care.

> The intention of the government was to provide these services, at a reasonable costs, as well as employment. India adopted a five-year development plan from its closest ally, the Soviet Union, in order to improve infrastructure, agricultural production, health care, and education, but the progress was extremely slow due to India's democratic system. (Gosal, 2013, paras. 1-3)

After four decades on this model, it became apparent that the system was not working to the advantage of the people and the economy. Poverty had not been significantly reduced. Beginning in the early 1990s the national government started to introduce reforms that made it easier for businesses to thrive. Import taxes and bureaucratic red tape were reduced. New laws began to allow foreign companies to invest in the country. Liberalization and privatization became the order of the day.

Two other changes should be noted. First, laws permitting Indian companies to invest outside the country were introduced, and second, a growing middle class increased domestic consumption. By the end of the 1990s, the Indian GDP was rising at an annual rate of 5% or more; that rate of growth is still being reached 20 years later (Gosal, 2013).

5.2 India Today

The Republic of India/Bharatiya Ganarajya (India) is the seventh largest country in the world by land mass, with the second largest population of approximately 1.25 billion people. It is a federal parliamentary republic whose capital is New Delhi. There are 29 states and 7 union territories. Common law as modified is the system of law practiced in the country. The Prime Minister at the time of this writing is Narendra Modi, who has been Prime Minister since 2014. The country works under a Constitution that was last modified in 2015. There are many national and state political parties. The parliament is bicameral. The Council of States has 245 members and the People's Assembly has 545 seats. The country's Supreme Court has a Chief Justice and 25 Associate Justices (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a).

Agricultural land constitutes nearly 61% of the land mass, with nearly 53% arable. Forests cover 23% of the land mass. Nearly 33% of the population are urbanized. Life expectancy at birth is 67.6 years for men and 70.1 years for women. Overall literacy in India is 71.2% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a).

India's GDP (Purchase Power Parity) is $9.459 trillion and $2.611 trillion at the official exchange rate with the U.S. dollar. The economy's growth rate is estimated at 8.2%, 7.1%, and 6.7% for the years 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. Agriculture is the largest sector by employment, with 47% of the workforce. Industry represents 22% of the workforce, and services represents 31%. Approximately 21.9% of the population live below the Indian poverty line. Military expenditures were estimated at 2.47% of GDP for 2016 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018a).

Compared to most developed countries, income tax rates are quite low in India. Rates for men below 60 years of age in FY 2017-2018 were ("Taxes," 2018):

Income Level Tax Rate

Income up to 250,000 Rupees: 0

Income between 250,001 and 500,000 Rupees: 5% of Income Exceeding 250,000 Rupees

Income between 500,001 and 10,000,000 Rupees: 20% of Income exceeding 500,000 Rupees

The two primary languages spoken in India are English and Hindi. There are also an additional 14 official languages spoken in India. However, there are over 400 other languages spoken throughout the country. The foreigner going into India for business purposes must be prepared to engage a translator for detailed work in many parts of the country.

5.*3 Religions in India*

Approximately 80% of the population of India are Hindus, 14% are Muslims, 2.3% are Christians, and 1.7% are Sikhs. Sikhism is a relatively new religion, having started about 600 years ago. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that draws its tenants from Hinduism and Islam. There are about 27 million Sikhs worldwide of which 83% live in India. The religion is strongest in the Northeast in the Punjab region. Most male Sikhs have a middle name or surname of Singh. "Sikhs believe in reincarnation but do not recognize caste distinctions. Unlike Hindus, Sikhs reject nonintervention with the world as cowardly" (Morrison & Conway, 2006, p. 225).

5.4 Companies in India

One will find in India the same range of types of companies that exist in most developed countries. There are sole proprietorships, partnerships, limited liability partnerships, family owned businesses, one-person companies, and various types of corporations. One unusual type of corporation is the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) business. In the HUF only family members can manage and own the business.

Corporations in India have the typical characteristics: separate property, independent corporate existence, perpetual succession, limited liability, capacity for suits, access to money markets, professional management, and government

registration. Corporate law is governed by a series of laws, the most recent being the Companies Act of 2013 (Srivastava, 2018).

5.5 Hindu Law

The legal system of India recognizes the special needs of people who practice the Hindu religion. To this end a system of laws was passed that apply to Hindus regarding marriage, adoption, inheritance, and other personal matters. Laws concerning these matters include the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act. These laws were adopted in the 1950s and remain in force today (Hindu Law, 2018). There is a comparable set of laws for Muslims while Sikhs are placed under Hindu law.

Because India is largely Hindu in its religious orientation, it is important that business professionals understand key elements of practice in India. As one can determine from the discussion below, the Hindu culture permeates all aspects of business practice.

> At an intellectual level, Hindu religion provides both a basis for moral values and a prescriptive mode that influences one's conduct and actions. This flexibility in interpretation allows Hindus to adapt to different religions and mores. This approach has led Indian's leading companies to imitate the conduct of their foreign MNCs and adopt the exploitative practices for their own benefit while bemoaning the poverty and misery of the masses as their manifest destiny (Karma). (Sethi & Steidlmeier, 2015, para. 3)

5.6 Business Protocol

In addition to a Passport, you may need a Visa if you are visiting India for business purposes. If you are going to remain in India for any length of time, you will need to register your presence with a Registration Office.

India has a collectivist and high context macro-culture. In this type of culture, relationships are all important. Business professionals must develop a first-person relationship with their counterparts if they are to enjoy long-term success doing business in India. In staring a business relationship, it is good to have a third party make the introductions.

When meeting with another male, it is important to offer a handshake. When meeting a female, it is important to wait until she offers the handshake. Among themselves, on meeting Indians will often use the *namaste,* which is a gesture where the palms of the hands are brought together at chest level, together with a modest head bow. The namaste is also used as a gesture for goodbye. The word is understood to mean, "I bow to the god within you."

Business professionals must have their business card ready to present. Business cards should reflect information in English on one side and in Hindi on the other. Business professionals must treat business cards received from counterparts with much respect, as this contains the person's name and title, both of which constitute the personal brand of that person.

Business meetings in India will often be accompanied by tea or a soft drink. Business professionals should be sure to partake of the drink, and be prepared for refills. At mealtime, business professionals should typically refrain from ordering meat dishes.

It is generally acceptable to eat with your hands. In many homes and restaurants, you may not be provided with food utensils. One should only use his or her right hand to access the food. If your hand is dirty from eating, do not use the hand to access the serving spoon; let the host serve you.

Most Hindus in India are vegetarians, but being vegetarian is not required of Hindus. Because of the possibility that another human being has been reincarnated into an animal which is being offered as food, most Hindus are reluctant to eat the meat of that animal. It is prudent for business professionals to order a vegetarian meal when eating out with a Hindu business professional, at least until one has determined that he or she is not a vegetarian.

Business practice in India is hierarchical in nature. Organizations are structured with a clear hierarchy and chain of command, and authority is held at the highest levels of the organization. Decision-making is largely executed from the top down. Considering their preference for retaining authority for top leaders, it would be prudent for business professionals to include leaders from the highest levels of the organization when visiting India to conduct business.

As a high context culture, words and word choice are very important. Business professionals must be exceedingly careful with their speech. One must be very polite to the business counterpart. One should use their official title often in the conversation. Also, avoid saying "no" to any proposal, but use some other phrase such as "that is an interesting concept and I will give it serious thought."

Don't bring gifts of any significant value to a business meeting. High-value gifts may be considered as bribes, which is sure to damage the business relationship. Also, be careful in the choice of colors of any gift or gift-wrapping. White flowers are used at funerals in India.

The family is very important to most Indians. Families in many parts of India still engage in the practice of arranged marriages, and separation and divorce rates are very low. There are a myriad of family-owned businesses throughout the country as well. Business professionals should do their homework and thoroughly get to know the people and the businesses they plan to engage in business with.

Business professionals should not expect to do any business on holidays or religious observance days. In particular, Hindu business professionals observe the following holidays: Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Mahashivaratri, Navaraatri, Janmashtami, and Diwali ("Hindu Holidays," n.d.).

5.7 Business Attire

Dress and attire are much different in eastern countries than in western countries. "The distinction between ordinary dress and religious dress is difficult to delineate in India because the ordinary members of the various socioreligious groups may often be distinguished by their costumes" ("Types of Dress," 2018, para. 1). In particular, Hindu men will often wear an *angarkha*, which is a short dress coat, and Hindu women will often wear a *sari,* which is a long scarf. Business professionals from the western world need not adhere to the religious or cultural attire of the east when on business; however, one should dress in a professional manner.

Business attire will normally be more formal in India than in the United States. Men should dress in formal business attire; a business suit is appropriate. Formal business attire also works well for women; a pantsuit is acceptable in all parts of India. If a female business professional wishes to wear a skirt, it should be longer in length, and cover the knees when seated (Carson, 2018). Many Indian women are wearing western attire, a growing trend throughout the country (Chatterjee, 2014). Neither men nor women should wear clothing that reveals too much of the body.

A unique aspect of clothing in India is head coverings. Turbans are a prominent fixture on the heads of men in India. However, Hindu men rarely wear turbans. If a man is wearing a turban, he is most likely a Sikh. In some cases, particularly in sacred spaces, Hindu men may wear a cap or other head covering, but usually not a turban. Hindu women mostly wear a drape, known as a *sari*, over their head, and some wear vails over their face (Choate, 2013).

Business professionals should avoid postures that are considered aggressive, such as placing hands on the hips or crossing arms. Also note that the feet are considered unclean, much like the left hand. It is prudent to refrain from discussing national or regional political topics such as discussions about relationships between India and Pakistan. One should also avoid discussions about nuclear weapons or about religious doctrine.

Although the caste system is outlawed in India, it is still a significant part of the culture. Persons of different castes attempting to do business together may find it difficult.

5.8 Human Resource Management

Organizations in India work hard to attract, develop, and retain quality employees. Branding is important for Indian companies, as they leverage their unique branding initiatives not only for marketing purposes, but also for attracting high quality applicants. Indians prefer to work for distinguished companies with good branding, even if it means accepting a lower salary. Employee referrals are highly regarded, and a person's ability to secure employment with a distinguished company is often predicated on whom he or she knows in the industry. While employee referrals are not necessarily a prerequisite to being considered as a potential employee by a company, it surely accelerates the screening process (Roa, 2015).

After securing employment with a company in India, one can expect to receive training and development from the organization. Similar to western culture, high performance is rewarded with increased remuneration, promotions, and other fringe benefits. Organizations also reward high performers by giving them preference in choice of projects and jobs performed. Larger organizations are becoming savvy at creating future workforce profiles and succession planning (Roa, 2015).

Retaining employees is a top priority for organizations in India. Organizations employ a variety of strategies to retain high-performing employees, including skill development, career development, and effective employee relations strategies. Organizations understand the importance of employee empowerment and the effects it has on employee engagement. One of the biggest employee engagement initiatives currently is training of supervisors and managers to effectively work with employees and extend retention efforts (Roa, 2015). Lack of training for managers has been

identified as a significant issue in American organizations, with nearly 60% of managers in a recent study reporting that they receive no training at all (O'Donnell, 2018).

Emphasis on work-life balance is growing phenomenon in India, with many organizations already moving in that direction. Recent studies have revealed that many employees in India place higher value on work-life balance, even if it means lower pay. Organizations are also reaping the benefits of employees achieving a better work-life balance. "One of the most important aspects of work-life balance is understanding that it is a key factor to ensure well-being of employees – a core component driving performance" (Mukherjee, 2017, para. 4).

Similar to western countries, India has a host of employment laws aimed at protecting the health, safety, and rights of Indian workers. There are laws regarding employee health and safety, trade unions, minimum wage, equal pay, workers compensation, and many more. In recent years, India has come a long way with regard to employee leave benefits. For example, women can take up to 26 weeks for maternity leave depending on family size and lengths of employment – far longer than the amount of time women in the U.S. receive. Furthermore, there are provisions in law for paternity leave benefits for government employees, and legislation aimed at granting paternity leave for private sector is being considered (Aich & Mathias, 2018; "Maternity Leave," n.d.).

Some of India's most recent employment laws relate to sexual harassment. The law requires Indian employers to implement policies that prohibit sexual harassment, and make annual filings of sexual harassment claims. Furthermore, the law requires organizations to establish a committee to hear sexual harassment complaints. "The committee must be chaired by a woman, at least half of its members must be women and must have on independent member who must have expertise in sexual harassment matters or matters relating to women" (Aich & Mathias, 2018, para. 51).

Due to the culture's respect for authority and for seniors in the society, whistleblowing is not common. While the Whistleblower Protection Act was passed in 2011, it really only applies to public servants and governmental entities. Therefore, consistent protections for whistleblowers are loose, and enforcement is lax. "Many instances of fraud, bribery and corruption do not get reported for the fear of retaliation…" ("Business and Ethics," 2016, para. 2).

6. Conclusion

Organizations today continue to break through geographic and cultural barriers as they expand their reach in today's global business environment. Recent research suggests that this trend will only continue into the future, with 57% of small businesses confident in their global operations while 63% claim that they are experiencing "good-to-booming" global growth ("New Data," 2017, para. 1). Business professionals engaged in the global community will benefit greatly from learning about the cultures and religions of various areas of the world. Considering the highly globalized nature of the business environment, and the increasing presence of south-central Asian countries such as India, it is highly likely that a global business professional will conduct business in this region and/or with Hindu business professionals at some point.

This paper has provided a brief history of Hinduism along with a brief history of India, where 80% of the population are Hindu. Subsequently, an overview of some of the more basic and fundamental beliefs held by Hindus was presented, which led to discussion on how those beliefs are expressed through business practices among Hindus. The paper concluded with insight into how global business professionals can successfully conduct business with Hindus in India and abroad. Ultimately, the authors hope to have instilled an understanding of and appreciation for Hinduism and its influence within the global business environment.

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