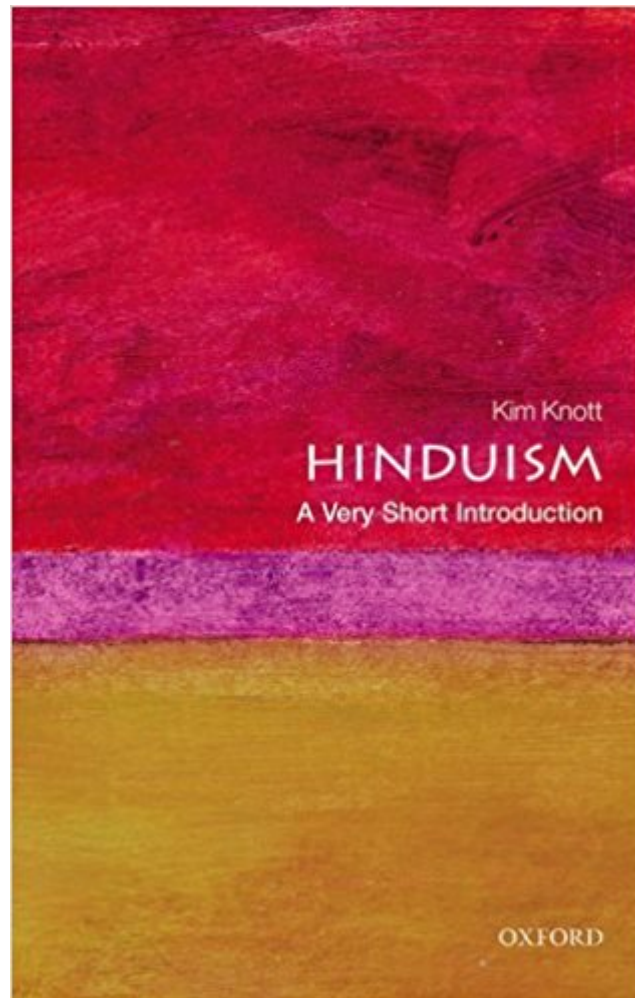




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Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Hinduism is practiced by about 80 percent of India's population, and by about 30 million people outside India. But how is Hinduism defined, and what basis does the religion have? In this Very Short Introduction, Kim Knott provides clear insight into the beliefs and authority of Hindus and Hinduism, and considers the ways in which it has been affected by colonialism and modernity. Knott offers succinct explanations of Hinduism's central preoccupations, including the role of contemporary gurus and teachers in the quest for spiritual fulfillment; and the function of regular performances of the Mahabharata and Ramayana--scriptures which present the divine in personal form (avatara) and provide models of behavior for everyone, from kings and warriors to servants and children, and which focus on the dharma, the appropriate duties and moral responsibilities of the different varna or classes. The author also considers the challenges posed to Hinduism at the end of the twentieth century as it spreads far beyond India, and as concerns are raised about issues such as dowry, death, caste prejudice, and the place of women in Hindu society. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

'very readable and certainly most helpful, with a new and original perspective conveyed in a succinct introductory style.' Ursula King, University of Bristol

Kim Knott is Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds and the President of the British Association for the Study of Religions. She has written on modern Hinduism, religions in Britain, and gender and religion.

I am using this book in a very short course on Hinduism and Buddhism and paired it with the Damien Keown, *VSI-Buddhism*. Hardly any students had any familiarity with either tradition. Most preferred the Keown book, though. The reason they gave was that Knott's book, although very readable and informative, left them wondering about what would be considered the fundamentals of Hinduism. Knott does address these aspects of the tradition, but they are woven into the larger narrative of how Hinduism squares with Indian culture. So, while I think Knott has done an admirable job offering AN introduction to Hinduism, someone with no previous knowledge would benefit from a companion, such as Arvind Sharma's *A Guide to Hindu Spirituality* or Gavin Flood's *Introduction to Hinduism*. Nonetheless, the book served my purposes very well.

Hinduism has a special place among the world's major religions, being of great antiquity and being, until recent times, an ethnic or racial religion, like Judaism, Sikhism or Shinto. In the last century it has spread its teachings to the West and in doing so has fragmented and branched into an even more complex variety, so that, as the author of this book says, we must now talk of 'Hinduisms', in the plural. So the writing of a very short introduction that will do justice to this subject is a tall order. Kim Knott succeeds splendidly. She does not shirk problematic topics, such as the evils of the caste system or the burning of widows. In fact, she devotes a fair amount of space to the particular difficulties faced by Hindu women. Knott being a British academic, and a Quaker, this is an outsider's view, a learned, sympathetic and interested outsider's view. It is none the worse for that. Including a map, a timeline, a glossary, excellent illustrations and suggestions for further reading, it is packed with a surprising amount of information in such a small space. If you have only a passing interest in Hinduism, this book may tell you all you want to know. If you wish to pursue the study, this is the perfect introduction. A good next step would be an annotated edition of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

This book was a wonderful way to be introduced to the concepts of Hinduism. Well written, relatively short, and reasonably objective in its overview; the book highlights how Hinduism is not solely a "religion", but an entire culture. Great for anyone who would like to learn about Hinduism's history and general inner-workings. I would highly suggest anyone interested in in this particular topic use this book as an initial stepping stone to learn more about the Hindu-based philosophies, religion,

and culture.

The book was well written. It encompassed quite a bit in a short amount of time. It gave an overall scholarly look at many aspects of the diversity of Hinduism. It is a good textbook for anyone who wants to start a study of Hinduism.

If you want to learn about anything, these little books pack quite a bit of information into a tiny package. A fun little "to-go" handbook on whatever topic you choose.

When I received this book in the mail, I was a little surprised to see that it was literally a "very short" introduction to Hinduism. Yet, Kim Knott did a fantastic job cramming as much information in a comprehensible manner in such a little book. As many other reviewers have said, this is a really quick but good introduction to Hinduism.

Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction is indeed very short, perhaps too short to do more than scratch to surface of a topic as complex and varied as the religion of Hinduism. This book is a very good introduction for someone who knows little about the subject and would like to learn more, however for someone who does know a something about Hinduism and would like to learn more it is a little unsatisfying. One is left wanting more.

Hinduism is an ancient, changing, and multi-faceted subject. The author of this book chose to offer an objective overview of this complex subject in a short format, and in my opinion did an excellent job.

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