

**Hinduism. A Religion to Live By by Hiran C. Chaudhuri,  
Oxford University Press. Don Ball (Toronto), Ont.,  
paperback, 340 pages.**

No one can deal with India, or understand the social and cultural life of its people, without coming to grips with Hinduism. This religion has influenced Indians from every walk of life. If Hinduism would disappear at any time, India would have lost its identity. Hinduism has been credited with an exalted, rarefied and esoteric spirituality in the West. The author attempts to present the Hindu religion as it is practiced and experienced by the Indians. He describes how the highest type of religious experience and lofty philosophies, have always remained current side by side with the very crude ritual practices of folk Hinduism. And he suggests that the Hindus have never taken another view of their religion.

Hinduism is difficult to explain in terms of Western thought. Many religious rituals and practices are beyond our comprehension. All life is sacred. Everything you do has religious significance. Help is sought for all purposes, moral or immoral. Even thieves and robbers worship their special deity for success in their ventures. Morality is separated from religion. Human sacrifices, in more than one form, continued until perhaps the middle of the 19th century. Even during British rule, people would never believe that a bridge was successfully built without human sacrifices. To drink alcohol is a major sin in Hindu's sacred laws, while murder, unless it is the murder of a Brahmin, is not. Beef is the most important taboo for all Hindus; the observance of this taboo is for all practical purposes the only infallible religious test, for them. Astrology has a powerful hold over Indian life. "Even today," the author says, "nothing is undertaken without finding out whether the hour is propitious, and to deny the influence of stars is to provoke derisive contempt."

Hinduism has always prided itself in its religious tolerance and in its ability to absorb every new religion introduced to India. But Biblical Christianity is an exception. "Modern Hindus have always considered the Christian denial of salvation to those who do not put faith in the Christian kerygma to be a monstrous perversion of religion."

Chaudhuri gives a timely warning to all westerners who are attracted by Hinduism as a religion. To become a Hindu, you must take all the superstitious and ritual trappings. He says "The western idiot who seeks salvation à la hindoue has no right to be disrespectful towards the rules for defecating and urinating à la hindoue."

This book is a must for students of missions, and for missionaries working with Hindus. You cannot preach the Gospel in India without some knowledge of those whom you want to convert. Chaudhuri has divided the book into three parts, the historical, the descriptive and aspects of Hinduism. His work is analytical, readable, scholarly, lively, highly informative and an instructive introduction to Indian's major religion.

Niran C. Chaudhuri, who is over eighty years old, is a renowned Indian scholar. He worked for the Bengali Congress Party as a journalist, and then, for the greater part of his career, with All-India Radio.

Johan D. Tangelder