

Introducing Hinduism
Essay Questions
Chapter 1 – Chapter 9

Chapter 1

1. What are some of the potential continuities between Indus Valley religion and that of modern Hinduism?
2. Define orthodox Hinduism and explain how it differs from the religious philosophy of the śramaṇas.
3. Trace the arrival and impact of Islam on Hindus and Hinduism?

Chapter 2

1. The primary concern of the Upaniṣads is with the relationship between Brahman and Ātman. Define both Brahman and Ātman, and give a detailed explanation of the relationship between them.
2. Define Śruti and smṛti, explaining the differences between the two, and the various complexities that arise from such designations.
3. Astrology has been a central component of the Hindu tradition since Vedic times. Give a detailed explanation of why this is so.

Chapter 3

1. Hindus have an elaborate conception of Time. Give a detailed description of this concept, explaining where humanity is currently located within this notion of time.
2. Hinduism offers an assortment of explanations regarding the origin and nature of the universe. What are some of these explanations? List the time period in which they developed, and the major texts with which they are associated.
3. Briefly define Karma, Saṃsāra, and Reincarnation. Then describe the concept of Mokṣa giving a detailed explanation of its relationship to the three aforementioned concepts.

Chapter 4

1. This is considered to be one of the most distinctive features of Hindu society. Name this feature, describing it in detail, including how it evolved, and the texts associated with it.
2. Discuss the role that notions of ritual purity and ritual pollution play in Hindu society. How do these notions relate to the varṇa system?
3. Hinduism is concerned with the categories of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Explain these categories, where they derived from, and the dimensions of society that they impact.

Chapter 5

1. What are saṃskāras, and why are they important to the orthodox Hindu tradition? List the most important saṃskāras, describing them in detail and the reason for their importance.

2. In what ways does marriage form the cornerstone of Hindu religious life? In your answer, describe the marriage process, the texts, rites, and requirements associated with it.
3. What is known about the Hindu women of ancient India? Is there a certain role that women play in Hindu society? What is expected of women, and how are they regarded during the various stages of their life?

Chapter 6

1. What is sphaṭa, explain it in detail including who is credited with its conception, which text elaborates upon it, and how it relates to mantra.
2. What is Aum or Om, and why is it so important to the Sanskrit language?
3. Define Brahman. Philosophically, what role does Brahman play in relation to the Sanskrit language?

Chapter 7

1. Explain what Hindu orthodoxy meant by heterodox, and then compare and contrast the heterodox darśanas of Jainism, Buddhism, and the Cārvāka.
2. Describe in detail the Sāṅkhya darśana. What is the Sāṅkhya view of reality, and of suffering (duḥkha)?
3. Describe the Yoga darśana in detail. Make sure to include the origins of yoga, the various types of yoga, and the important people and texts associated with it.

Chapter 8

1. In what ways is dharma a central feature in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata epics?
2. In what ways are the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata influential in transmitting Hindu religious values?
3. The epics emerged at the end of the Vedic period. What significance do you think this had in the particular stories that were told, and why?

Chapter 9

1. What are the paths laid out in the Bhagavad Gītā and how do they solve the dilemma of choosing a life in society or away from it?
2. In what ways did Hinduism, and Hindu orthodoxy change during the period of the Epics?
3. Why do you think the Bhagavad Gītā makes its most compelling case for bhakti yoga?