What Is It to Be Hindu?
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IN MY OPINION

What Is It to Be Hindu?

My ancient faith is relevant in modern times

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Every society has it's share of problems. Hindus have always openly recognized the flaws of their society and have taken steps to correct them. Although sati, dowry and caste discrimination do exist, they are officially banned in India by law. There are also many Hindu organizations actively involved in eradicating these ills.

Let us now contemplate the beautiful and unique aspects of Hinduism. We Hindus need to appreciate the importance of our heritage and instill some pride in ourselves. As Swami Vivekananda once said, "When a man starts feeling ashamed of his ancestors, the end has come."

Born Hindus are heirs to the world's oldest living culture. They are also descendents of the world's oldest living civilization, which has often been referred to as "the cradle of Human civilization." The Vedas, which form the core of the Hindu scripture, comprise the oldest religious texts known to man. The language in which the Vedas have been revealed, Sanskrit, is considered the mother of all European languages.

Every Hindu has the freedom to believe or not believe in different aspects of his religion. Every Hindu has the right to question, oppose and even refrain from practicing any of the customs, rituals or methods of worship in his religion. The right of a Hindu to think freely, and even differently, is respected within his religion.

Hindus are encouraged to perceive the whole world as one family. The holy texts say, "Vasudaiva kutumbakam, " meaning "the whole world is one family." Most Hindus do not create a distinction between themselves and the followers of other faiths. They do not condemn those outside their fold as non-believers. They pray not only for themselves, but for the world as well.

Hindus revere nature, deeply respecting the rivers, mountains, animals and trees. In India, one often hears the Ganges River referred to as Ma Gangay (Mother Ganga). The Himalayas, where many of India's rivers originate, are also sacred to Hindus. There are many holy shrines in the Himalayan mountains.

Many sincere Hindus practice vegetarianism. One of the verses of a famous Hindu scripture declares, "How can one claim to practice true compassion when he consumes the flesh of animals to fatten his own flesh?"

Hinduism is the only religion in the world where God is also worshiped in a feminine form as the Goddess. Hinduism respects womanhood.

It is a popular Hindu belief that the two most famous wars of Hindu history, detailed in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, were the result of dishonorable acts committed against women. Motherhood, an important aspect of womanhood, is glorified in Hinduism with the saying "Mathru Devo Bhavah, " which means "Revere your mother as God." The much maligned Manu Smriti also glorifies women and womanhood. It says, "Where women are honored, there the Gods are pleased; but where they are not, no sacred rite yields rewards."

Never in the history of Hinduism has there been a clash between science and religion. The very sages who developed Hinduism also investigated science. Some of the most popular scientific studies in Hinduism are: ayurveda, the science of medicine; stapathya veda, the science of architecture; and artha veda, the science of sociology and economics.

At a time when the world is engulfed in fanaticism, leading to sectarian violence, disrespect of nature, leading to environmental degradation, and violation of

women's rights, leading to the degradation of society, correctly understanding Hindu philosophy can bring about a positive change. This shows me that Hinduism is as relevant today in my high-tech world as it was during ancient times.