

**Introducing Hinduism**  
**Class Discussion Questions**  
**Chapter 10 - 18**

**Chapter 10**

Does Śiva's polar associations with eroticism and asceticism reveal something fundamental about human tensions.

Is it possible to distinguish characteristics that make Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, or Śaktism more appealing than their other two counterparts?

Are Hindu goddesses, more typically than gods, associated with blood, and features of the landscape? If so, why?

**Chapter 11**

Prahlāda and Bali are considered to be dharmic demons. Discuss the meaning of dharma, and the ways in which might be possible for a demon to be dharmic.

Do you think that there are ancient socio-political realities embedded within the Purāṇic accounts, or do you think it is more likely that they are primarily literary compositions?

In Hinduism, why do you think there is a trend to include marginal deities within the "family" of the mainstream gods and goddesses?

**Chapter 12**

If it is regarded as poor taste to request favors from deities, why do you think it is so common for people to do so?

Do you think that the term "orthodoxy" is a problematic one, especially in terms of the "Great Tradition," and if so why?

Even the most rudimentary temples often incorporate the dual symbolism of the male and female principles, why do you think this is the case?

**Chapter 13**

Why do you think Śaṅkara regards the path of transcendental knowledge (jñāna marga) as the ultimate means for the removal of ignorance and the attainment of liberation?

Why do you think Rāmānuja thinks it is meaningless to comprehend, relate to, or speak about a Nirguṇa Brahman? Do you agree with him, and why?

If it is ultimately the Lord's decision to liberate a being, done through the descent of his grace, the goddess Śrī, then what do you think is the point of following a path such as bhakti?

**Chapter 14**

Why does Tantra strive to transcend traditional boundaries of purity and pollution, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, and how is this viewed within the orthodox tradition?

Why do you think the ideology of secrecy is so important to the tradition of Tantra, and do you think this ideology is helpful or a hindrance to the tradition?

For what reasons do you think Kashmir Śaivism accepts the tattva scheme found in Sāṅkhya and Vedānta systems, and yet subordinates them to categories of their own? Why accept the tattva scheme at all?

### **Chapter 15**

Ramakrishna Paramahansa found an underlying unity amongst a variety of religions, an underlying unity that is characteristic of the Hindu tradition. Do you think that Hinduism could be classified as a “universalistic” religion, why or why not?

Humanism’s focus is on human beings, and their creative expressions and potential.

In what ways does Hinduism take a Humanistic approach, if any?

Discuss the relationship between the religion and politics of India, do you think this relationship has managed to strengthen or weaken Hinduism?

### **Chapter 16**

Why do you think the Hindu epics are so important to Balinese culture?

What do you think was the appeal of Hindu culture that made it spread beyond the confines of the Indian subcontinent?

What role does geography play in shaping the religious character of a particular area?

Can you use the contexts of Nepal and Southeast Asia as examples?

### **Chapter 17**

Yoga has entered the mainstream in the West and is widely practiced as a form of physical fitness often excluding its enlightenment purposes as described in ancient yogic texts. Do you think that it is still appropriate for Westerners to call it Yoga, why or why not?

Gangaji claims a Hindu spiritual lineage, but is not of Indian origin. Do you think this would be looked upon more positively or negatively by Western students seeking a “Hindu” guru?

In what ways do you think Hinduism changed as it entered the West? Do you think its movement into the West caused Hinduism to simplify itself, or do you think it has become more complex through the process?

### **Chapter 18**

Why is the figure Satya Sai Baba so important to contemporary Hinduism?

The most renowned Śaṅkarācāryas, and their monastic centers, are the closest that Hinduism comes to having a centralized authority or cornerstone of orthodoxy. Do you think this is important for Hinduism, why or why not?

Discuss whether you think Hinduism is changing the Western world, or whether the Western world is changing Hinduism.