

## 2. Defining Hinduism

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### SOURCES

 [If Hinduism is "Universal Truth", Why Did the World Reject It? · Part 1](#)

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## 2. Defining Hinduism

### quick read

- **Sanatan dharma** (the "eternal way", Hinduism's self name, meaning a truth that has always existed rather than one founded at a specific point in history) can mean Hinduism, or it can widen to include Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The centre can be Krishna, or Shiva, or the divine feminine. The supreme god changes depending on whom you ask.
- The Bhagavad Gita says you can worship any god and you will still be worshipping Krishna in the end.
- Before asking whether Hinduism is universally true, you have to ask what Hinduism actually is.

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**Sanatan** means eternal, without beginning or end. **Dharma** means the natural order, duty, the way things actually are. So, Hindus say this is not a religion that was founded by someone. This is how reality has always worked.

Sometimes the category is narrow. Hinduism, the religion of India, rooted in the Vedas (the oldest Hindu scriptures, considered **shruti**, meaning "that which is heard", divine revelation), the Puranas (later mythological and devotional texts, considered **smriti**, meaning "that which is remembered"), the great epics, the temple traditions, and the caste system.

Sanatan dharma includes Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism too. They are all "dharmic" faiths. They all aim at the same liberation, whether called moksha (release from the cycle of rebirth), nirvana (Buddhist term for the same concept, literally "blowing out" of desire), or kaivalya (isolation of the pure self, used in Jainism and Yoga philosophy).

So, If someone asks why Hinduism did not spread globally, and the answer is "well, we are actually five religions under one umbrella," the umbrella has not produced unity, because, It has produced a label under which people disagree about almost everything important. A Sikh can say, "I am from the dharmic tradition, but I am not a Hindu," and the label gives him no reason to stay.

The instability keeps recurring at a deeper level too. One moment the supreme authority is the Vedas. Then it is the Bhagavad Gita ("Song of God" — a 700-verse philosophical dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and the god Krishna, often called the most practical Hindu text). Then it becomes a specific school: ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Hare Krishna movement, a Gaudiya Vaishnava missionary organisation), or Advaita Vedanta (the non-dual school founded by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century, which says only Brahman — the absolute, impersonal reality — truly exists). Then someone else's school is rejected for teaching the wrong thing. The boundary between legitimate diversity and plain contradiction becomes hard to hold.

The sectarian landscape deepens this. Vaishnavites (followers of Vishnu and his avatars like Krishna and Rama) treat Vishnu as supreme. Shaivites (followers of Shiva) treat Shiva as supreme. Shaktas (followers of the goddess Shakti in her many forms — Durga, Kali, Lakshmi) worship the divine feminine. Smartas (a tradition that worships five major deities equally) try to hold everyone together. Sometimes one sect's supreme god is demoted to a servant of another's. The system holds internally if you accept that different people need different paths. But it does not hold well externally, when you are asking a stranger to believe that this is the one universal truth.

The Bhagavad Gita 4.11 says: "In whatever way people surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects." That line has been read as the philosophical basis for Hindu inclusivism — worship anyone, you worship Me. But the inclusivism collapses under its own weight.

If worship of any entity counts as worship of the supreme, then the concept of "supreme" stops meaning anything. And if there is no way to distinguish correct worship from incorrect worship, the religion has no public criterion of truth at all.