

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM IN SINDH: ORIGINS, BELIEFS, AND CULTURAL LEGACY

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Vol. 03, Issue, 04, Oct-Dec 2025, PP:64-82

OPEN ACCES at: www.irjicc.com

Article History	Received	Accepted	Published
	18-10-25	03-11-25	30-12-25

Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive examination of Hinduism in Sindh, tracing its origins, ideological foundations, and historical development from antiquity to the present. As one of the world's oldest living religious traditions, Hinduism has shaped the cultural, social, and spiritual landscape of South Asia for over four millennia. In Sindh – a region that served as a cradle of ancient civilization and a crossroads of diverse cultural currents – Hinduism developed distinctive characteristics while maintaining continuity with broader Indic traditions. This study explores the historical roots of Hinduism in the Indus Valley Civilization and Vedic traditions, analyzes its core ideological principles including dharma, karma, samsara, and moksha, and examines their influence on individual behavior, social structure, and spiritual practice. The article traces the historical presence of Hinduism in Sindh from ancient times through the medieval and colonial periods, examining the complex interactions between Hinduism and other religious traditions, particularly Islam and Sufism, and analyzing how these interactions shaped the cultural and religious landscape of the region. The socio-cultural impact of Hindu ideology on Sindhi society is evaluated, including its influence on traditions, festivals, rituals, language,

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literature, art, social values, and community structures. Finally, the study assesses the contemporary relevance of Hinduism in Sindh, focusing on minority identity, interfaith relations, and the preservation of cultural heritage in modern Pakistan. This study argues that the history of Hinduism in Sindh represents a unique case of religious continuity, cultural synthesis, and resilience in the face of profound historical transformations, and that understanding this history is essential for comprehending both the region's cultural heritage and the contemporary dynamics of religious diversity in Pakistan.

Keywords Hinduism, Sindh, Indus Valley Civilization, Vedic Tradition, Religious Syncretism, Sufism; Cultural Heritage, Minority Identity, Interfaith Relations, Socio-Cultural Impact.

INTRODUCTION

Hinduism, known to its adherents as Sanātana Dharma (the Eternal Way), constitutes one of the world's oldest and most complex religious traditions. Unlike many other major religions that trace their origins to a single founder or prophetic revelation, Hinduism represents a cumulative tradition encompassing diverse philosophical schools, ritual practices, devotional movements, and social formations that have evolved over more than four millennia. Its continuity and adaptability have enabled it to survive and flourish through profound historical transformations, from the urban civilization of the Indus Valley to the Vedic synthesis, from the rise of Buddhism and Jainism to the advent of Islam, from European colonialism to the challenges of modernity.

Sindh, a region of immense historical significance located in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent, occupies a special place in the history of Hinduism. The Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's earliest urban civilizations, flourished in Sindh and adjacent regions between approximately 2600 and 1900 BCE. The archaeological remains of Mohenjo-Daro, with its sophisticated urban planning, advanced drainage systems, and distinctive artistic traditions, bear witness to a complex civilization whose religious practices, though not directly continuous with later Hinduism, contributed elements that would be incorporated into the developing Hindu tradition.

The region of Sindh has served throughout history as a cultural crossroads, a meeting point of diverse traditions and influences. Its geographical position at the western edge of the Indian subcontinent made it a gateway for migrations, trade, and cultural exchange. Successive waves of influence – Indo-Aryan, Persian, Greek, Central Asian, and Arab – left their marks on Sindhi culture, while the region maintained deep connections with the broader currents of Indian civilization. This unique position gave rise to distinctive developments in Sindhi Hinduism, characterized by both continuity with Indic traditions and openness to new influences.

The historical trajectory of Hinduism in Sindh encompasses several major phases. The ancient period saw the emergence of Vedic culture and the development of classical Hindu traditions. The medieval period witnessed the expansion of devotional (bhakti) movements and the establishment of Sufi orders, creating conditions for

complex forms of religious interaction and synthesis. The colonial period brought new challenges and opportunities, including the emergence of reform movements, the development of modern education, and the growth of communal politics. The Partition of India in 1947 marked a catastrophic rupture, resulting in the mass migration of Sindhi Hindus to India and the transformation of Sindh's demographic and cultural landscape.

Despite this history of continuity and significance, the study of Hinduism in Sindh has received limited attention in mainstream scholarship. Colonial and postcolonial historiographies have often treated Sindh as a peripheral region or have focused primarily on the region's Islamic heritage. The rich traditions of Sindhi Hinduism – its sacred geography, its distinctive ritual practices, its contributions to language and literature – remain understudied and inadequately appreciated. This article seeks to address this lacuna by providing a comprehensive examination of Hinduism in Sindh, tracing its origins, ideological foundations, and historical development, and assessing its contemporary relevance.

The study is organized into nine sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 traces the origins of Hinduism, examining its roots in the Indus Valley Civilization and Vedic traditions. Section 3 analyzes the core ideological principles of Hinduism, including dharma, karma, samsara, and moksha, and explores their influence on individual and social life. Section 4 provides an overview of Hinduism's sacred texts and their role in shaping religious thought. Section 5 traces the historical presence of Hinduism in Sindh from ancient times through the medieval and colonial periods. Section 6 examines the interaction between Hinduism and other religious traditions, particularly Islam and Sufism. Section 7 evaluates the socio-cultural impact of Hindu ideology on Sindhi society. Section 8 assesses the contemporary relevance of Hinduism in Sindh in modern Pakistan. The conclusion synthesizes the study's findings and suggests directions for future research.

2. Origins of Hinduism: From the Indus Valley to the Vedic Synthesis

2.1 The Indus Valley Civilization: Precursors and Continuities

The earliest evidence of religious and cultural practices that would contribute to the development of Hinduism comes from the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2600-1900 BCE), also known as the Harappan Civilization. Centered in the Indus River valley, with major urban centers at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, this civilization was one of the three great early urban civilizations of the Old World, alongside Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Archaeological excavations at Mohenjo-Daro, located in present-day Sindh, have revealed a highly sophisticated urban culture. The city's layout, with its grid-like streets, advanced drainage systems, and standardized brick construction, testifies to centralized planning and administration. The Great Bath, a large public bathing structure, has been interpreted by many scholars as having ritual significance, possibly serving as a precursor to the ritual bathing practices that would become central to Hinduism.

The religious iconography of the Indus Valley Civilization provides suggestive evidence of continuity with later Hindu traditions. A famous seal from Mohenjo-Daro depicts a seated figure surrounded by animals, interpreted by some scholars as a proto-

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Shiva or "Pashupati" (Lord of Beasts) figure. The figure is shown in a yogic posture, with three faces and erect phallus, suggesting associations with asceticism and fertility that would later be associated with the god Shiva. Other seals depict what appear to be tree spirits, goddess figures, and animals such as the bull and elephant, which would later become associated with Hindu deities.

The Indus Valley Civilization also provides evidence of goddess worship, a feature that would become prominent in later Hinduism. Numerous terracotta figurines depicting female figures have been found, suggesting the veneration of a mother goddess or multiple goddesses. The prominence of female figurines, along with the absence of clear evidence of a centralized temple cult, suggests a religious practice centered on domestic and household worship—a pattern that would continue in later Hindu traditions.

It is important to note, however, that the relationship between the Indus Valley Civilization and later Hinduism remains a matter of scholarly debate. The script of the Indus Valley Civilization remains undeciphered, limiting our ability to understand its religious beliefs and practices directly. Some scholars, particularly those associated with Hindutva ideology, have claimed direct continuity between the Indus Valley Civilization and later Hinduism, while others emphasize the discontinuities and the limitations of archaeological evidence. A balanced view recognizes both continuities and transformations: certain elements of Indus Valley religious practice—ritual bathing, goddess worship, yogic postures, reverence for certain animals—likely contributed to the developing Hindu tradition, but the Vedic tradition that emerged after the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization also brought new elements that would shape Hinduism in distinctive ways.

2.2 The Vedic Tradition: Texts, Rituals, and Social Order

The decline of the Indus Valley Civilization around 1900 BCE was followed by a period of significant cultural and demographic change. The arrival of Indo-Aryan peoples, who migrated into the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia, brought new languages, religious traditions, and social structures. The synthesis between Indus Valley and Indo-Aryan elements, which occurred over several centuries, gave rise to the Vedic tradition that forms the foundation of classical Hinduism.

The Vedas—the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism—comprise four collections: the Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. The Rigveda, the oldest and most important, consists of 1,028 hymns addressed to various deities. Composed between approximately 1500 and 1200 BCE, the Rigveda provides insight into the religious beliefs and practices of the early Vedic period. Its hymns invoke deities such as Indra (king of the gods and god of thunder), Agni (fire god, mediator between humans and gods), Varuna (guardian of cosmic order), and Soma (god of the sacred ritual drink), among others.

The ritual system of the Vedic tradition was centered on sacrifice (yajna), a complex set of ceremonies performed by priests (brahmins) to maintain cosmic order and secure benefits for patrons. The Vedic sacrifice, with its elaborate procedures, specialized priesthood, and emphasis on precise ritual performance, reflected a worldview in which proper ritual action was essential for maintaining the order of the

universe and ensuring prosperity for human society.

The social order of Vedic society was organized according to the varna system, a four-fold classification of society into brahmins (priests and scholars), kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and shudras (servants and laborers). This system, which would later evolve into the more rigid jati (caste) system, provided a framework for social organization that was understood as reflecting cosmic order. The Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda (10.90) provides a mythological account of the origin of the varna system, describing how the primordial being Purusha was sacrificed to create the social order.

2.3 The Upanishads: Philosophy and the Quest for Liberation

The later Vedic period (c. 800-500 BCE) saw the emergence of the Upanishads, philosophical texts that represent a shift from the ritual focus of the earlier Vedas toward metaphysical speculation and the quest for spiritual liberation. The Upanishads – meaning "sitting near" (a teacher) – comprise a collection of texts that explore fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the self, and the path to liberation.

Central to Upanishadic thought is the distinction between Brahman (ultimate reality, the ground of all existence) and Atman (the individual self). The Upanishads identify Brahman as the unchanging, eternal reality that underlies the phenomenal world of change and multiplicity. Atman, the innermost self of the individual, is ultimately identical with Brahman: "That art thou" (tat tvam asi), as the Chandogya Upanishad declares. This identification of Atman and Brahman represents a radical insight: the goal of spiritual life is not to attain something external but to realize one's true nature, which is already identical with ultimate reality.

The Upanishads also develop the concepts of samsara (the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth) and karma (the law of moral causation). According to this understanding, actions performed in one life determine the conditions of one's next birth, and beings are bound to the cycle of rebirth until they achieve liberation (moksha). The Upanishads identify knowledge (jnana) – specifically, the knowledge of the identity of Atman and Brahman – as the path to liberation.

The Upanishads represent a pivotal development in the history of Hinduism, shifting the focus from external ritual to internal realization and laying the philosophical foundations for later schools of Hindu thought. Their influence extends beyond Hinduism, shaping the development of Buddhism and Jainism as well.

2.4 The Synthesis: Classical Hinduism

The period from approximately 500 BCE to 500 CE saw the synthesis of Vedic and Upanishadic traditions into what scholars term "classical Hinduism." This period witnessed the composition of the great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which incorporated and transmitted Vedic and Upanishadic ideas in narrative form accessible to a wider audience. The Mahabharata, the world's longest epic poem, includes the Bhagavad Gita, a philosophical dialogue that has become one of Hinduism's most influential texts.

The Bhagavad Gita, set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, presents a synthesis of various paths to liberation: the path of knowledge (jnana yoga), the path of action (karma yoga), and the path of devotion (bhakti yoga). The Gita's teaching that one should act without attachment to the fruits of action, performing one's duty (dharma)

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as an offering to God, provided a framework for reconciling worldly engagement with spiritual aspiration.

This period also saw the development of the puranas, encyclopedic texts that systematized Hindu mythology, theology, and ritual practice. The Puranas, composed over several centuries, present the mythology of the major Hindu deities – Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess – and provide the basis for the devotional (bhakti) movements that would transform Hinduism in the medieval period.

The emergence of theistic devotionism represented a significant development in the history of Hinduism. While the Vedas and Upanishads had focused primarily on abstract philosophical principles, the Puranic tradition presented a more personal understanding of the divine, centered on deities who could be approached through devotion, worship, and love. The cults of Vishnu and Shiva, and later the Goddess, provided the framework for popular Hindu practice that continues to the present day.

3. Core Ideological Principles of Hinduism

3.1 Dharma: Moral Duty and Cosmic Order

The concept of dharma occupies a central place in Hindu thought, encompassing both cosmic order and individual moral duty. Derived from the Sanskrit root dhr (to uphold, support, sustain), dharma refers to that which upholds the universe, society, and the individual in their proper functioning. In its cosmic dimension, dharma is the principle of order that sustains the universe, distinguishing it from chaos and disorder. In its social dimension, dharma refers to the system of duties and responsibilities that enable society to function harmoniously. In its individual dimension, dharma refers to one's moral and religious obligations, which vary according to one's station in life, social position, and personal circumstances.

The Hindu understanding of dharma is elaborated in the dharmashastra texts, the most famous of which is the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu). These texts prescribe duties for different classes (varna) and stages of life (ashrama), creating a comprehensive framework for social and religious life. The four stages of life – student (brahmacharya), householder (grihastha), forest-dweller (vanaprastha), and renunciant (sannyasa) – provide a structure for the individual's progression from learning and family life to spiritual seeking and renunciation.

Dharma is not understood as a single, universal code but as a principle that takes different forms according to context. The concept of svadharma (one's own duty) emphasizes that what is appropriate for one person may not be appropriate for another. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that it is better to perform one's own duty imperfectly than to perform another's duty perfectly, reflecting the importance of context and individual circumstance in determining dharma.

The concept of dharma has profound implications for individual behavior and social structure. It provides a framework for moral decision-making that emphasizes duty, responsibility, and the maintenance of order. It also provides a justification for social hierarchy, with different duties prescribed for different social groups. While this aspect of dharma has been criticized as reinforcing inequality, it is important to recognize that dharma also encompasses universal ethical principles, such as non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), and compassion (daya), that apply across social

divisions.

3.2 Karma: The Law of Action and Consequence

The concept of karma (literally "action" or "deed") is fundamental to Hindu understanding of causality, morality, and the nature of existence. According to the law of karma, every action produces consequences that affect the agent, either in this life or in future lives. Good actions produce positive consequences, leading to favorable circumstances and spiritual progress; bad actions produce negative consequences, leading to suffering and bondage.

The law of karma operates according to its own intrinsic logic, without the intervention of an external judge or deity. It is understood as a natural law, analogous to physical laws, that ensures moral causality operates consistently throughout the universe. This understanding has profound implications for how individuals understand their circumstances and their moral responsibilities.

Karma is intimately connected with the concept of samsara (the cycle of rebirth). Actions performed in one life produce consequences that determine the conditions of one's next birth: one's species, social position, physical condition, and circumstances are all understood as results of past actions. The doctrine of karma thus provides an explanation for suffering and inequality that does not depend on divine will or arbitrary fate.

The concept of karma has been subject to diverse interpretations within Hindu traditions. Some traditions emphasize the deterministic aspects of karma, viewing one's current circumstances as fixed by past actions. Others emphasize the freedom of the individual to act in the present, recognizing that while the past cannot be changed, the present and future remain open to transformation through conscious action. The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on acting without attachment to the fruits of action represents an effort to navigate this tension, affirming the importance of action while seeking to transcend the bondage that arises from attachment to results.

3.3 Samsara: The Cycle of Rebirth

Samsara refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth through which beings transmigrate according to the law of karma. This cycle is characterized by suffering and impermanence; all beings within samsara are subject to aging, death, and the inevitable consequences of their actions. The goal of spiritual life, in most Hindu traditions, is liberation from this cycle.

The understanding of samsara is closely tied to Hindu conceptions of the self. The individual self (*jiva*) is understood to transmigrate from one body to another, carrying with it the accumulated karma of past lives. The specific form of rebirth – whether as a human, animal, or other being – depends on the quality of karma accumulated. Good karma leads to favorable rebirths, while bad karma leads to unfavorable ones.

The doctrine of samsara provides a framework for understanding the diversity of life and the apparent injustices of existence. It explains why beings are born into different circumstances and why suffering is distributed unevenly. It also provides a motivation for ethical conduct: actions matter not only in this life but across lifetimes, creating consequences that extend far beyond one's immediate circumstances.

The concept of samsara has implications for how Hindus understand the

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relationship between humans and other forms of life. The recognition that all beings are subject to samsara and that one may have been reborn in various forms across lifetimes supports an ethic of non-violence and compassion that extends beyond the human realm. Many Hindus practice vegetarianism and observe non-violence toward animals in recognition of this shared condition.

3.4 Moksha: Liberation and Its Paths

Moksha (liberation) represents the ultimate goal of spiritual life in Hinduism – the release from the cycle of samsara and the attainment of ultimate freedom. Different Hindu traditions understand moksha differently: for Advaita Vedanta, it is the realization of the identity of Atman and Brahman, the recognition that the individual self is ultimately identical with ultimate reality. For theistic traditions, it is eternal union with or service to God, often understood as residing in a heavenly realm.

Hindu traditions recognize multiple paths (margas) to liberation, accommodating different temperaments and capacities. The Bhagavad Gita famously synthesizes three paths: the path of knowledge (jnana yoga), the path of action (karma yoga), and the path of devotion (bhakti yoga). Later traditions elaborated additional paths, including the path of meditation (raja yoga).

Jnana yoga emphasizes the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, particularly the knowledge of the identity of Atman and Brahman. This path is associated with the Upanishads and the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Shankara. It involves study of sacred texts, reflection, and meditation to realize the true nature of the self beyond the limitations of body, mind, and ego.

Karma yoga emphasizes selfless action performed as an offering to God. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that one should act without attachment to the fruits of action, performing one's duty as a service to the divine. This path enables spiritual development within the context of worldly engagement, transforming everyday activities into spiritual practice.

Bhakti yoga emphasizes devotion to a personal deity. Emerging in the medieval period, bhakti movements spread across India, emphasizing love, devotion, and surrender to God as the primary means of liberation. The bhakti traditions, with their emotional intensity and accessibility to all regardless of social position, transformed Hindu practice and remain central to contemporary Hinduism.

Raja yoga, systematized by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras, emphasizes meditation and mental discipline as the path to liberation. The eight limbs of yoga – ethical restraints, observances, postures, breath control, withdrawal of senses, concentration, meditation, and absorption – provide a systematic method for transcending the mind's fluctuations and realizing the true self.

4. Sacred Texts and Their Role in Shaping Religious Thought

4.1 The Vedas: Revelation and Authority

The Vedas constitute the foundational scripture of Hinduism, understood as shruti (that which is heard) – eternal, authorless revelation perceived by ancient sages (rishis). The four Vedas – Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda – comprise hymns, rituals, and philosophical speculations that form the basis of Hindu tradition.

The Rigveda, the oldest and most important, consists of ten books (mandalas) containing hymns addressed to various deities. Its composition spans several centuries, with the oldest portions dating to approximately 1500-1200 BCE. The hymns reflect a worldview centered on sacrifice, cosmic order (rita), and the power of properly performed ritual. Key hymns, such as the Purusha Sukta (10.90), provide mythological accounts of creation and social order that have shaped Hindu thought for millennia.

The Samaveda consists primarily of verses from the Rigveda arranged for chanting at sacrifices, reflecting the importance of musical recitation in Vedic ritual. The Yajurveda provides prose formulas used in sacrificial rituals. The Atharvaveda, somewhat different in character, includes hymns and spells addressing everyday concerns such as health, prosperity, and protection from harm.

The authority of the Vedas in Hindu tradition is complex. While orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy accept the Vedas as authoritative revelation, the actual content of Vedic texts has been less central to popular Hindu practice than the epics, Puranas, and devotional literature. The relationship between Vedic authority and later developments reflects the capacity of Hindu tradition to maintain continuity while adapting to changing circumstances.

4.2 The Upanishads: Philosophical Foundations

The Upanishads, also considered shruti, represent the philosophical culmination of the Vedic tradition. Composed between approximately 800 and 200 BCE, the Upanishads explore fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the self, and the path to liberation. Major Upanishads include the Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, and Mundaka, among others.

The Upanishads develop the concepts of Brahman (ultimate reality) and Atman (the individual self) and identify them as ultimately identical. They introduce the concepts of karma and samsara and identify knowledge (jnana) as the path to liberation. The Upanishadic emphasis on inner realization over external ritual represents a significant development in Hindu thought, shifting the focus from the performance of sacrifice to the quest for spiritual knowledge.

The Upanishads have exerted profound influence on Hindu philosophy and spirituality. The Advaita Vedanta tradition of Shankara (c. 8th century CE) systematized Upanishadic teachings into a comprehensive philosophical system, arguing for the non-dual identity of Atman and Brahman and the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. Other philosophical traditions, such as the theistic schools of Ramanuja and Madhva, offered alternative interpretations while still drawing on Upanishadic authority.

4.3 The Bhagavad Gita: Synthesis and Devotion

The Bhagavad Gita, part of the Mahabharata epic, has become one of Hinduism's most influential texts. Set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the Gita presents a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu), who serves as his spiritual guide. Facing the prospect of fighting against his own relatives, Arjuna is overcome with moral doubt; Krishna responds with teachings that synthesize various paths to liberation.

The Gita's synthesis of jnana, karma, and bhakti yoga provides a comprehensive framework for spiritual life that accommodates different temperaments

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and circumstances. Its teaching on acting without attachment to the fruits of action, performing one's duty as an offering to God, has been particularly influential, providing a way to reconcile worldly engagement with spiritual aspiration.

The Gita's emphasis on devotion (bhakti) to Krishna as the supreme deity reflects the emergence of theistic devotionism that would characterize much of later Hinduism. Krishna's revelation of his cosmic form (vishvarupa) in Chapter 11, where Arjuna sees the universe in Krishna's body, represents a powerful expression of divine immanence and transcendence.

The Gita's influence extends beyond Hinduism to Indian thought more broadly. Mahatma Gandhi, for whom the Gita was a "spiritual dictionary," drew on its teachings in developing his philosophy of non-violent action. The Gita has also been influential in the West, where it has been read as a philosophical and spiritual classic.

4.4 The Puranas: Mythology, Theology, and Practice

The Puranas, composed over several centuries (c. 300-1500 CE), represent a vast corpus of texts that systematize Hindu mythology, theology, and ritual practice. Eighteen major Puranas are traditionally recognized, along with numerous minor Puranas. Each Purana typically includes cosmology, genealogy of gods and sages, mythology, and descriptions of ritual practices.

The Puranas play a crucial role in popular Hinduism, providing the mythological framework for understanding the major deities and their relationships. The Vishnu Purana, Shiva Purana, and Devi Bhagavata Purana, among others, present the mythology and theology of the major Hindu traditions. The Puranas also provide extensive descriptions of pilgrimage sites (tirthas), festivals, and ritual practices, serving as guides for religious observance.

The Puranic tradition reflects the emergence of theistic devotionism as the dominant form of Hindu practice. While maintaining continuity with Vedic tradition, the Puranas present a more personal understanding of the divine, centered on deities who can be approached through devotion, worship, and love. The concept of avatara (divine descent), particularly in the Vishnu tradition, provides a framework for understanding divine intervention in the world.

The Puranas also reflect regional and sectarian diversity, with different Puranas emphasizing different deities and practices. This diversity has enabled the Puranic tradition to serve as a unifying framework for a wide range of local and regional traditions, incorporating local deities and practices into the broader Hindu synthesis.

4.5 The Epics: Ramayana and Mahabharata

The Ramayana and Mahabharata, known as itihasa (history), are the two great epics of Hinduism. While not classified as shruti (revealed scripture), they have exercised profound influence on Hindu culture and practice, serving as sources of moral exemplars, religious teachings, and cultural identity.

The Ramayana, attributed to the poet Valmiki, tells the story of Rama, prince of Ayodhya, who is exiled from his kingdom and later rescues his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. Rama, understood by many Hindus as an avatar of Vishnu, serves as a model of dharma – the ideal son, husband, king, and warrior. The Ramayana has been transmitted in numerous versions across South and Southeast Asia, with regional

variations reflecting local cultural contexts.

The Mahabharata, attributed to the sage Vyasa, is the world's longest epic poem, comprising approximately 100,000 verses. It tells the story of the conflict between two branches of a royal family, the Pandavas and Kauravas, culminating in the great battle of Kurukshetra. The epic incorporates the Bhagavad Gita and numerous other philosophical and narrative sections, creating a complex text that explores the nature of dharma, the complexities of moral choice, and the tragedy of war.

Both epics have been central to Hindu culture for millennia, providing models of virtuous behavior, transmitting religious teachings, and serving as sources of collective identity. Their stories have been retold in countless forms – drama, dance, music, visual art – and continue to be performed and celebrated across the Hindu world.

4.6 The Dharmashastras: Law and Social Order

The dharmashastra literature, most famously represented by the Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), provides the framework for Hindu law and social organization. These texts, composed over several centuries from approximately 500 BCE to 500 CE, prescribe duties for different classes (varna) and stages of life (ashrama), creating a comprehensive system for social and religious life.

The Manusmriti, traditionally attributed to the mythical lawgiver Manu, covers topics ranging from creation and cosmology to the duties of kings and the regulation of social interactions. Its prescriptions for the varna system, including the duties and privileges of each class, have been highly influential in shaping Hindu social structure. The text also addresses issues such as marriage, inheritance, ritual practice, and criminal law.

The dharmashastras have been both influential and controversial. They have provided the framework for traditional Hindu social organization, including the caste system and the subordination of women. At the same time, they have been criticized for legitimizing inequality and social discrimination. The status of dharmashastra authority has been contested within Hindu tradition, with some traditions emphasizing their authority while others, particularly bhakti movements, have challenged their prescriptions.

5. Historical Presence of Hinduism in Sindh

5.1 Ancient Sindh: Indus Valley to the Mauryan Period

The history of Hinduism in Sindh begins with the Indus Valley Civilization, whose urban centers at Mohenjo-Daro and other sites flourished in the third millennium BCE. While the religious practices of this civilization cannot be directly equated with later Hinduism, archaeological evidence suggests continuities that would later be incorporated into Hindu tradition. The Great Bath at Mohenjo-Daro suggests ritual bathing practices that would become central to Hinduism. Seals depicting figures in yogic postures, particularly the so-called "Pashupati" seal, suggest connections with later Shaivite traditions. The prevalence of female figurines suggests goddess worship that would continue in later Hinduism.

The decline of the Indus Valley Civilization around 1900 BCE was followed by a period of cultural transformation associated with the arrival of Indo-Aryan peoples. The Vedic tradition that emerged from this synthesis shaped the religious landscape of the region for centuries. Sindh, located at the northwestern edge of the Indian

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subcontinent, was a significant site for Vedic culture. The Rigveda, composed in the Punjab and surrounding regions, includes references to the Indus River (Sindhu) and the peoples who lived along it.

The Mauryan Empire (c. 322-185 BCE), under Emperor Ashoka, extended its control over much of South Asia, including Sindh. Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism and his support for Buddhist institutions influenced the region, but Hinduism continued to be practiced alongside Buddhism and Jainism. The rock edicts of Ashoka found in the region provide evidence of imperial patronage for Buddhist institutions, while the continued presence of Hindu practices is attested by archaeological and literary sources.

5.2 The Classical Period: Hinduism under the Indo-Greeks, Scythians, and Kushans

The period following the decline of the Mauryan Empire saw Sindh ruled by a succession of foreign dynasties – Indo-Greeks, Scythians (Shakas), Parthians, and Kushans. These rulers, while often patrons of Buddhism, also supported Hindu institutions. The Indo-Greek king Menander (Milinda), for example, is remembered for his engagement with Buddhism in the Milinda Panha, but his coins also depict Hindu deities.

The Kushan Empire (c. 30-375 CE), which controlled a vast territory from Central Asia to northern India, had its core in the region of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, including Sindh. The Kushans were patrons of Buddhism, but they also supported Hindu and Zoroastrian traditions. The art of the Gandhara region, which flourished under Kushan patronage, reflects the synthesis of Indian, Greek, and Central Asian influences that characterized the period.

The classical period also saw the composition of key Hindu texts that would shape the tradition. The Mahabharata and Ramayana were composed and transmitted during this period, incorporating the religious and cultural traditions of the region. The Puranas, which would later become central to Hindu practice, began to take shape during this period.

5.3 Hindu Traditions in Medieval Sindh: Cults, Practices, and Institutions

The medieval period saw the development of diverse Hindu traditions in Sindh, reflecting the broader diversity of Hinduism across South Asia. The worship of Shiva in the form of jyotirlingas (lingas of light) was prominent, with sites such as the Shiv temple at Sukkur attracting pilgrims. The cult of Vishnu, particularly in the form of Krishna, was also significant, with traditions of Krishna worship developing in the region.

The goddess tradition (Shaktism) was particularly strong in Sindh, reflecting the region's connection with the broader currents of goddess worship in South Asia. The worship of the goddess in various forms – as Hinglaj Mata, as the protectress of the region – has been central to Sindhi Hindu practice. The Hinglaj Mata temple, located in Balochistan near the Sindh border, has been a major pilgrimage site for Sindhi Hindus for centuries, attracting devotees from across the region.

The institution of the dera (religious center) played a significant role in Sindhi Hindu life. Deras served as centers of religious instruction, ritual practice, and

community organization. The heads of *deras*, known as *gurus* or *pirs*, exercised spiritual authority and provided leadership for their communities. These institutions, which combined religious and social functions, would continue to play an important role in Sindhi Hindu life until the Partition.

5.4 Colonial Period: Reform Movements, Education, and Identity

The colonial period (c. 1843-1947) brought profound changes to Sindhi Hindu society. The British conquest of Sindh in 1843 incorporated the region into the Bombay Presidency and introduced new administrative, legal, and economic systems. These changes disrupted traditional patterns of social organization and created new opportunities and challenges for Hindu communities.

The colonial period saw the emergence of reform movements within Sindhi Hinduism, influenced by broader currents of Hindu reform across India. The *Arya Samaj*, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, established a presence in Sindh and attracted followers among urban Hindu communities. The *Arya Samaj*'s emphasis on a return to the Vedas, its opposition to caste discrimination and idol worship, and its support for modern education resonated with some sections of Sindhi Hindu society.

The *Brahmo Samaj*, another reform movement, also had followers in Sindh. The *Brahmo Samaj*'s emphasis on monotheism, social reform, and rationalism appealed to educated Hindus seeking to reconcile traditional values with modern ideas. These reform movements, while not displacing traditional Hindu practices, contributed to the diversification of Sindhi Hindu identity and the development of new forms of religious expression.

The colonial period also saw significant developments in education and literacy among Sindhi Hindus. The establishment of schools and colleges, the growth of publishing, and the emergence of a modern print culture contributed to the development of Sindhi language and literature. Sindhi Hindus played a prominent role in these developments, contributing to the growth of journalism, literature, and public discourse.

The growth of communal politics in the late colonial period created new challenges for Sindhi Hindus. The demand for Pakistan, articulated by the Muslim League and supported by sections of Sindhi Muslim society, raised concerns about the future of Hindu communities in Sindh. While some Sindhi Hindus supported the Pakistan movement, others were wary of living as a minority in a Muslim-majority state. These tensions would come to a head with the Partition of India in 1947.

6. Interaction with Other Religious Traditions

6.1 Hinduism and Buddhism in Sindh

The interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism in Sindh spans more than a millennium, from the emergence of Buddhism in the sixth century BCE to its decline in the medieval period. Buddhism flourished in Sindh under the patronage of the Mauryan and Kushan empires, with Buddhist monasteries (*viharas*) and stupas established across the region. The rock edicts of Ashoka found in the region attest to imperial support for Buddhism.

The relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism in Sindh was complex, characterized by both competition and mutual influence. Buddhist philosophy,

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particularly the Madhyamaka and Yogacara schools, developed in dialogue with Hindu philosophical traditions. Hindu deities were incorporated into Buddhist practice, often as guardians of the dharma, while Buddhist concepts influenced Hindu thought.

The decline of Buddhism in Sindh, like elsewhere in South Asia, was gradual and complex. The absorption of Buddhist ideas and practices into Hinduism, the loss of patronage, and the rise of devotional Hinduism all contributed to Buddhism's decline as a distinct tradition in Sindh.

6.2 Sufism and Hindu Devotionalism: Shared Sensibilities

The parallels between Sufism and Hindu devotionalism have been noted by scholars and practitioners alike. Both traditions emphasize love as the primary means of approaching the divine, with the relationship between lover and beloved serving as a metaphor for the soul's longing for God.

The poetry of Sindhi Sufis and Hindu bhaktas reflects shared sensibilities and mutual influence. The stories of Krishna and his devotees, which appear in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, are treated not as Hindu mythology but as symbols of the soul's longing for the divine. The theme of viraha (separation and longing), central to both Sufi and bhakti traditions, resonates across religious boundaries.

The poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai reflects a affinity with Hindu Bhakti traditions, particularly in its emphasis on love, devotion, and the seeker's journey toward the Divine. However, this connection is symbolic and cultural rather than theological, as his work ultimately remains rooted in Islamic Sufi principles.

The shared sensibilities between Sufism and Hindu devotionalism did not, however, erase religious differences. The relationship between the traditions was complex, characterized by both mutual appreciation and theological disagreement.

6.3 The Development of Composite Sindhi Culture

The interaction between Hinduism and other religious traditions in Sindh contributed to the development of a composite Sindhi culture that transcended religious boundaries. Sindhi language, literature, and art reflect the synthesis of diverse influences, creating a cultural tradition that cannot be neatly divided along religious lines.

Sindhi language, which developed as a distinct language by the medieval period, incorporates vocabulary and literary forms from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and other languages. Sindhi literature, from the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif to the works of modern writers, reflects the cultural synthesis that characterizes Sindhi identity.

Sindhi folk traditions, including music, dance, and festival practices, reflect the integration of Hindu and Muslim elements. The celebration of festivals such as Diwali and Holi by Muslims, and the participation of Hindus in Sufi festivals, reflects the fluidity of cultural practice in Sindh. This composite culture, which persisted for centuries, would be profoundly disrupted by the Partition of India in 1947.

7. Socio-Cultural Impact on Sindhi Society

7.1 Influence on Traditions, Festivals, and Rituals

Hindu traditions have profoundly influenced the festival calendar and ritual practices of Sindhi society. The major Hindu festivals – Diwali, Holi, Navratri, and others – have been celebrated in Sindh for centuries, with participation often extending

beyond the Hindu community. The festival of Holi, the spring festival of colors, has been particularly significant in Sindhi culture, celebrated by both Hindus and Muslims.

The pilgrimage tradition has been central to Sindhi Hindu practice. The Hinglaj Mata temple, located in Balochistan, has been the most important pilgrimage site for Sindhi Hindus, attracting hundreds of thousands of devotees annually. The Hinglaj pilgrimage, which involves a journey through the desert and mountains of Balochistan, represents a distinctive tradition that has survived despite the challenges faced by Sindhi Hindus since Partition.

Ritual practices, from daily domestic worship to lifecycle rituals, have shaped Sindhi Hindu social life. The rites of passage (samskaras) – birth, naming, initiation, marriage, death – provide structure to individual and family life. These rituals, while rooted in Hindu tradition, have also been shaped by Sindhi culture and the region's specific conditions.

7.2 Contribution to Language, Literature, and Art

Sindhi Hindus have made significant contributions to Sindhi language, literature, and art. The development of Sindhi as a literary language was supported by Hindu writers and scholars, who produced works in a range of genres. The Sindhi script, derived from the Arabic script with additional characters, was developed and standardized with the participation of Hindu scholars.

Sindhi literature, from the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif to the works of modern writers, reflects the composite culture of Sindh. Hindu writers have contributed to poetry, fiction, drama, and criticism, enriching Sindhi literary tradition. Writers such as Lekhraj Aziz, Hari Das Ahuja, and others have made lasting contributions to Sindhi literature.

Visual arts in Sindh have also been shaped by Hindu traditions. Temple architecture, sculpture, and painting reflect Hindu iconography and aesthetics. The temples of Sindh, while fewer in number since Partition, represent important cultural heritage sites that reflect the region's artistic traditions.

7.3 Role in Shaping Social Values and Community Structures

Hindu traditions have shaped social values and community structures in Sindhi society. The concepts of dharma (moral duty), seva (service), and dana (charity) have influenced ethical norms and social practices. The institution of the dera provided structure for community organization and leadership.

The caste system, while historically significant in Sindhi Hindu society, has been less rigid than in other regions of India. The Lohana community, the largest Hindu community in Sindh, developed distinctive social structures and practices. Other communities, including the Bhaiband, Brahmin, and Scheduled Caste communities, contributed to the diversity of Sindhi Hindu society.

The role of women in Sindhi Hindu society has been shaped by both Hindu traditions and Sindhi culture. While traditional norms emphasized domestic roles, women have also been active in religious practice, education, and social reform. The Partition period saw women facing particular challenges, including violence, displacement, and the disruption of family structures.

7.4 Economic and Commercial Contributions

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Sindhi Hindus played a significant role in the economy of Sindh, particularly in commerce and trade. The Lohana community, in particular, developed extensive commercial networks, engaging in trade across South Asia and beyond. Sindhi Hindu merchants and entrepreneurs contributed to the economic development of Sindh, establishing businesses in urban centers such as Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, and Shikarpur.

The colonial period saw Sindhi Hindus emerging as a commercial elite, with significant interests in trade, banking, and industry. This economic role, while contributing to prosperity, also created tensions with Muslim communities who saw themselves as economically disadvantaged. These tensions would contribute to the communal politics of the late colonial period and the violence of Partition.

The Partition of India and the migration of Sindhi Hindus to India disrupted these economic networks and led to the loss of significant economic assets. The transition to India, while bringing new opportunities for some, also involved significant challenges and the need to rebuild economic lives in a new context.

8. Contemporary Relevance: Hinduism in Modern Pakistan

8.1 Interfaith Relations and Dialogue

Interfaith cooperation and dialogue. Muslim and Hindu communities in Sindh continue to interact in various contexts, with some Muslims participating in Hindu festivals and Hindus participating in Sufi practices.

The Sindhi Sufi tradition, with its emphasis on love and the unity of being, has provided a framework for interfaith understanding. Sufi shrines continue to be visited by both Muslims and Hindus, and the poetry of Sufi mystics continues to resonate across religious boundaries.

Efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding have been undertaken by civil society organizations, religious leaders, and government institutions. These efforts, while limited, have sought to build bridges between communities and to address the challenges faced by religious minorities.

8.2 Preservation of Cultural Heritage

The preservation of Hindu cultural heritage in Pakistan faces significant challenges. The temples and sacred sites that remain in Sindh and other provinces are often neglected, with limited resources for maintenance and restoration. The Hinglaj Mata temple, which continues to attract pilgrims, has been the focus of preservation efforts, but many other sites have fallen into disrepair.

The Sindh government has taken some steps to protect Hindu cultural heritage, including the establishment of the Hindu Heritage Committee and the restoration of some temples. However, these efforts have been limited, and many sites remain vulnerable to encroachment and neglect.

The cultural heritage of Sindhi Hindus also includes intangible heritage: language, literature, and ritual practices. The preservation of this heritage in Pakistan is challenged by the departure of many Hindus who were bearers of these traditions and by the marginalization of Hindu culture in public life. Efforts to preserve Sindhi Hindu heritage are being undertaken by community organizations and cultural institutions.

Conclusion

This study has examined the origins, ideological foundations, and historical development of Hinduism in Sindh, tracing its trajectory from the Indus Valley Civilization to the present. As one of the world's oldest living religious traditions, Hinduism has shaped the cultural, social, and spiritual landscape of Sindh for over four millennia. The region of Sindh, with its unique geographical position at the crossroads of civilizations, has been a site of remarkable religious and cultural synthesis, where Hindu traditions interacted with Buddhism, Islam, Sufism, and other traditions to produce a distinctive composite culture.

The core ideological principles of Hinduism – dharma, karma, samsara, and moksha – have provided a framework for individual behavior, social organization, and spiritual practice. These concepts, elaborated in the sacred texts of the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Puranas, have shaped Hindu thought and practice across diverse contexts. The adaptability of these principles has enabled Hinduism to maintain continuity while adapting to changing circumstances, from the urban civilization of the Indus Valley to the challenges of modernity.

The history of Hinduism in Sindh reflects the broader patterns of South Asian religious history while also exhibiting distinctive features. The region's position at the western edge of the Indian subcontinent made it a gateway for diverse influences, from the Indo-Aryan migrations to the arrival of Islam. The interaction between Hindu and Islamic traditions in Sindh, particularly through the mediation of Sufism, produced forms of cultural synthesis that shaped Sindhi identity for centuries.

The mass migration of Sindhi Hindus to India, the demographic transformation of Sindh, and the challenges faced by the Hindu minority in Pakistan have profoundly shaped the contemporary situation. The memory of Sindh – its landscapes, its sacred sites, its cultural traditions – continues to be preserved by the Sindhi Hindu diaspora, while the Hindu community that remains in Sindh navigates the challenges of minority identity in contemporary Pakistan.

The contemporary relevance of Hinduism in Sindh lies in its contribution to religious diversity, cultural heritage, and the ongoing conversation about pluralism and coexistence. The preservation of Hindu cultural heritage in Pakistan, the protection of minority rights, and the promotion of interfaith dialogue are important challenges that require attention from both state institutions and civil society. The history of Hinduism in Sindh, with its long record of cultural synthesis and religious interaction, offers resources for thinking about pluralism and coexistence in a region that continues to be shaped by religious diversity.

Future research on Hinduism in Sindh might explore several directions. Archaeological and textual studies could shed further light on the early history of Hindu traditions in the region. Ethnographic research on contemporary Hindu communities in Sindh could document the preservation and transformation of religious practices. Comparative studies of Sindhi Hindu traditions and other regional Hindu traditions could illuminate patterns of continuity and difference. Finally, continued efforts to preserve and document Sindhi Hindu cultural heritage, both in Pakistan and in the diaspora, can contribute to the understanding of this important tradition.

The history of Hinduism in Sindh, as this study has shown, represents a story of continuity, synthesis, and resilience. From the urban civilization of Mohenjo-Daro,

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Sindhi Hinduism has demonstrated remarkable capacity for adaptation while maintaining connection with ancient traditions. Understanding this history is essential for comprehending both the rich cultural heritage of Sindh and the contemporary dynamics of religious diversity in Pakistan and South Asia more broadly.



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