



Hinduism

Kshiti Mohan Sen

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A guide to the nature and function of Hinduism. Hinduism is unique among the great religions in that it had no founder but grew gradually over a period of 5000 years, absorbing and assimilating all the religions and cultural movements in India. Consequently it has no Bible, *Koran* or *Dhammapadam* to which controversies can be referred for resolution. Many works such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* are authoritative but none is exclusively so. As in Christianity there are several Hindu schools of thought and *Hinduism* clearly outlines their common beliefs and particular differences.

Hinduism Details

Date : Published January 30th 1962 by Penguin Books Ltd (first published 1961)

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Author : Kshiti Mohan Sen

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Genre : Religion, Hinduism, Spirituality, Nonfiction, Cultural, India, Philosophy, History

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From Reader Review Hinduism for online ebook

Kenneth says

A concise overview of Hinduism, for the general reader.

Howe-Siang Tan says

Great introduction book that summarizes and put into the proper context the many terms (Bhakti, jnana...), texts (Rigveda, Upanishad...) and philosophical labels (Brahman, Atman...) associated with Hinduism, that I have heard about, but have no/very vague clue what they are about.

Now at least I have some brief ideas of what I don't understand about (which is still a lot).

Erik Graff says

This book was employed in Harold Kasimow's Major Eastern Religions course at Grinnell College. Not knowing much about the traditions of the Asian subcontinent, I found it very enlightening.

Derek says

read travelling Indonesia in 1990: <http://www.5cense.com/15/404.htm>

Prashanth Nuggehalli Srinivas says

With a foreword by his better known grandson, Amartya Sen, this Penguin

[caption id="attachment_998" align="alignright" width="195"] Detail of mother and child from 5th century AD now at the LA County Museum of Art[/caption]

paperback 2002 reprint of Kshiti Mohan Sen's 1961 book. With only 138 pages for a very grand title "Hinduism", the book seems overambitious from its cover itself. Yet, I found it to be a fairly comprehensive account of the history and (then in the 60s) present of this religion with which many people in the subcontinent identify themselves with. As Sen clarifies in his foreword,

I was not surprised that Kshiti Mohan's conception of the book was driven by his interest in writing something that could be read, as he put it in the preface, 'by those with much else to do' and by his determination not 'to add to the number of fat tomes on Hinduism'.

The book is possibly better suited to a busy "outsider", giving a no-nonsense and much less romanticised account of the various influences on Hinduism than many others that I have read. At the same time, it tends not to under-play or be cynical about the rich history and traditions in terms of music and culture that

have shaped the religion as we see it today. His focus on many influences that are not spoken about, such as the Sufi influences, many folk traditions with little written histories exemplified by the Bauls, a tradition of Bengali mystics, an extremely short section on non-Vedic influences, help improve our understanding of the diverse inputs into the *potpourri* that has been ossified as a single religion much like the large monotheisms. The mutual sharing of cultures, traditions, music and ideas between Islam and Hinduism particularly engage (the elder) Sen, while the younger one, in his foreword, contrasts this with the rather "...standard generalisations made not only by combative exponents of religious politics, but also by serious experts on cultural history who have been inclined to neglect these constructive interrelations". He is talking of Nirad C Chaudhuri's works on the history of Hinduism.

There is a lot too on the influence of early Buddhism and Jainism, with the upper-caste Hindu pre-occupation with vegetarianism being traced to these periods. In fact, A Sen points out that KM Sen possibly saw Buddhism and Jainism, "at least to some extent, (as) intellectual continuations of heterodoxies within Hinduism itself". Gautama Buddha's agnostic philosophy may have had origins in several (then) prevalent agnostic and atheistic streams of thought in the then (Hindu?) society (see for example the *Lokayata* movement, which drew upon various forms of materialism, religious indifference and philosophical skepticism). From here, he traces back Hindu heterodoxy further back to the Vedas itself, quoting the *Nasadiya hymn* of the Rg Veda as a case in point.

"Who really knows?
Who will here proclaim it?
Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation?
The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe.
Who then knows whence it has arisen?"

129th hymn of the 10th mandala of the Rg Veda

One major departure for me is the somewhat apologetic stance on the caste practices, where he points out the scarce scriptural backing, in addition to open criticism of the idea in some instances. This is of course pointed out by the (then) younger Sen in his foreword (p. xv).

All in all, it is a nice and concise and critical introduction to many of the associations of modern day Hinduism without too much romance nor cynicism. Much recommended as an introduction to students of religious studies, but certainly not for people with an already deeper engagement. That said, if you are looking for more critical an eye at the religion than has been provided by Hindu missionary accounts, then this is a go-to book, in my opinion. Sen draws from wider sources than the classical texts that are quoted *ad nauseum*.

Links

Kshiti Mohan Sen's Medieval mysticism of India (with a foreword by Rabindranath Tagore) is available as PDF [here](#).

A rather short account of Kshiti Mohan Sen by Amartya Sen at his 130th birth anniversary is in this rather poorly written article in the Telegraph.

A short UNESCO introduction to the Bauls is here

Erin Ramsay says

Quite short and not that detailed but a good introduction for someone who does not know that much about Hinduism

Mel says

A pithy, humane and intelligent account of an extremely complicated subject with a myriad of historical and regional variations. Highly recommended introduction to the subject.

Ritodhi says

Incredibly concise and amazingly informative. Best crash course on the fundamentals of Hindu roots.

Ludo says

Very concise and interesting. Also quite unbiased imho.

Nitin says

great book. what it says - an introduction. don't expect deep dive into any topics but a good read.
