

CREATION OF MAN IN ISLAM AND HINDUISM: AN INTELLECTUAL ENCOUNTER

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Abstract

This study examines the similarities and differences in ontological views of the creation process as described in Islam and Hinduism. The Islamic view is based on the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, expounded in the commentaries and auxiliary works of the Islamic scholars, and the Hindu view is rooted in the oldest Vedic scriptures, particularly the Rig Veda. The Qur'ān reaffirms the Judaic account of the creation of Adam as the primordial human, who was established as a vicegerent in the earth. It repeatedly iterates the Quranic theme of the incredible fine-tuning of creation being a cause for reflection on the meaning and significance of the universe, rather than being a random or idle occurrence. The Qur'ān declares that human beings have a uniquely privileged role in the destiny of the Universe. They are not an irrevocably fallen creature, as believed by Christians. The Islamic paradigm is fundamentally centered on the divine mandate of humans to worship their Creator, whereby they may return to their Paradisal homeland; exhibiting some similarities and differences, the Vedic theory of Creation posits that the universe is of immense age, and that humans have descended (devolved) from a higher state of consciousness to their current impasse. It must seek to re-ascend to their former status and unity with the transcendent Absolute. The study then zooms out to offer a comparative analysis of general Islamic views of Hinduism and some modern Hindu views of Islam.

Keywords: Islam, Hinduism, Qur'ān, Evolution, Creationism.

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1. Introduction

Among the abundant favors granted by the Creator, the distinguishing feature of the human being according to the Abrahamic faiths is the ability to discern (i.e., to *name* things), by which Adam was honored above other creatures.² The mystical ability to understand and to learn is the essence of all human activity, by which humans learn from past knowledge, and to survive in the alien environment of the world by squarely facing up to its challenges. This uniqueness of man to explore the causes and the consequences, to comprehend the association between the antecedent and the outcome is certainly a divine blessing conferred upon him only. It is this unique favor venerated to man which differentiates him from the brutes and has been the real purpose for all the advancement made by him in arts and sciences, culture and civilization.³

This paper explores the Islamic and Hindu accounts of creation. Clearly it is impossible to expound the beliefs of two great religions in this paper, thus this analysis is necessarily limited to a general and mainstream assay. It presents the Islamic view in the context of the Abrahamic religions' belief in an ordered cosmos. The discussion is premised on Islamic and Jewish doctrines exhibiting a high degree of orthodoxy and homogeneity concerning creationism (although the Christian view is somewhat different due to the consequences of particularities of Christian beliefs in the Fall of Man and Redemption of Christ). In contrast, Hinduism has always been a more heterogeneous faith tradition, taking shape over many centuries in disparate communities throughout Central, South, and Southeast Asia, and attempts by modern fanatical movements seeking to make it a political ideology, and to impose a rigid orthodoxy, are likely to be short-lived in the long term.

This study presents the generic and mainstream beliefs of traditional Hinduism concerning Creation. Those seeking more in-depth knowledge of the particularities and debates occurring among

² al-Qur'ān, 2: 31; *Holy Bible*, (New International Version (NIV) 2011 by Biblica, Inc.), Genesis, 1: 19-20.

³ Kausar Niazi, *Creation of Man*, (Delhi: Taj Company, 1990), 9.

Hindu scholars – as well as among scholars of Islam and other religions – may do so in confessional works, but the scope of the current paper is to give an overview, which it is hoped may serve as a primer for people primarily familiar with the Abrahamic religions to gain a deeper appreciation of the Hindu view, and to consider the similarities and differences in these religions’ views on Creation.

2. Islamic Creationism

The Quranic view of the genesis of humans describes that they were created in the best form by God, amenable to divine obedience and guidance, and susceptible to shortcomings and repentance, and not in a form irrevocably predisposed to the Fall, requiring an absolute salvation (unlike the Christian variation from the Abrahamic paradigm). Every human being is imperfect because man is prone to commit negligence because of the inherent nature of the human creation. According to the Islamic view, Adam and Hawa committed their own individual original sins, and were subsequently forgiven by Allah (ﷻ) prior to their departure to the earth, after He accepted their repentance.

Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely, we are of the lost.⁴

And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.⁵

After acceptance of their repentance, Adam and Hawa were dispatched to populate the earth, wherein they and their descendants were to follow guidance received from the transcendent realm, while resisting the snares of their enemy, Satan:

We said: ‘Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from me, whosoever

⁴ al-Qur’ān, 7: 23.

⁵ al-Qur’ān 20: 121-22.

follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.⁶

He said: ‘Get ye down, both of you, - all together, from the Garden, with enmity one to another: but if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from Me, whosoever follows My Guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery.’⁷

But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgement.⁸

Consequently, humans retain the capacity for Adamic perfection, which consists of sinning and then sincerely repenting to their Lord, and not of pagan ritual sacrifices, cannibalism, and drinking blood (e.g., to partake of Christ’s redemption). Anas bin Malik may Allah (ﷺ) be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

All of the children of Adam are sinners, and the best sinners are those who repent.⁹

By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if you did not commit sin Allah would do away with you and bring people who would commit sin then pray for forgiveness.¹⁰

Hence, in Islam, humans retain the capacity for obedience, and for disobedience, repentance, and forgiveness, all of which are part of the divine splendor of the human mission in Allah (ﷻ) creation.

⁶ al-Qur’ān, 2: 38.

⁷ al-Qur’ān, 20: 123.

⁸ al-Qur’ān, 20: 124.

⁹ Abi Issa Muhammad bin Isa bin Surah Al-Tirmidhi, *The True Collection Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, 1-4 Vols, (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-’Ilmiyyah, 2005), 2499; Imam Muhammad bin Yazid Ibn Majah al-Qazvini, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-’Ilmiyyah, 2008), 4251.

¹⁰ Abu Al-Husayn Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj Al-Qushayri, *Sahih Muslim*, (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-usSalam, 2007), 2749.

3. Purpose of Creation

Allah unequivocally rejects man's conceit that he has been created in vain, by means of random and meaningless processes.

Did ye then think that We had created you in jest, and that ye would not be brought back to Us (for account)?¹¹

According to the Islamic view, the Children of Adam are called to a noble destiny, premised on worshipping their Creator, and going through the adventures of this world and its temptations away from this end, and from remembering their primordial covenant with Allah. The whole of the Qur'ān reiterates this message, a few illustrative examples of which are given below:

We have indeed created man in the best of molds.¹²

If it had been Allah's plan, they would not have taken false gods: but We made thee not one to watch over their doings, nor art thou set over them to dispose of their affairs.¹³

Say, 'The truth is from your Lord': Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrongdoers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames), like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in: if they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass, that will scald their faces, how dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on!

As to those who believe and work righteousness, verily We shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed.

For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of

¹¹ al-Qur'ān, 23: 115.

¹² al-Qur'ān, 95: 5.

¹³ al-Qur'ān, 6: 107.

fine silk and heavy brocade: They will recline therein on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on!¹⁴

4. Man's Creation from the Islamic Viewpoint

According to the Islamic creation account, Allah (ﷻ) created the heavens and the earth (including the narrow band of the electromagnetic spectrum that we inhabit in this life) in six stages: “He it is who created the heavens and the Earth in six days – and His Throne was over the waters”.¹⁵ At a later phase, Allah (ﷻ) conveyed to the angels: “I want to create a vicegerent on earth,” declaring the role of this creature as a custodian and representative of the Creator, based on His unfathomable knowledge of human potential and quality:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’ They said: ‘Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? - whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?’ He said: ‘I know what ye know not.’¹⁶

Iblis found it abhorrent that he should be called upon to give obeisance to what he considered an inferior life form created from the base matter of clay, described variously in the Qur’ān as “sounding clay,” “like unto pottery,” and “from mud”.¹⁷ Abrahamic religion affirms that Allah (ﷻ) breathed His spirit into the dry mud and man came into being. Allah (ﷻ) did not use His “breath,” “blood,” or “flesh”; rather He blew from His own Soul into man.¹⁸ Thus, man, who was formed from mud and the spirit of Allah (ﷻ), is a two-dimensional being. One dimension tends towards mud, lowliness, sedimentation, and stagnation; while the other aspires to the loftiest imaginable point possible. The animating soul of the

¹⁴ al-Qur’ān, 21: 29-31.

¹⁵ al-Qur’ān, 11: 7.

¹⁶ al-Qur’ān, 2: 30.

¹⁷ al-Qur’ān, 55: 14.

¹⁸ al-Qur’ān, 15: 26.

human being is the source of nobility and sacredness, while the bodily (clay) component is that which inclines toward material desires. This is reflected in Abrahamic religions in the struggle to master the lower desires of the bodily self and to consecrate human and bodily activities by means of the spirit's obedience to Allah (ﷻ). It is up to man to choose where to go: to cleave to the lowly world of clay, or to transcend this by sanctifying his material existence with the light of the spiritual realm of providence.¹⁹ Man's fate, from reaching the age of maturity to death, is to engage in jihad, the spiritual struggle between these poles.

He it is created you from clay, and then decreed a stated term (for you). And there is in His presence another determined term; yet ye doubt within yourselves!²⁰

He Who has made Everything which He has created Best: He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay,²¹

When Iblis refused to obey his Creator's command to prostrate to the Adamic being (notably *after* breathing the soul component into him), due to his perceived material superiority as a being made from "smokeless fire" as opposed to clay, he founded the concept of material and racial superiority as an index of worth.

And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate to Adam', they (all) prostrated except Iblis; he refused.²²

Allah) said: 'What prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?' He said: 'I am better than he: thou didst create me from fire and him from clay.'²³

The Islamic paradigm posits that nobility depends upon spiritual

¹⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, (Al-Qahira: Darul-Sharuq, 1979), Vols. III, 1400; VII, 1392-94; Yasien Mohamed, 'The Interpretations of Fitrah', *Islamic Studies*, 34/2 (Summer 1995), 131-32.

²⁰ al-Qur'ān, 6: 2.

²¹ al-Qur'ān, 32: 7.

²² al-Qur'ān, 20: 116.

²³ al-Qur'ān, 7: 12

knowledge and intelligence rather than upon racial superiority. Man's potential superiority over material creation is also evident when Allah contrasts his fate with that of the skies, seas, plants, mountains, animals and so forth, when Allah (ﷻ) invited them to accept the "trust," but all refused except man. This is indicative of the fact that man possesses another virtue; that is, his acceptance of a trust that everyone else refused. This means that man is a representative of Allah (ﷻ) in the universe as well as His trustee.

We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors above a great part of Our Creation.²⁴

Humans have the free will to choose whether to obey or disobey the Creator, and unlike vegetables, animals, and minerals, they can act contrary to their innate disposition. For example, no animal voluntarily fasts, and no plant can commit suicide in grief and despair. Humans have the ability to revolt against their material, physical, and spiritual nature and needs, and to actively execute wrongdoing or sacrifice self-benefit for others. These are among the unique favors and status accorded to humans according to Islam, highlighting the rapport between them and the Creator.²⁵

5. Hindu Creationism

The primordial Hindu scriptures, the Vedas, refer to "knowledge of that which was before unknown" (a concept which can be considered to allude to "revelation" in the Abrahamic sense). Modern scholars distinguish between the primordial Vedic religion of the Indo-Aryans, the subsequent Brahminic religion that subsequently took shape in ancient India, and the heterodox modern faith tradition of Hinduism. In all cases the Vedas are considered sacred texts, which were recited, memorized, transcribed, and transmitted over the millennia by the sacerdotal Brahmin caste, and which were jealously

²⁴ al-Qur'ān, 17:70

²⁵ Ali Shariati, *Islamic View of Man*, trans from Farsi by A. A. Rasti (Free Islamic Literatures Incorporated (FILINC), Bedford, 1978), 3.

guarded secrets withheld from the profane.²⁶ These ancient texts shape modern Hindu beliefs about the nature of Creation and the role of human beings. In a mystical sense, Hindus believe that water existed before all Creation, and that Creation rests on this, which is the cause of the cohesion of atoms and the order of the Universe. Water is thus conceptualized as the primordial substance from which the Creator derived other things, analogous to the Quranic concept of God's primordial throne being "over the waters"²⁷

He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days - and His Throne was over the waters - that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct. But if thou wert to say to them, 'Ye shall indeed be raised up after death, 'the Unbelievers would be sure to say, 'This is nothing but obvious sorcery!' ²⁸

In terms of the creation of the conventional Universe, the Vedas explain that it originates from the Para Brahman (Supreme Brahman), which is the Absolute, primordial godhead, also understood as the Ultimate Reality; this concept is philosophically analogous or even identical to the understanding of God in Abrahamic religion. Para Brahman gave rise to the triune Trimurti, which orthodox Hinduism refers to as Brahma (the "Creator"), Vishnu (the "Preserver"), and Shiva (the "Destroyer"). The Trimurti collectively represent the governing dynamics of Creation. While it may be tempting for those familiar with Abrahamic religion to see this as analogous to the Christian Trinity, Brahma is a distinct entity from Para Brahman (and is not simply "God the Father" as in the Trinity), and Vishnu became

²⁶ Bloomfield, Maurice, *The Religion of the Veda: The Ancient Religion of India (from Rig-Veda to Upanishads)*, (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 18; Basham, A. L., *The Cultural History of India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

²⁷ Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, trans. and ed. E. C. Sachau (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1910), 222.

²⁸ al-Qur'ān, 11: 7.

much more important (and indeed the most important Hindu deity) in the post-Vedic development of Hinduism.²⁹

While Brahma implicitly originates physical manifestation in the material universe, Vishnu is seen as the main motivator of events within it, and is the focus of much more practical importance and veneration for Hindus. Indeed, Vishnu came to be seen as the practical “maker” of the earth and its water, as well as fire and wind, as described in the excerpt below. The Trimurti are conceptualized as masculine emanations, complemented by the female-natured Tridevi: Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati, the mystical spouses of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge, art, and music, known as Bharati (eloquence), Shatarupa (existence), Vedamata (‘mother of the Vedas’), Brahmi, Sarada, Vagisvari, and Putkari). Lakshmi is the goddess of beauty, fertility, power and prosperity. Parvati, also called Uma, is a regulatory goddess concerned with harmony, love, motherhood, and nourishment.

In Hindu theology, all of the gods of their pantheon are considered manifestations of a single essence (ultimately derived from Para Brahman), which can be extended to encompass the whole Universe in general in philosophical analyses; when these personas of the Divine are incarnate in the Earth to interact directly with the human realm, they are known as avatars. All Creation is in transcendent unity according to Hinduism, as Vasudeva said in *Bhagavad Gita*:

To speak accurately, we must say that all things are divine; for Vishnu made himself the earth that the living beings should rest thereupon; he made himself water to nourish them thereby; he made himself fire and wind in order to make them grow; and he made himself the heart of every single being. He presented them with recollection and knowledge and the two opposite qualities, as is mentioned in the Veda.³⁰

In terms of the mechanics of how biological life forms were created,

²⁹ *Rigveda*, Vol. 1. Eng trans. by Tulsi Ram, (Delhi: Vijaykumar Govindram Hasanand, 2013), 74-75.

³⁰ Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni's India*, 40.

the Veda declares that “every being comes from Purusha.”³¹ Purusha is the life force of the existing world, emanating at its ultimate source from Para Brahman, described as knowing and not knowing, gaining knowledge by acquisition. The not-knowing of Purusha is the cause of action coming into existence, and its knowing is the cause of action ceasing.³² The Rig Veda describes Purusha as Cosmic Man, burned in sacred fire to create the familiar worldly man. The Purusha is considered a heavenly emanation of the Para Brahman, analogous to the Adamic creation in the Abrahamic religion, representing the individuation of consciousness, and a personal aspect of God whose lower mutations create the physical universe. The Rig Veda specifies that 75% of the Purusha remain “ascended high.” At the same time, a quarter “took birth again down here,” whereby the physical universe is a lower reality of less magnitude and importance than the majoritarian divine realm.

The androgynous primal human Purusha separated through a primordial self-sacrifice into man and woman, from whom the world was created with all its contrasts. This is equivalent to the non-binary initial Adamic being described in Genesis³³ and the Qur’ān³⁴ prior to the separation into the male “Adam” and his female mate. An analogous creation myth among early Vedic beliefs is that of the cosmic egg, which was separated into the male sky and the female earth.³⁵ The “mundane egg” (Hiranyagarbha) represented a dualistic male-female energy, comprising the mutually dependent Purusha and Viraj (the primordial creative goddess). Hindu cosmology is unique in going beyond the division of primordial “man” into male and female to describe the additional individuation of the four castes (Brahmin, Rajanya, Vaishya, and Shudra), and its further belief that the higher elements of the world in general are created from this proto-human energy, which differs from the Abrahamic account of a

³¹ Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni’s India*, 31.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ *Holy Bible*, (New International Version (NIV) 2011 by Biblica, Inc.), Genesis, 5: 1-2.

³⁴ al-Qur’ān, 4: 1.

³⁵ *Rig Veda*, 1. 164. 45; Brown, W. Norman, ‘Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Jan.-Mar. 1965, 85/1 (Jan -Mar. 1965), 31.

pre-existing physical world that predated the creation of Adam. According to the Hindu creation account, the gods undertook a *yajna* (“sacrifice”) of Purusha, and subsequently formed the revealed or lower world from his transfigured body parts and mind, which were disseminated among the physical universe, encompassing the sky, air, earth, Vedas, varnas (castes), and the gods Indra and Agni. The obvious parallels with motifs of ancient Indo-European and other ancient cosmologies suggest that this is likely a very early concept in Vedic religion (and not a later “Hindu” development arising within India during the classical period).³⁶

Following this process, Hindus believe that Purusha became incarnate consciousness in all beings, including humans (who are at a relatively heightened – though imperfect – state of consciousness), animals, plants, and natural manifestations such as mountains and rivers, etc. Hindu creationism posits that all beings on earth, including humans, have ultimately “devolved” from a primordial elevated state of absolute awareness (i.e., Para Brahman), and via an infinite cycle of births and rebirths consciousness can ascend or descend through various tiers of existence, whereby the Universe may be of unimaginable age. The Vedas certainly affirm the extreme antiquity of the universe and the history of the earth.³⁷

Hindu religion is premised on the doctrine of karma, whereby good actions (in accordance with the dharma, the order of the Universe instituted by the transcendent) accrue ascending consciousness, which may result in reincarnation as a higher form of consciousness in future lives (e.g., serially ascending from insect to goat, cow, lower-caste human, and Brahmin), before seeking ultimate reunion with the universal consciousness of Para Brahman. Alongside the individual trajectory of particular souls, Hindus believe that the universe itself goes through cycles of birth, decay, destruction, and rebirth. At the end of the Kali Yuga (dark age), the Vedic theory of the evolution of consciousness (expounded in the Upanishads) marks the dawning of a new era in which consciousness will come to be incorporated as an essential item in our scientific theories about life and its origin.

³⁶ *Rig Veda*, 10. 54.3; Brown, ‘Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda’, 32.

³⁷ Brown, ‘Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda’, 27.

Hindus believe that their religious law and its single precepts derive their origin from Rishis, their sages and pillars of their religion, and not from prophets (*narayana*), who appear as human figures to rectify particular evils and to restore the primordial dharma, which is eternal and not subject to change (unlike the successive Sharī'ah and dispensations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as in Muslim belief). Laws (i.e., karmic principles) do not change in Hinduism.³⁸ According to Hindu religion, humans are to seek to accrue good karma to ascend divine transcendent consciousness. While religious worship *per se* is an intrinsic part of the religion, these are symbolic tokens of obeisance (as in Abrahamic religion), and not admission prices to buy an ascension in consciousness. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says:

Many people try to approach me in their aspirations through something which is different from me; they try to insinuate themselves into my favor by giving alms, praise, and prayer to something besides me. I, however, confirm and help them in all these doings of theirs, and make them attain the object of their wishes because I am able to dispense with them.³⁹

6. Classical Islamic Views of Hinduism

6.1 Al-Biruni's Perception of the Hindu Religion

The history of Indian perceptions of divinity is a complex and nuanced field, of which even most practicing Hindus are largely unaware. While modern political ideologies are keen to emphasize religious divides between people, classical Muslims had a deep appreciation of Hinduism (which may be surprising to modern Muslims), and even saw in it the philosophy of the Oneness of God. During the first incursions into Sindh by the Umayyad armies the

³⁸ Muhammad Abdul Karim Shahrastani, *Kitab Al-Milal Wa al-Nihal (Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects)*, Edited by William Cureton. (London: James Madden & Co. 1842), 449; Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni's India*, 106-7.

³⁹ Abul Kalam, *Tarjuman ul Quran*. Vol. 1, (Lahore: Urdu Academy, n.d.), 182-83; Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni's India*, 122; Basham, *The Cultural History of India*, 72.

Hindus were accorded an equivalent status to the People of the Book, and their temples and practices were protected, as explained below. Despite the axiomatic abhorrence of idolatry for Muslims, classical Muslim scholars were able to see beyond the superficial polytheism of folk religion to ascertain a deep philosophical transcendence in Hinduism.⁴⁰

The Islamic intellectual most noted for his pro-Indian (and pro-Hindu) sensibilities was Al-Biruni (973-1050), who considered that Hinduism posited that God is One, with the associated Divine Attributes (i.e., of Para Brahman) of being eternal, devoid of origination and end, acting by consciousness, invincible, prudent, living, life-giving, sovereign, sustaining, unique, and beyond all likeness.⁴¹ He rooted his analysis of Hinduism in an elementary model, whereby universal beings in the world are composed of heaven, wind, fire, water, and earth, known as *mahabhuta*. He described how Hindus called the world *loka*, containing the upper (*svarloka*/ paradise) and lower (*nagaloka*, the world of serpents, i.e., hell), and the intermediary realm of our current existence, called *madhyaloka* and *manushyaloka*; all of these concepts equate easily with the Islamic cosmology of the higher and lower heavenly and hellish *akhira* realities, and the current lower *dunya* world. Humans seek to attain the upper realm and avoid descending to the lower, which is clearly analogous to Abrahamic concepts. A man who merits arriving at *svarloka* or *nagaloka* obtains there the greatest reward of his acts in a specific time comparable to the length of his acts, but in both, there is only the soul, free from the body.⁴² According to *Vishnu-Purana* there are 88,000 hells for the specific traits and names by which a hell is assigned to a particular sinner according to the gravity of their sins:

The man who makes a false claim and who bears false witness, he who helps these two and he who ridicules people, come into the *Raurava* hell.

⁴⁰ Shahrastani, *Kitab Al-Milal Wa al-Nihal*, 445, 449; Al-Kufi, Ali b. Hamid, *Chach-Namah*, (Islamabad: Institute of Islamic History, Culture and Civilization, Islamabad University, 1983), 184, 208-09.

⁴¹ Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni's India*, 27.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

He who sheds innocent blood, who robs others of their rights and plunders them, and who kills cows, comes into *Rodha*. Those who also strangle people come here.⁴³

Al-Biruni recorded that the Hindus of his time considered that there were 33 *koti* or *crore* (330,000,000) devas (which he loosely equated with angels), of which eleven belonged to Mahadeva.⁴⁴

7. Opinions on Prophets Being Sent to India

According to the Quranic specifications, prophets and messengers were sent to every nation and tribe, to convey and explain the message of God according to their language and their needs, so that they might avoid evil and wrong actions and obtain the pleasure of Allah (ﷻ), including India, which comprises a vast span of South Asia. This was the opinion of numerous scholars throughout history, including Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1862-1943), Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868-1927), Maulana Abdul Bari Farangi Mahali (1878-1926), Shaikh Al-Hadith Maulana Zakaria (1898-1982), Syed Akhlaq Husain Dehlavi (1919-2009), Shams Naveed Usmani (1931-93), and Abdul Razzaq Hansvi (d. 2016) etc.⁴⁵

Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan (1699-1781) explicitly said that the Veda comprises a divine revelation sent to the Hindus by the entity he called the “Angel Brahma” (i.e., the Brahma of the Trimurti), and similar views are attributed to Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlavi (1746-1824). The founder of Darul Uloom Deoband, Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi (1833-80), forbade insolence toward Rama and Krishna, because of the probability that they were originally prophets (in addition to the general Quranic prohibition of insulting other religionists’ “gods”):

Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah,
lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance.

⁴³ Abu Rayhan, *Alberuni's India*, 60.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁵ Abul Kalam Azad, *Jamiush Shawahid*, (Patna: Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library, 1993), 34-35; Qasmi, M. Shamim Akhtar, ‘Salatin Hind ke Ahd meyn Ghair Muslims ki Sharai Haisiyat,’ *Darul Uloom Monthly*, 2: 91, Feb. 2007, 33-34.

Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end, will they return to their Lord, and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did.⁴⁶

Maulana Manazir Ahsan Geelani (1892-1956) wrote that the existence of prophets and messengers in India cannot be denied, and Shah Abdul Rahman Chishti (1596-1655) demonstrated in several contexts that there is a concept of such figures in the Hindu religion (*dharma*) and society. In the opinion of Qazi Sanaullah Panipati (1730-1810), the nature of the Vedas is proof that prophets and messengers came to India, and that Hinduism was of the same origin as the Abrahamic religions. He contextualized this view in terms of the potential interpretation that religions derived from monotheism are viewed in the Qur'ān:

Verily, those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.⁴⁷

Verily, those who believe (in Allah and in His Messenger Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Majus [Zoroastrians], and those who worship others besides Allah; truly, Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Verily, Allah is over all things a Witness.⁴⁸

According to classical exegetes, human communities after Adam (and later after Noah, peace be upon them) tended to degenerate over time into polytheism, and were periodically sent prophets to warn and restore monotheism. While Judaism is essentially unequivocal in its monotheism and views Christianity as absolute idolatry, the Christian Trinity was viewed as a proto-polytheist concept by classical Islamic exegetes. Modern Muslims tend to view this as

⁴⁶ al-Qur'ān, 6: 108.

⁴⁷ al-Qur'ān, 2: 62.

⁴⁸ al-Qur'ān, 22: 17.

straightforward *shirk*, but the classical view was that Christian monotheism was acknowledged in the Qur'ān,⁴⁹ and only those who regarded God as being one of three beings *within* the Trinity (and not incarnate in all the personas), such as the heresiarch Marcion of Sinope, were considered outright “disbelievers”: “Surely, disbelievers are those who said: ‘Allah is the third of the three...’”⁵⁰ (a view that is shared by mainstream Christianity).

Classical exegetes also considered the Zoroastrian duality of the forces of light and darkness to be a proto-polytheist concept, but not to be polytheism *per se*, while the religion in itself was considered to derive from a prophet (i.e., Zarathustra). Due to the general accommodation of Zoroastrianism alongside the People of the Book in the Qur'ān, Zoroastrians (Magians) were accorded analogous status in classical Islamic civilization. Based on these precedents, Qazi Sanaullah Panipati argued that Hindus were entitled to equivalent regard:

I say that if the forefathers of the Magians were people of the Book, then the Hindu idolaters of our time will also be people of the Book. They also have a book called the Vedas, which has four parts, and they claim that it is a divine book, then most of their principles are also compatible with the Sharia principle, and the principles that differ are the result of satanic mixing. Just as the Muslim community split into seventy-two sects due to satanic division. The Qur'an also supports the fact that Hindus are people of the book. Allah said, ‘Verily We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner: and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past).’⁵¹

The king of the Magi became angry with drunkenness and committed adultery with his sister and left his religion and the book and became the advocate of the

⁴⁹ al-Qur'ān, 2: 62.

⁵⁰ al-Qur'ān, 5: 73.

⁵¹ al-Qur'ān, 35: 24.

religion of Adam, but the Hindus did not do anything like that, but they became infidels because of denying the Messenger of Allah. It has been narrated to me that the fourth Veda contains the good news of the Messenger of Allah; after reading which the Hindus became Muslims...

if any nation or tribe claims to be a book of God, such as the Magi and Sabians, then it cannot be rejected by saying that its name is not in the Holy Qur'an. Because those who understand the Holy Qur'an know that not all the names of the heavenly or divine books are in the Holy Qur'an... the light can be obtained from the study of their texts that if they are based on monotheistic instructions and the concept of the Hereafter... However, we must reject the distortions and additions that have been made in the heavenly book.⁵²

Similarly, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote that if the Magi and Sabians can be considered similar to People of the Book, then the Hindus warrant the same status. In addition to these things, it is also known from the Ḥadīth of Musnad Ahmad that 124,000 prophets and messengers were sent to guide people in the world, a small number of whom are named or described in the Qur'ān, while there is no specific explanation about most of them.⁵³

8. Status of Hindus in India

Classical Muslim views rightly regarded India as a site of ancient human civilization, and presumed that Indians had received prophets throughout the history of their great civilization. For this reason,

⁵² Qazi Sanaullah Panipati, *Tafseer al-Mazhari*, 8 Vol., (Beirut: Dar Ehia Al - Tourath Al Arabi, 2004), 16-18.

⁵³ Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah. *Zad Al-Ma'ad: Provisions of the Afterlife Which Lie Within Prophetic Guidance*, translated by Ismail Abdus Salaam, (Beirut: Dar al Kotob al ilmiyah, 2010), 304-05; Al-Kufi, *Chach-Namah*, 151; Azad, *Jamiush Shawahid*, 35; Niazi, *Creation of Man*, 7-8; Qasmi, 'Salatin Hind ke Ahd meyn Ghair Muslims ki Sharai Haisiyat', 36-38; al-Baladhuri, Abu al-Hasan b. Yahya, *Futuh al-Buldan*, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijariyya, 1932), 538.

some scholars of India like Qazi Sanaullah Panipati and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad used the term “*Shibh Ahl-i-Kitab*” to refer to Hindus, and their analogous situation to that of the People of the Book (Jews and Christians).⁵⁴ Al-Baladhuri noted the policy of toleration established by Muhammad b. Qasim, who said: “The [Hindu and Buddhist] temples shall be unto us like the churches of the Christians, the synagogues of the Jews, and the fire temples of the Magians.” With specific regard to religious sites, this is a significant allusion to the Quranic approbation of such sites.

In other words, Muhammad b. Qasim assumed Buddhists and Hindus to be identical to *ahl-al-Kitab* (People of the Book), specifically respected minorities who paid *jizya* instead of *zakat* (the latter of which was paid by Muslim citizens) to be excused from military conscription, and who were granted a large amount of religious freedom, in addition to overall liberty to conduct their business and control their own affairs. In Islamic jurisprudence, the status of *dhimmi*s was originally given to the People of the Book (mainly Christians and Jews); later, when regions populated by other communities such as Zoroastrians and non-Christian Berbers were conquered, they were assigned the position of *Mushabbih Ahl-i-Kitab* (Equivalent Companions of the People of the Book).⁵⁵

For all practical purposes there is no difference in the status of the two except for two issues: Muslims are permitted to marry females of the People of the Book and eat the meat slaughtered in accordance with their religious rites, which is not allowed in the case of the *Mushabbih Ahl-i-Kitab*. When the issue of the status of Hindus in Islamic sharia was encountered in Sindh, Muhammad b. Qasim emphatically conferred on them the status of *Mushabbih Ahl-i-Kitab*, which was practically reflected in his protection of the famous

⁵⁴ Panipati, *Tafseer al-Mazhari*, 7/ 215-16; Azad, *Jamiush Shawahid*, 34-35.

⁵⁵ Qazi Abu Yusuf, *Kitab al-Kharaj*, (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Salafiyya, 1933), 128; Abu Ubaid Qasim Sallam, *Kitab al-Amwal*, trans. Abdur Rahman Tahir Surti, (Islamabad: Idarah Tahqiqat-i Islami, 1969), 44-45; Azad, *Jamiush Shawahid*, 34-35; Qasmi, ‘Salatin Hind ke Ahd meyn Ghair Muslims ki Sharai Haisiyat’, 33-34; Arshad Islam, ‘Multifaith Relationships and Civilization-Building in India’s Muslim States and Societies’, in *South Asian Islam: Spectrum of Integration and Indigenization*, edited by Nasr M Arif and Abbas Panakkal (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group UK, 2024), 85-86.

Temple of the Sun in Multan, which he left unmolested, building a separate mosque nearby, and his successors honored his covenant, and followed this practice.⁵⁶ This reflects a long-term policy of building relations with local traditions, as well as a manifestation of the general Islamic political ethos of respecting people of preceding religions in their attempt to follow the Quranic ethos:

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, ‘We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).’⁵⁷

9. Antipathy to Hinduism: Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1562-1624)

While the general picture of Hindu-Muslim engagement was one of concord in classical Islamic civilization, the reader will no doubt be left wondering how the current impasse came about, and the absurdity that Muslims and Hindus were perceived to require their own separate states in modern times. While Hindu-Muslim divisions were actively encouraged during the British Raj, and it is not the focus of this paper to explore Hindu-Muslim relations *per se*, it should be noted that commensurate with the generally peaceful *modus vivendi* established by the attitudes described above among Islamic scholars and rulers (the Indian equivalent of Muslim Spain’s *Convivencia*, or the Ottoman millet system), there were scholars who were deeply suspicious or resentful of the heterogeneity they saw in local society and (more seriously for them) religion, as exemplified by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. He was generally considered in India to be the “Mujaddid Alf Thani” (Renewer of the Second Millennium). A Farooqi and Naqshbandi, he was perturbed by what he perceived to be the adverse religious impacts of “foreign” or non-orthodox influences upon the lives of Muslims, particularly Shi’ism and

⁵⁶ Al-Kufi, *Chach-Namah*, 184, 208-9; Qasmi, ‘Salatin Hind ke Ahd meyn Ghair Muslims ki Sharai Haisiyat’, 39-40.

⁵⁷ al-Qur’ān, 29: 46.

aspects of Hindu culture. In *Risalah Radde-e-Rawafidh* he vigorously condemned Shia beliefs and traditions, and sought to curtail the soaring impact of Shias in the Mughal court of the Emperor Akbar (1542-1605).⁵⁸

In his treatise *Ithbat al-Nub-uwwah* (On Prophethood), he commenced with a polemic against the resolute profligacy in India under Akbar, who was noted for his highly heterodox beliefs that many considered beyond the pale of Islam. In his screed, Sirhindi decried public trust in fortune-telling and directly criticized governance by denouncing the despotic torture of several ‘*ulāma*’ for their arduous devotion to Sharia and submission to the Prophet (ﷺ). He observed that the state was so dire that the name of “Muhammad” was not cited in the imperial court, and people bearing this name had adopted an alternative. Akbar also banned the sacrifice of cows, which was a hot-button issue for Muslims seeking to differentiate themselves from Hindus. He also noted that many illiterate people and Muslim women celebrated the Hindu festival of Divali and performed other Hindu rituals.⁵⁹

Shaikh Sirhindi directly addressed the questions of Muslim life in India from the juristic viewpoint, exploring the relations Muslims should maintain with the people of India, who do not fall directly into the class of *Ahl-i-Kitab*. Unlike the vast majority of Islamic scholars, Sirhindi was derisive concerning the question of the role of prophets in primordial India. While acknowledging that prophets had been sent to the region, he claimed that all of them were abandoned, and none of them had more than three adherents. They were ineffective in setting up a community, thus there could be no confidence in any reliable sources for them. He cited the existence of relics all over

⁵⁸ Badaoni, Mulla Abdul Qadir, *Muntakhabat Twareekh*, Vol. II & III, (New Delhi: Qaumi Council Baraye Farogh Urdu Zuban, 2008), 206; Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *Imam-i-Rabbani Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Tham Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi’s Conception of Tawhid*, (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1940), 7-8.

⁵⁹ Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, *Ithbat al-Nubuwwah*, (Hyderabad Sindh, 1383 AH.), 515; Badaoni, *Muntakhabat Twareekh*, 252-53; Shaikh M. Ikram, *Raud-i-Kauthar*, Lahore: Idarah Thaqafat-e-Islamiya, 2005), 318-20; Fahad, Obaidullah, ‘An Analysis of Mujaddid’s Critique of Hinduism,’ Eds. Abdul Ali & Zafarul Islam, *Contribution of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi to Islamic Thought*, (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, AMU., 2005), 132-33.

India as possible evidence of abortive prophetic missions.⁶⁰ While these obscure prophets left some marks upon the mystical life of India, the “leaders of Indian infidelity” (*ruasa-i-kufr-i-hind*) had ensured that nothing more than a tentative theological philosophy had managed to endure in native Indian thought and belief. Citing the classical belief that reason alone is not adequate to distinguish the traits of God, Sirhindi argued that the human intellects of Brahmins could not discern God without prophetic guidance.

He also criticized the Brahmin belief that the divine was incarnate in them (*hall-o-sari*), whereby they encouraged people to bequeath the divine worship upon their own person (a Hindu belief analogous to the Christian doctrine of Divine incarnation in Christ, and indeed the belief of some Shias that the Divine was incarnate in Ali ibn Abi Talib and the Imams).⁶¹ Sirhindi apparently makes a distinction between the Islamic concept of prophecy as a purely human mission to convey divine revelation, and the Hindu belief of *awtar* (incarnation and apotheosis).⁶² In addition, Sirhindi clearly refuted the belief in incarnation as follows:

God is not unified with *anything*; nothing is unified with God. Nothing is assimilated in Him nor is He assimilated in any-thing. He is indivisible and impartible. The partition and division are impossible and far from His being.⁶³

Sirhindi likewise rebutted the asceticism promoted by Hindu yogis and Greek philosophers, emphasizing the distinction between religious duties (*farāidh*), works of supererogation (*nawafil*), and acts of indignity (*riyazat, mujahadat*), into the latter of which he accorded popular ascetic practices. He argued that the suppression of the sensual soul, which ought to be man’s ultimate aim in this world, can be influenced exclusively through the execution of the works approved by the Sharia, while works of supererogation are of value

⁶⁰ Sirhindi, Shaikh Ahmad, *Maktubat Imam Rabbani*, ed. Nur Ahmad, Vol. I, (Amritsar, 1334 AH.), L. No. 284.

⁶¹ Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol. 1, 1334, L. No. 284.

⁶² Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol. 1, 1334, L. No. 80.

⁶³ Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol. 2, 1334, L. No. 126.

only when they enhance sacred obligations.

Sirhindi's assiduous critiques, however valid in sharia, would have been viewed as puritanical in most classical and early modern Muslim cultures; for example, the human soul itself is viewed as something mystically emanating from God, which might be viewed as being somehow "incarnate" in human beings, as discussed previously. While Ibn Taymiyyah and other custodians of literalist theology denounced the mainstream belief of pre-modern Muslims that Allah (ﷻ) dwelt in the heart of the pious believer (a view held by Al-Tabari and Al-Ghazali), the majority of Muslims in Sirhindi's own society held this belief:

Indeed, Allah Ta'ala has reserved certain individuals among the inhabitants of earth as his containers. The containers of your Rabb are the hearts of his pious slaves, and the most beloved of hearts to Allah are the softest and most tender.⁶⁴

Some of the most arcane and complex controversies in Islamic intellectual history were due to the mystical (and ultimately unfathomable) nature of God and the possibilities of the manifestations of Him or His attributes, such as the Mu'tazilite argument that the Qur'ān, emanated from God and is not un-created and co-eternal with Him; only the renowned Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal thought it worthwhile to risk his life by standing up against this particular concept, while the other scholars of Iraq were content to go along with it due to its arcane nature and apparently negligible impacts on popular religious observance. Jesus, the son of Mary (peace be upon him) was described in the Qur'ān itself as "a Word from [i.e., emanating from] God".⁶⁵ Consequently, Sirhindi's singling out of Hindus for special treatment in his polemic about issues of incarnation is idiosyncratic, as similar views could be found among the Muslim masses and even major scholars.

Indeed, Sirhindi's critiques can only be understood in the

⁶⁴ Shams AlDin Abul Khayr Muhammad bin Abd AlRahman Al-Sakhawi, *Al-Maqasidul Hasanah*, (Beirut: Shams Al-Din and Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2009), Hadith No. 990.

⁶⁵ al-Qur'ān, 3: 39.

context of the highly troubling regime of Akbar, which was certainly very unsettling for orthodox Muslims. Akbar was on the verge of creating his new syncretic religion, which he called *Din-i-Ilahi*, supported by Hindu and Zoroastrian priests and rationalist court scholars. Consequently, traditional Muslims underwent various forms of harassment, as alluded to previously, and had no powerful protectors at court or among customary authorities.⁶⁶ Islam and Muslims were openly reviled and suppressed; while Hindus freely observed their celebrations across the country with great pomp, Muslims were forbidden to demonstrate any public observances or practices. To commemorate *ekadasi* (a Hindu rite involving a fast), Muslims were prohibited from dining and drinking in public, whereas Hindus were encouraged to ostentatiously dine and drink at will throughout the month of Ramadan. In *Eid ul-Adha* if Muslims slaughtered a cow their lives were forfeit. Many mosques were destroyed by Hindus and temples were erected on their grounds during this period.⁶⁷

It is important to note this episode as an example of the existence of orthodox streams tending against concordist interpretations of both Islam and Hinduism, and of the possibility of Hindu reactionary movements against Muslims (as well as the more famous converse), but as emphasized above, such trends must be contextualized in terms of prevailing governmental and societal directions. We can see a similar crisis in the current era, when Hindu-Muslim enmity is deliberately encouraged by political entrepreneurs seeking to align themselves with both traditions in order to divide and rule. Such shenanigans represent an abuse to both religions, and the demagogues who resort to such tactics seem curiously unwilling to apply any facet of Islam or Hinduism in their political, legal, economic, and social policies (all of which are strangely germane to the interests of big business and the lower self, rather than any transcendent spiritual vision of the elevated possibilities of human life). The genuine lived experience of the majority of Indians throughout history is epitomized in the observation of Gandhi in his

⁶⁶ S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. *Tarikh Da'wat wa Azimat*, Vol. IV, (Lucknow: Majlis Tahqiqat wa Nashriyat Islam, 1980), 108-25.

⁶⁷ Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, Vol. 2, 1334, L. No. 92; Ikram, *Raud-i-Kauthar*, 322-23.

pamphlet *Hind Swaraj* (originally written in 1909):

Should we not remember that many Hindus and Mahomedans own the same ancestors and the same blood runs through their veins? Do people become enemies because they change their religion? Is the God of the Mahomedan different from the God of the Hindu? Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarrelling?

Those who do not wish to misunderstand things may read up the Koran, and they will find therein hundreds of passages acceptable to the Hindus; and the Bhagavadgita contains passages to which not a Mahomedan can take exception.⁶⁸

10. Hindu Views on Islam

10.1 Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Although the nineteenth-century Hindu monk, spiritual leader, preacher, and revivalist Vivekananda spent most of his life in Kolkata, where he was born and died, he had a key role in the spread of the Vedanta philosophy outside India. Vedanta is an ancient Hindu philosophical school based on the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, which Vivekananda's teachings popularized in the US and the UK. Vivekananda first became well-known both domestically and internationally in 1893 after giving a momentous farewell address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, promoting humanitarianism and social action as the ultimate objectives. He established the twin spiritual institutions of Ramakrishna Math (a monastic order) and the Ramakrishna Mission, and is regarded as the principal disciple of the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna (1836-86).⁶⁹

⁶⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Jitendra T Desai Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 44-47.

⁶⁹ Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekanand: A Biography*, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center, New York, 1989, 1.

Vivekananda, a supporter of Vedanta philosophy, elaborated on the fundamental principles of Hinduism and spirituality in his many lectures. He discussed a wide range of topics, including the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the ideas of yoga, bhakti, atman, and maya. According to Vivekananda's teachings, working for the good of all people—especially the underprivileged and destitute—is the highest calling and a path to enlightenment. His own experiences as a wandering monk, when he saw the poverty of the Indian populace, shaped this vision. The Ramakrishna Order of Monks and its adherents have continued to uphold this concept of devotion to humanity throughout their life.⁷⁰

Vivekananda advocated for the equality of all religions. In his speeches, he urged people to embrace the existence of other faiths, rather than seeking to destroy them. He placed a strong emphasis on religious concord and peace, which could only be achieved with tolerance. It is debatable whether he viewed all faiths as equal in themselves or sought to subsume non-Hindu faiths within his neo-Vedanta philosophy. In any case, he devoted more attention to Buddhism and Christianity than to Islam, and his "Complete Works" include only one chapter on "Mohammed", with no commensurate chapter on Islamic civilization (unlike his descriptions of Christianity and Buddhism). Indeed, Islam occupies a conspicuously small portion of his work, and he goes little beyond acknowledging that Islam is a monotheistic faith based on the idea that there is only one God, and that He has no partners with whom to share His divinity.⁷¹

He himself attributed this to the inherent simplicity of Islam. He sardonically observed that Islam is uniquely simple to understand because it lacks a priesthood, philosophy, or intricate moral code. He feels that Islam's message of equality for people of all races and colors, which aids in the development of a social structure based on justice, equality, and fraternity, embeds the religion's practicality.

While Vivekananda sought to present Hinduism as a "spiritual" hobby for Western elite dilettantes, alongside Buddhism and Christianity, his chief concern with regard to Islam was to prevent the mass conversion of Hindus to the religion, which was

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

⁷¹ Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekanand*, 27.

mainly driven by the rigid caste system and the professed egalitarianism of Islam. Vivekananda observed that Muslims claimed to accept converted people without any difference (i.e., between converts and people born and raised as Muslims), which he viewed as a deceitful, claiming that according to Muslims, freshly converted “American Indians” would be welcome to eat with even the Sultan of the Turks, which he viewed as impossible.⁷² Conversely, Vivekananda claimed that Muslims were a nation of bigoted throat-slitters, and lower caste and untouchable people would be best advised to remain in their place:

Mohammadans talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of reality? ... Why, anyone who is not a Muslim will not be allowed to join this fraternity; instead, they will probably have their neck sliced.⁷³

He also argues that Islamic sectarian hostility and conflict between the Shia and Sunni sects belie claims of brotherhood. Vivekananda was primarily irritated by the widespread conversion of lower Hindu classes—who were severely discriminated against in society due to their caste—to Islam as a means of escaping caste prejudice. He criticized Islam in an attempt to persuade his fellow Hindus that converting to Islam would not free them from caste and sectarian hierarchies.⁷⁴

Only a small percentage of Vivekananda’s “Complete Works” contain viewpoints on Islam itself, and most of them are dominated by his rejection of Islamic philosophy and its idea of racial equality. To construct an argument that Islam logically condemns Hindu idolatry, he views Islamic ideas as a collection of inconsistencies, considering that the Muslims worship the Kaabah as an idol, prostrating to it five times a day and kissing the black stone during

⁷² Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta Spiritual Library Kolkata| www.celextel.org, Volume-2, 166.

⁷³ Nosheen Zaheer, “Vivekananda’s Views on Christianity and Islam,” *Rahat-ul-Quloob* 1, no. 1 (January–June 2017): 1–20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

the Hajj. Additionally, he equated Muslim veneration of saints and prophets with Hindu forms of “idolatry.”⁷⁵

Vivekananda was perplexed by the implications of the Hindu caste system, and its negative image set alongside contemporary religions which at least posited human equality in their doctrines, if not in practice (i.e., Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam). Vivekananda attempted to downplay the violent actions of Hindus and the abuse of lower castes in addition to the inability of Hindu society to unite, due to class and social divisions. Additionally, he was fond of the orientalist trope that Islam was forcibly spread by the sword, claiming that Muslim despotism, not bravery, had enabled them to triumph over the superior Hindus.⁷⁶ Needless to say, this view is not respected among contemporary historical scholarship, which acknowledges that the Islamic religion (as opposed to political power) was already widespread in the Indian Ocean maritime civilizations long before political and military forces arrived in Sindh. Furthermore, his own existence and identity were a testament that Hindus had not been forcibly converted to Islam under centuries of Indian Muslim governance.⁷⁷

Although he was critical of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, it is clear from comparing the severity of his attacks on these three religions that he acknowledges Buddhism as a complementary aspect of Hinduism. Despite treating Christ as a pure spirit, he disavows Christian dogma, rites, missionary work, and Western civilization (this view was popular among Western theosophists and other orientalist dilettantes interested in “Wisdom of the East”). His criticism of Islam, Islamic teachings, rituals, and proselytization was complemented by his ad hominem attacks on the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), calculated to inflame Muslim-Hindu conflict among Indians.

In his polemic against the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Vivekananda attempted to smear him as an opportunist and worldly

⁷⁵ Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 21-22.

⁷⁶ Yashodharma, Rkm Propagating the Opposite of What Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Had Said Call to the Rank and File at Rkm! Stand up and Uphold the Truth (Mumbai: Maanoj Rakhit, 2013), 46.

⁷⁷ *South Asian Islam*, 85-86.

figure concerned with kingship, describing the visitation of Gabriel as “dreams and visions” rather than revelation. However, unlike Western polemics against the Prophet (ﷺ), Vivekananda considered them to be consequences of spiritual preparation (e.g., extensive prayers, seclusions, and fasts). Vivekananda sought to characterize this as the spiritual states attainable by conventional yogis, which more enlightened souls could receive from birth, such as Krishna, Buddha, and Christ. He considered the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to be a superstition, and did not consider him to be a Vedantist alongside Buddha and Christ.⁷⁸

Vivekananda’s speculations were based on the concept that Islam arose as a reaction against “the sin, idolatry and mock worship, superstitious and human sacrifices, and so on” of seventh-century Arabia, but that it was not an enlightened tradition comparable to Hinduism, Buddhism, or even Christianity. He claimed that Muslims had a far greater degree of animosity against Hinduism than Jews and Christians, and that this was ultimately rooted in core tenets of Islam, and he presented the familiar anti-Islamic tropes of Muslim savages cutting non-Muslims’ heads of a whim to attain sensual pleasures in the Hereafter. In Vivekananda’s words:

Muhammad advocated a two-pronged approach. He explained to Muslims that murdering non-Muslims is both a genuine act of worship to Allah and a gesture of charity towards them. Allah has so offered these men direct access to heaven and all the sensual pleasures they could desire with stunning women who are unaffected by pregnancy or ageing. Muslims have killed many non-Muslims because of this belief.⁷⁹

As with his other bigoted polemics against Islam, this was populist propaganda designed to stoke Hindu-Muslim animosities. Vivekananda’s speeches convey the idea that Muhammad (ﷺ) alone has the power to determine the fate of unbelievers, ignoring the Islamic precept that Allah (ﷻ) is omnipotent and that Muhammad (ﷺ) just delivered the truth that Allah (ﷻ) had given him. His claim

⁷⁸ Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 213.

⁷⁹ Ibid.,158.

that “ignorant persons...dare to say that others are entirely wrong, and they alone are right” reflected his view of Muhammad (ﷺ)’s authority. They start fighting whenever someone opposes them. They claim that if a man does not share their beliefs, as Muhammad (ﷺ) did, they will engage in combat. Vivekananda thus holds Muhammad (ﷺ) accountable for giving his nation (Muslims) a barbaric and intolerable name, which they could be disabused of if only they would recant and submit to Hindu domination (and revert to their lower caste status).⁸⁰

Vivekananda’s inflammatory and prejudiced portrayal of Islam and disparagement of Christianity (notwithstanding his sympathetic approach to “Christ” himself) is partly a reaction due to Hinduism’s precarious existence among other religions like Islam and Christianity. With regard to the latter, Hinduism had a shameful reputation among Christian imperialist elites due to *suttee*, the caste system, and other Hindu customs, while Islam was attracting converts seeking to escape from the humiliations of the caste system. However, he was aware of the need for Hindu-Muslim cooperation in order to overthrow British colonial domination, as expressed in his saying that:

the only hope for our motherland is a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam-Vedanta brain and Islam body. With the body of Islam and the brain of Vedanta, I envision the ideal India of the future emerging from this turmoil and conflict, magnificent and unbeatable.⁸¹

Naturally his view of a Hindu brain (potentially incorporating some kind of Hindu interpretation of Islam) with Muslim brawn driving India’s future was a novel reiteration of the caste system, with Hindu Brahman brain and Muslim Shudra brawn in a united, independent India. He also sought to harness slogans of equality to the “body” aspect (i.e., Muslims and lower castes equally subjugated to the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 231; CXLII Friend – Letters of Swami Vivekananda to Mohammed Sarfaraz Husain of Naini Tal, Almora on 10th June, 1898.

Hindu elite). He thus sought to harness Islamic egalitarianism to the service of otherwise effete Hindu domination:

Despite our grand philosophy, you note our weakness in practice; but there You see the greatness of the Mohammedan beyond other races, showing itself in equality, perfect equality regardless of race or colour.⁸²

10.2 Arvind Sharma (b. 1940)

A more enlightened and conciliatory view of Islam has been offered by some contemporary Hindus, diverging from the colonial-era Hindu polemics of Vivekananda and the modern political jingoism of the Hindutva supremacist movement. Prof. Arvind Sharma argues that common sense entails a respectful attitude toward world religions and their followers in the modern world, citing Judaism's monotheism and ethnic exclusivity, which does not seek to proselytize (like Hinduism), in contrast to Christian evangelical ardor that has profoundly shaped Indian communal relations over the last two centuries. While Christian proselytizing has always been unwelcoming for Indian Hindus (as noted above with regard to Vivekananda), the Christian concept of the Trinity has been more familiar to the Hindu belief system than the more austere monotheism of Judaism and Islam. Sharma describes how, while Muslims venerate the Prophet, somewhat similar to Christ in Christianity, the former is definitively *not* considered to be a divine incarnation, which is contrary to what Sharma considers to be the general tendency of Indian religions. For instance, he cites that while Buddha purportedly did not "believe in God," he was nevertheless venerated as a divine being by Buddhists, which is analogous to the position of Christ for Christians.

Sharma argues that Hindu doctrines urge maximum tolerance for other religions and urges Hindus to seek conciliatory interpretations of other faith traditions. This is consistent with the Hindu-Buddhist doctrine of *anatta*, which states that all created ephemera, including human beings, are in one sense inconsequential. Sharma interprets this doctrine thus: if one views oneself as a non-

⁸² Ibid., 108, 166, 238.

ego, to the maximum extent possible, it is inconsistent to adopt a partisan preference for one's own particular religious identity. Rather, one should be compassionate to all things, including followers of other religions. Sharma also cites the Hindu offshoot of Jainism, with its *anekāntavāda* doctrine, which posits that the complicated nature of the world should make people avoid judging others.⁸³

In this sense, Sharma considers that Sikhism represents an archetypically Hindu formation in balancing Hindu and Islamic constituents in a cohesive religious tradition, analogous to the Confucian "Doctrine of the Mean" in Chinese tradition.

While Sharma is fundamentally averse to monotheism, considering it totalitarian and equivalent to communism in its political impacts, he argues that a delicate and accommodative balance is required of Hindus and indeed everyone in modern societies.

Sharma considers the salient characteristic of Islam to be the love Muslims bear toward the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and considers that Hindus ignoring this sensibility can be inflammatory. According to Sharma, the crisis of modern relations between Hindus and Muslims is exemplified by the Nupur Sharma issue, which can potentially be leveraged to improve relations. After a Shiva-linga was purportedly discovered in the Gyanvapi Mosque, Varanasi, some Hindu populists insulted the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

Sharma observed that problematic texts and concepts for modern people can be found in all religions, including Hinduism, with parallels between the marriage of Aisha and Sita, the wife of Rama. Additionally, the *Puranas* are replete with narrations of Hindu gods engaging in activities illegal under modern Indian laws, and even to Hindutva sensibilities. Consequently, Sharma argues that the importance for Hindus is to consider what holy figures bid their votives to do ("*na devacaritam caret ... devakathitam caret*"). He argues that even modern luminaries such as Einstein, Gandhi, and President Kennedy offered important lessons, even if we might not agree with aspects of their personal, private lives.

⁸³ <https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/dharma-files-the-delicate-nature-of-different-religions-12626702.html>

Sharma notes that using Islamic religious texts to stir trouble between Muslims and Hindus for modern political entrepreneurialism is disingenuous as well as dangerous, and that the implications of the Sunnah are no different from those of Hindu texts, and that followers of great religions – including Islam and Hinduism – must interpret their texts in alignment with contemporary needs. He cites the example that the Hindu saint Vinoba Bhave cited that Shivaji, a Maratha lord, who built many castles, but a contemporary understanding of this would look to build missile centers or airfields, as traditional castles are useless in modern warfare. Similarly, he argues that polygamy can be understood in the same context of meeting the needs of widows after the battle of Uhud.

Sharma argues that the Prophet Mohammed (ﷺ) is undoubtedly the founder of a great world religion, who for Muslims is the conveyor of God's words, and in comparison, to this profound, transcendent belief, the particularities of personal issues of modern societal mores are inconsequential. While for Muslims the Prophet (ﷺ) is the exemplar for all of humanity, for Hindus he is a notable figure who should be treated with appropriate respect, even though Hindus might not agree with all (or indeed any) of the tenets of Islam (although Hinduism has historically been an inclusive, conciliatory faith tradition).⁸⁴

11. Conclusion

This paper has presented a summary of the salient characteristics of Islamic and Hindu Creationism. It has highlighted cross-cultural similarities and contrasts between two different but overlapping worldviews in terms of their doctrinal and scriptural beliefs. It has also demonstrated the practical ecumenism of traditional Muslim approaches toward this issue, and the inherent expansiveness in Hindu philosophy, which can serve as a framework for the development of harmonious relations between Muslim and Hindu civilizations, both of which consider human beings to be noble creatures of transcendent origin with sacred souls, with concomitant

⁸⁴ <https://bharatabharati.in/2022/07/04/understanding-islam-in-the-light-of-hinduism-arvind-sharma/>

rights (e.g., to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). It is hoped that this paper can provide a primer for people to grasp a basic understanding of the core ontological implications and potentials of Islam and Hinduism, which can serve as a basis to continue studies into the future of inter-civilizational development and harmony, as well as to shape contemporary socio-economic and political discourse.