

## **The Religion in India: Comparative Study Between Hinduism and Buddhism**

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“Religion change in order to retain meaning in the face of changing social and political  
circumstance”

Religion is deeply connected with society; we learn what is morally good and what is bad. It helps in shaping the different communities and integrates nation. Ethno linguistic relation of community influences religious feelings. In cultural preservation religion, play very important. Religion also helps in establishing relationship between society and culture. Hinduism and Buddhism as culture blend with the ideas of living their religion faith rather than defining it. People faith cannot be blame on syncertizing two religion, because traditions and strong roots of culture are more relevant than theological spirit. It is not enough to attend Buddhist temple and meditated to become Buddhist. It is not enough to read Bhagavad-Gita to become Hindu. Religions are community and population because it is where we are born and brought up with no intention. On other hand, we can say that culture is no different from religion both are linked with each other. Thus, we can say that Hinduism and Buddhism are more culturally united than spiritually. Before going deep into the main topic of discussion about Hinduism and Buddhism, I, like to highlight few lines about Syncretism, its meaning and definitions. How it help in establishing syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism.

### **Meaning and definition of syncretism**

There is no universally agreed upon the concept of Syncretism. The basic definition of syncretism accepted by most scholars “the unsystematic combination within a single tradition of elements which their originators intended to be kept apart” Syncretism means belief in multiple religious assumptions , dogmas, doctrinal systems and or the unification of different religious denominations, schools of thought and practices. The Random House Dictionary defines Syncretism as “The attempted reconciliation or union of different opposing principles, practices or parties” Hendrik Kraemer in his essay “ syncretism: states that The term syncretism has always more or less had the connotation of expressing the mingling different religious elements.” The book *Syncretism in Religion: A reader* by Anita Maria Leopold discusses that Syncretism and culture are not so far from each other. Whenever we think about a country or a place, we consider their culture. Factions that compel to be thought as culture could be typical food of the area, the music and another big one is religion. “New religious Movement or new myth making often incorporate “borrowed” elements from other religious sources as way of legitimating new contemporary values, often disguised as old religious teaching as a means to context orthodox

values". If syncretism relies in the art of "borrowing" elements from religious source, the act of syncretism itself is to take the characteristics of other religions to make their own contemporary.

If we believe that Buddhism has been in globe since about the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC it was thought because Buddha was born about 2565 years ago. Hinduism has been around since about 2000 BC (at least the Hindus valley civilization from which the term the Hindu came) Buddhism is borrowing some characteristics from Hinduism (as more orthodox religion) to incorporate their values in order to make this moral more explanatory to the followers. Syncretism is all about the exchange and interaction of new elements into other religions. According to Sociology author, Alex D.Thio Religion appears in several forms, but widely there are two religious forms along with Confucianism Taoism and Shintorism, Buddhism is an ethical religion. It attributes sacredness to the moral principle rather than to a deity. On the other hand Christianity, Judaism Islam, and Hinduism are theistic religions the believers worship one or several Gods. If Buddhism is an ethical religion and Hinduism is theistic. How they are syncretizing? "Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are indigenous religious traditions: it is from India that particularly Buddhism has spread to other parts of Asia and the world. Buddhism has practically wiped out of India by the eighth century but only after many of its ideas and ideals had been absorbed into Hindu thought. In fact, the Buddha was deified by the Hindus, not by the Buddhists."

Huston Smith suggests in his book *The Illustrated World's Religions*, that Buddhism finds its roots in Hindu beliefs. Buddhism is man's created Religion. The Buddha was a Hindu before the world considered him as a religious symbol. We see Buddhism against the background of Hinduism from which it was born and split. Unlike Hinduism this emerged by slow, gradual spiritual growth, Buddhism appeared (overnight not literally). In a large, picture it was a reaction to Hindu "perversions"

## About Hinduism:

Hinduism one of the world third largest religion along with Christianity, Islamism, Sikhism and Buddhism. It stands for the faith and way of life people follow in India. It is the collection of religious belief that developed slowly over long period. Some aspect of religion can be traced back to ancient times. Hinduism is based on belief in things such as reincarnation, dharma and in the three main Gods. From origins and beliefs, it was found that Hinduism is seen as way of liberating the soul from the illusions, disappointments and mistakes of everyday existence. Hinduism is a mixture of sects, cults and doctrines, which have a profound effect on Indian culture. In spite of this diversity, there are few of its aspects, which do not rely in some way or the other on the authority of Indian religious literature the Vedas, the epics and the puranas.

Hinduism is all about understanding Brahma, the existence within the atman, which means "self or soul" and attaining the highest belief is a process of removing the bodily pain and destruction from life, allowing one to eventually understand the Brahma nature within it. It is job and wishes of each soul to return to Brahma. It is not possible though because soul's sins and impurities in the world, they are no longer pure and holy to return, so it is necessary that soul much become pure before returning to Brahma, who is pure. The process of becoming pure is so hard that no soul can become pure in one lifetime. The soul is forced to live life after life until it is pure enough to return to Brahma. According to Hindu, no soul can returned to Brahma. Until becoming clean of all impurities and sin of the world, the soul much holy and pure to return to

Brahma. The process of becoming pure enough to return to Brahma is not an easy task. The soul is forced to live a life after death until pure enough to return to Brahma. The Hindus call the cycles of rebirth samsara or wheel of life. It is called moksha when a soul is finally cleansed and ready to go back to Brahma, it is there for eternity of contentment and ecstasy. Along with Moksha every human being soul are rewarded and punished according to the works and deeds, which is regarded as karma. Karma rules what each soul will be in the next lifetime. It is formed by the persons good and bad deeds in his or her lifetime.

Hinduism is more likely a way of life that is technically, there is no religion called Hindu. The term Hindu is purely one of geographic origin, referring to river Sindhu. The particular religion as the language, arts, agriculture and civics systems-synthesized with the ancient Indus Basin Civilization of the around five thousand years ago, into its present form Hinduism might be the oldest religion. It was never stated that it was a defined group of people who had specific characteristics of living. Indian and scholars in general agree on two version of definition of a Hindu: the centralist and pluralistic view. The centralist view describes a single, mainly Indian, hegemonic, orthodox tradition, transmitted through generations primarily in Sanskrit language by the members of Brahmanic class. This tradition concentrates around the Vedic texts. The pluralist view gives more important to liberal and abundant range of ideas and practices.

The Encyclopedia Britannica states: "In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divinity in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant. Hinduism is, then, both a civilization and a conglomeration of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, nor organization."

Hinduism proposes to make life more perfect, comprehensive, universal, and truly human. Some information gather that Hinduism accepts the reality of various religions and spiritual levels in people lives and acknowledges the facts that every human being are not same, so it offers different approaches to guide individuals at their own level so they can experience the Path of faith with the same intensity and attain the same goal. The words spoken by Krishna: "Whosoever follows any faith and worships me under whatsoever denomination, in whatsoever form, with steadfastness, his faith shall I indeed reinforce" Hinduism is a religion particularly good for syncretism. As it tries to bring up the best human being we can possibly be, it allows other religion (like Buddhism) to blend easily into their own. Their fundamental beliefs have no part in superstitions and superstitious practices that categorize themselves as a religion and there is no concept of religion "in war" or competing for more followers.

The fundamental teaching of Hinduism is that a human being's nature is not confined to body or the mind. Beyond both is the spirit of God in our souls. Anyone who purifies and refines his or her mind and senses can feel the truth of this. This path can take various ways and is known as yoga. The practitioners of these paths are called yogis.

## About Buddhism:

The term Buddhism is used to denote the teaching of Buddha, a historical person who flourished some 25 centuries ago on Indian subcontinent. Buddha teaching is describing as religion, philosophy, a psychological system, an ethical moral code, a socio economic blue print. The

term, which Buddhists use to designate the teaching, is Dharma. This term comes from root term meaning “uphold” and the basic law, which “uphold” the universe. Buddhism is all about finding the Anatman “not soul or not self” One follows a disciplined life to move through and understand that nothing in one self is “me” such that one dispels the very illusion of existence. In doing so, one realizes Nirvana.

In order to relate Dharma to Buddhist religious, first it is clear that Buddha taught his disciples by a skillful way and means. They are three divisions in Buddhism: Vajrayana, Mahayana, and Theravada Buddhism. Among these three divisions of Buddhism, The philosophical idea is central to both Mahayana and Vajravana. The concept of skilful means (upayakausalya) is the ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people, by statement or actions, which are adapted to their capacity. The presentations of Buddha and Bodhisattvas within the Mahayana are often seen as expedients at that, though ultimately untrue, from the relative standpoint focus for devotion and give help to practitioners, ultimately leading them to salvation and enlightened understanding. The meditation is skilful means of harnessing the mind’s general business to preoccupy with the visualization, which draws it from outside world and clam down of its own accord. The colors and content of visualization provide interest and lead to stability. One is often told to focus on lower parts of the Buddha’s form or on the lotus or throne. If one become mentally ill he or she is encouraged to focus on the upper part of the Buddha’s body.

A second point of Buddha is extremely important as it is relates to the Buddhist religious doctrine of the three bodies or kayas of the Buddha. In Mahayana Buddhist religious the philosophy, that encompasses elements of not only Tibetan, but also Chinese, Korean and particularly Japanese school that make distinction between the Nirmanakayas, the historical Buddha; the sambhogakaya. This encompasses the range of celestial Buddha’s and Bodhisattvas and finally the Dharmakaya because it is absolute and formless nature that cannot be conceptualized or indeed visualized. The Dharmakaya is known as Enlightenment body, the state of Buddha hood itself; it is also the nature of Mind or emptiness. These distinctions are often temporal duration. Dharmakaya is beginning less and endless; the Sambhogakaya has a beginning but it is endless, while the Nirmanakaya is temporary. The Buddha Sakyamuni is seen to possess all three bodies. These philosophical distinctions have own personal body correlates. These are three centers or ‘gates’ correlating with one of the three bodies of the Buddha. The first is the head center between the eyebrows; this corresponds to the Nirmanakaya or the physical body. The second is the throat center, which corresponds to the Sambhagakaya and subtle energy flows and speech. In addition, the third is the heart centre, which corresponds to the mind or the Dharmakaya. Toward the end of the practice, colored lights emerge from three different source and parts of Buddha’s body is visualized from the three aspects of the practitioners’ body. This is the purification of bodily elements and accomplished by sound and visualized lights.

The third it is concern with meditations that establish relation with Samsara, the imperfect world with full of suffering and nirvana, the perfect state where suffering ceased to exist. In Buddhist religious, relationship establish between relative and absolute worlds. It clearly state from religious belief that Samsara and Nirvana are one. As Conze has, state “if all is one and the same, then absolute will be identical with the Relative, the unconditioned, Nirvana with Samsara’.

Through the meditation all individual lived experience field (i.e. Samsara) are visualized are temporally replaced by elements of pure land i.e. Nirvana and it is carried out with open eyes.

‘The dharma is the method that enables us to go from the state of ordinary being to the state of awakened being’.

The objective of Buddhism is to liberate oneself from transmigratory existence from this world. Transmigratory existence is understood as the little time human being living and breathing in the world. Buddhist desires the eventual transcendence from cycle to attain the states of Sukhavati where there is no suffering but only Happiness. The Enlightenment processes (the Buddhas’ discoveries) are also known as The Four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth is that life is Dukkha. The word is translated as “suffering”, Buddha didn’t think the suffering he acknowledge was unbelievable, what cause dukkha life suffering? The second Noble Truth answers the question. The cause of dukkha is Tanha. Tanha is usually understood as desire. Not a normal desire a desire for private and selfish fulfillment. Tanha is an ego, which have selfish interest that pull one individual to satisfy own needs and desire at the expense of others. These egocentric desires bring suffering. The Third Noble Truth states that if, tanha is the cause of suffering, and the cure relies on the overcoming of tanha. Releasing ourselves from the limits of self-interest into the existence with the universe. Only then, we would be relieved from the suffering. The fourth Noble Truth brings solution to overcome all the problem and suffering a individual face. This path is known as The Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists in being a moral individual; show us what we say and do and our livelihood, focusing our mind on being fully aware of our thoughts direction and action and develop wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and compassion. The path is a process that moves beyond the actions or response that will not let our true nature shine. Buddhism teaches that the solution to our problem is within us, not outside. The Buddha asked all his followers not to take his word as true, but to test his teachings for them. In this way, each person has the option to decide and take responsibility for his or her own actions and understanding. This make Buddhism less of a fixed package of beliefs which is to be accepted entire life and more lesson package which each person learns and uses in their own way.

## Comparison between Hinduism and Buddhism

When we are talking about Hinduism and Buddhism, some similarities’ are noticeable. Both religions were born in India. As it is already, mention that Hinduism is born at that side of the Sindhu River, and Buddhism is group of teaching which come from the Buddha who was born a Hindu. According to S Rahdhakrishna ‘Buddhism in its origin at least is an offshoot of Hinduism’ According to Buddha desire is the cause of suffering and if the desire is remove from life then it result in the halts of suffering. Some Hindu text (like the Bhagavad-Gita) consider that action motivated by desire lead to an attachment to bondage and suffering and that action without desire would result in liberation. It is however clear that Buddhism gained popularity in India because it released the people from the oppression of the tradition and orthodoxy. The teaching of Buddha created hope and aspiration for those who had no hope of salvation and freedom of choice in the society, which was dominated by caste system. Long ago Hindu tradition accepted Buddha as a incarnation of Vishnu. Both emphasize in the world nature the

role of Karma and the importance Dharma. The Mahabharata says that Dharma is so called because it protects Dharmat (everything). Dharma maintains everything that has been created; Dharma is thus that very principle which can maintain the universe. Dharma is the foundation of the good life.

To the Indian population Dharma is well known Mantra. No matter what religion we practice. Culturally this word is present in Hindu life. If it is merely a religious concept, why would nearly the whole population know its significance? The identity of the average Indian is complex made of religion, caste, language and region. In both the religions, the beliefs of karma, the transmigration of souls to another world and the cycle of rebirths and death, prevails. Both encourage compassion and livelihood of nonviolence towards all living beings. They observe certain spiritual practices like meditation, concentration and the peaceful state of mind. They firmly believe in the renunciation of the materialistic life as a way to enter fully spiritual life. Both consider desire as the ultimate cause of suffering.

Important point between Hinduism and Buddhism that highlight some similarities:

- 1 Both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize illusory nature of the world and the role of Karma and the cycle of births and death.
2. Both believe in the existence of several hells and heavens or higher and lower worlds.
3. Both believe in the existence of Gods or deities on different planes.
4. The Advaita Philosophy of Hinduism is closer to Buddhism in many respects.
5. Buddhism and Hinduism have their own version of tantra.
6. Both originated and evolved on the Indian soil. The founder of Buddhism was a Hindu who became the Buddha. Buddhism is the greatest gift of India to Mankind.

Buddha's attitude towards Hindu:

Buddhism started with a man, Siddhartha Gautama and his awakening (enlightening). He was the son of an Indian warrior/king, who had a princely life. When he got bored of the banality of royal life, he took off the world in search of understanding and Enlightenment. Before finding his own path, he went to Hindu gurus to find the answer to the problem of suffering. He followed the meditation techniques and ascetic practices as prescribed by the Hindu scriptures and followed by the Hindu yogis. After becoming Buddha, He showed special consideration to the higher caste Hindus especially Brahmins (Priests) and the Kshatriyas (warriors). The certain categories of Brahmins had free access to the Buddha and that some of the Brahmin ascetics were to the Monastic discipline without being subjected to the rigors of probation, which was otherwise compulsory for all classes of people. Buddha converts many Brahmins to Buddhism and considers their involvement as sign of progress and popularity of his fledging movement. Much later we find similar echo d sentiment in the King Ashoka where he exhorted the people of his empire to show due respect to the Brahmins.

Along with some similarities, we notice some difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, which are noticeable in the principle and practices.

1. Hinduism is not found by any particular prophet, but Buddha finds Buddhism.
2. Buddhism does not believe in the existence of souls whom generally call God. Hinduism believes in the existence of Atman, that is the individual Soul and Brahman, the supreme creator.

3. Hinduism accepts the Buddha as an incarnation of Mahavishnu one of the God of Hindu trinity. The Buddhist does not accept any Hindu God superior and equivalent to the Buddha.
4. The original Buddhism taught by the Buddha is known as Theravada Buddhism or Hinayana Buddhism. Followers of this do not worship images of Buddha nor believe in the Bodhisattvas. The Mahayana considers the Buddha as the supreme soul or the highest being but in Hinduism Brahman is worship in the form of images and icons.
5. The Buddhist considers the world full of sorrow and pain. To end the sorrow is the chief aim of human life. The Hindus consider that there are four aims in life, which everyone should follow and pursue. They are dharma (religious duty), artha (wealth and material possessions), karma (desire and passions) and moksha (salvation).
6. Hindus also believe in the four ashramas or stages in life. This is not followed in Buddhism. People can join the order any time depending upon their spiritual preparedness.

In the book *Culture, Religion and Philosophy- Critical studies in Syncretism and inter-faith Harmony*, there is an essay by Manis Kumar Raha called “Synthesis of Buddhism and Hinduism in Western Himalayas: A study of the Kinnauras of Himachal Pradesh”. In this essay, the Author writes about how in the society of Kinnauras religion play important role. The manners and beliefs of all people are guided by it. He tries to talk about that how in their entire activities religion play important guiding factor. The Kinnaura community has adapted to the fatalistic theory of life, which is a result of lack of technology. This tribe is found in every corner of Himachal Pradesh. In the western Himalayas, Kinnaura tribal community are found in Baspa or Sangla valley that is located in high attitude of the Kinnaur district, bordering Tibet. It is divided into three administrative units name Poo, which is religiously dominated by Mahayana Buddhism, Nichar, in which dominance of Hinduism prevails. Kalp where there is a presence of both religious traditions.

The Author goes into many details in how Kalp district has a extraordinary intermingling of dual religious tradition. He explains that this phenomenon is cause due to continuation and presence of Hinduism and Buddhism and it had a great impact among the people. People practice both religion and perform their rituals. They go to the Hindu temple as well as the Buddhist monasteries. The structure of the society and culture is patterned according to their religious influence. Even though some difference is observed between people of these districts. They agree that there is a smooth undergone of cultural similarities in the dilemma of cultural diversities.

Kinnaurs worship numerous Gods and Goddesses. Each deity has demarcated area over which exerts authority and control. This control is not direct but through the social religious and administrative aspects. No one undertakes any work, social matter or any other activity without the approval of the deity he or she worship. The cults of each area depend on the deity of the particular locality.

The religious functions of both Hinduism and Buddhism play very important role in social life and all has different duties in their temple. The common villagers do not have the right to approach their deity directly; they depend on the function completely to solve their religious plights. Their major syncertic characterizes is the religious homogenization and the cultural

syncretism of two local variants of Hinduism and Buddhism by the people who use both Hindu and Buddhist religions to perform local rituals. The predominantly combined religious roles in the religious domains give the kinnauran society a unique character.

This is a clear example of how two religions can syncretize. Thanks to the proximity of the two religions they practiced and the people willing to accept different functions and rituals in their practices. In order to give clear knowledge for syncretism between two religions, not only social factors play a major role but also geographical factors have its importance. This is an example of religion syncretism that talks about practice and follows two religions by one single group of people.

## Conclusion

Houston Smith's book, "*Why Religion Matters*". He talks about the religion's social impact and approaches. He states that people will never agree on the world's meaning and it seems to be safer that way, if we were told about the mission and goal in the world, we would not like it because it would deprive us from our freedom, as a view given by Kierkegaard. Buddhists claim that we as human beings are luckiest of all because we have the power to decide what we want to do with our lives and what path we want to follow, all these choices set us free from the world.

Thus, we can say that Hinduism and Buddhism are the terms that help us to understand the group beliefs. In the concluding lines, we can say that Hinduism and Buddhism play an important role in Indian society. Both the religions are part of Indian society but Buddhism crossed the boundaries of the Indian society and went on to play a greater role in the whole Asia. In this process it developed a complex sectarian, theological and geographical diversity and became one of the most significant and influential religions of the world. Along with this syncretism is another concept, which talks about the merging of two or more religions and cultural traditions. The merging of Hinduism and Buddhism is one of the examples of religion syncretism. As we know, that syncretism is a mixer of two or more religions and gives different spiritual understanding to religions that we follow. Both Hinduism and Buddhism acknowledge a supreme being and follow a variety of spiritual paths to achieve peace with themselves and God. Culture is another varies that talk about religious attachment. If we try to make people understand that religion are mixer of two or more religions. They might not agree to this concept because their faith and belief are so well integrated that they do not think about religion in a different way.

While writing this paper I came to know that religions are a mixer of two or more different sects. The faith and beliefs make everything different, and the way we look at particular religion is another important matter that all make the difference.

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