



## Humanist, Pluralist, and Dialogical Concepts in Hindu Theology

**Pradeep Jyotis**

University of Valey Farge, Pennsylvania, United States  
pradeepjy@gmail.com

### Abstract

The aim of this research is to describe humanist, pluralist, and dialogical concepts in Hindu theology. The method used is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Human life cannot be separated from the beliefs he holds. These beliefs generally take the form of religion (*organized religion*). Outside of that, it is often called belief or original religion (*native religion*). Whatever the name, it all pivots on belief in the Almighty God, who is called by various names. This belief becomes the guidance of life for a person and their group. Religious teachings provide enlightenment and direction in life to their adherents. In living together in society, there are various religions and/or beliefs, and each religion or belief has differences, especially regarding faith (*sraddha*), the way to connect oneself to Him, and ethics. These differences give color and color to religious life in society. However, they have similarities in certain aspects, for example, regarding humanity.

**Keywords: Human, Plural, Dialogue; Hindu Theology**

### Introduction

This brief article highlights the fundamentals of Hindu theology about humanity (*humanity*), about differences (*plurality*), and about how religious teachings teach us to communicate with fellow human beings (*dialogic*). This article is descriptive by exploring sources of teaching about this matter as normative and combining them with empirical issues in the field.

Mahadevan (1984) mentions theology as *brahmavidyà*, that is, *the knowledge of Brahman*, while Apte in the Sanskrit English Dictionary (1987) translates the word theology with *Īsvara-brahmajñānam*, *paramàrthavidyà*, *adhyàtmajñāvidyà* which lexically means knowledge of divinity, highest knowledge, and spiritual knowledge. Based on this description, *brahmavidyà* implies knowledge of the Almighty God, including all His manifestations, His creation, and everything related to Him. This last understanding includes a very broad understanding of *brahmavidyà*.

The term theology in The New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary (1978) is stated as the science of religion, the study of God or gods, esp. of attributes and relations with man, etc., which means religious knowledge, the study of the Almighty God or the gods, especially His details and their relationship with humans, and so on. In the Women's Journal for Enlightenment and Equality (2001), Admirand (2019) states that theology is knowledge of the Divine. Say windows comes from Greek *logos*, which can be interpreted as knowledge with a high level of expertise that differs from everyday opinion. *Logos*, it is different from idea because it is pure contemplation without being attached to any interests. Theology can then be defined as contemplative, interest-free, and proper knowledge of the Divine.

Besides theology, there is also the term theology. The word theology comes from the word *thea*, which means goddess in Greek. To deconstruct the concept of the Divine according to patriarchy, theology explores the concept of the goddess from Western and Eastern civilizations. Theology wants to bring out the idea of a goddess buried in the sea of sand of a religious culture that favors men (Admirand, 2019).

Is Admirand's statement above correct? When studied from the perspective of Hinduism, the emergence of the concept of *drive (power)*, then the idea of the goddess is not buried in the sea of sand of religious civilization as stated in this statement. In Hinduism, although later because of the entry of other religions and cultures into India, the impact was that women did not seem to get honorable positions, but if we return to the Vedic scriptures and Hindu literature, we find figures or *mahàrsi* which are called *Brahmavadin* which shows that women also have equal opportunities to become Hindu clergy.

Furthermore, female theologians in Hinduism can start from the figures mentioned in the Vedic scriptures, as para *Brahmavādinī* above, among others: Visvavārā, Apālā, Ghosā, Godhā wife of Vasukra, sister of maharsi Agastya, Lopāmudrā, Sasvatī, and Romasā. Besides these names, there is another Vāch (Sushil, 1982). Apart from the *Brahmavādinī* figures above, in the Upanisad books, some statistics are known as theologians and ideal women who are experts in philosophy, namely Maitreyī, Kātyāyanī, who are the two wives of Yājñvalkya, a maharsi who is often and very dominantly mentioned. In the Upanisads. Another female character is Gārgī, the son of a figure or hero from the city of Banares.

Likewise, we know the concept *Ardanariswara* shows that God Almighty is imagined as half male and female. In contrast, God Almighty cannot be given male or female attributes because He is not a living creature with a gender. If you pay attention to the description above, then *Brahmavidyā* includes the concept of theology and theology, which is a common challenge to formulate these teachings further. In connection with theology and theology, spiritualism is also known, namely the understanding that believes that behind this gross universe is a spirit that overcomes and regulates it. The manifestation of spiritualism is religion. Human belief in the spiritual is expressed internally, appearing in patterns of feeling systems of thought (religious beliefs, religious teachings, myths, and dogmas) while outwardly manifesting in systems of social behavior (rituals) and organizations with laws and positions certain positions (Johnson, 2017).

The following description of theology and religious studies is an adaptation of Frank Whaling's writings in *Various Approaches to the Study of Religion* Connolly, Ed (2002) as follows. The position of theology is critical in various discussions about the study and teaching of religion. The theological approach focuses on several concepts, primarily based on ideas *theologians* the research or knowledge of God or the Gods. This presumption contains a different message from the humanities or social sciences. Religious studies in its modern form is seen as emerging from Christian theology. So, religious studies and theology give rise to various views; some consider it essential, some think it unimportant, and others have pros and cons.

## Methods

This research is completely based on qualitative methods with a descriptive approach and interpretive paradigm. Data collection was carried out using document study techniques, each of which has its own domain in the data search process. Apart from primary data sources, this research also uses secondary sources, in the form of various documents, such as the Veda, Bhagavadgitha and important records that are related to this research. Then the data obtained was analyzed using qualitative-interpretive analysis techniques. This means that knowledge, especially social sciences, and social research in qualitative research are directed at truly understanding the meaning behind human actions.

## Results and Discussion

There are five types of theological approaches in the study of religion, namely:

1. Theologies of beliefs, is a particular theology that emerged in a specific religious tradition. So, the theology of religions is a theology that studies certain theologies that arise from religious traditions. Every religion has practices whose sources are difficult to find in the holy books.
2. Theology of religion, namely an effort to build a more universal religious theology, which in this case concentrates on transcendent categories. So, the approach is to study universal theology, which focuses on the transcendent (spirituality, holiness).
3. A global theology of religion, starts from the worldwide situation in all its complexity, human morals, and nature. It then reconceptualizes the emerging theological categories and specific religious traditions that can direct the development of the global situation, which affects everyone. So, the theology of global religions is a theology that studies the complexity of religion, including moral, human, and natural, as well as constructing or reconceptualizing these theological categories.
4. Comparative theology of religion. We will explore several theological points of contact and comparison by reading certain religious theologies. Comparative religious theology is a theology that studies religions by comparing theological descriptions of each religion.

Differences between religious studies and theology.

1. Religious studies, apart from being multi-religious, also use a variety of approaches and methods. So, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history, phenomenology, psychology, linguistics, and so on are components of religious studies.
2. Theology is more of a discipline in itself, and although theology uses the various methods outlined above, it falls under theology and often the associated church or religious community.
3. Theology often centers on doctrinal issues. Religious orthodoxy emphasizes religion's doctrines and conceptual elements as more central than spiritual practices or behavior.
4. Religious studies place the same emphasis on other elements of religion, such as social practices, rituals, aesthetics, spirituality, myths, symbols, and so on. There is no overemphasis on doctrine or concepts.
5. Theology is mainly concerned with transcendence, which is "deemed beyond debate" as it relates to theology.
6. The focus of religious studies is more on believers and their experiences or beliefs rather than the objects of thought.
7. Theology is concerned with transcendence, whereas religious studies is not.

In medieval learning, science still had a place, as Durkheim and others pointed out, but it took second place. However, cultural and scientific knowledge is part of the totality of learning based on theology. As stated by Aquinas, theology is *a set of sciences*. In the modern era, the dominant model has changed again. Experiments on nature and the development of natural sciences that emanate from it become the basis of knowledge. Its axis is more centered on nature than God or humans, and its emphasis is on natural sciences as the key to learning. Because scientific research is based on specialization and knowledge is divided into particular areas, in this case, there is a setback when it is understood that there is a totality of knowledge.

Even though theology and its derivatives, religious studies along with humanities still exist, and approaches to knowledge tend to use a scientific worldview, there is nothing hidden from the fact that the view of the integrity of knowledge has been fragmented. Wisdom is found more in its elements and disciplines than in its totality. In the current era, with a global perspective, there *is* a greater awareness of the need to

reintegrate knowledge, along with a deeper understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of a scientific worldview. Although the New Age movement and postmodernism have specific interests, revive this spirit, and there is a desire to reunite knowledge to meet the demands of a global world. In other words, there is greater awareness of the complementarity of knowledge models and the need for more profound interconnections. Theology and religious studies, humanities, and natural sciences need each other.

There are three reasons for theology and religious studies regarding the importance of models of knowledge. *First*, the concepts crucial to theology are only one of the eight elements in this model. Religious studies relate to the eight elements: (1) religious communities, (2) rituals, (3) ethics, (4) social and political involvement, (5) holy books and myths, (6) concepts, (7) aesthetics, and (8) spirituality, without exaggeration one of them. Moreover, religious studies are cross-cultural, and there is no particular interest in developing one tradition. *Second*, this model addresses the ideas of transcendence, mediating focus, and faith or intentionality, also found in theology. For certain religious practices, faith is a belief in their transcendence through a mediating focus that is so important, which is apparent in certain theologies. However, apart from this understanding, this model can explain particular religious traditions' general structure and meaning. It has basic assumptions, namely the general interest. This model can also show that religions are radically different if we compare them openly through this model. On the other hand, this model can also be understood to indicate the direction of belief and transcendence as universal theological categories and, therefore, the focus of general religious theology. *Third*, although theology tends to doctrinal formulations, this model shows that those formulations can be broad and varied. Theology pays attention to eight related elements, and in recent years, this attention has developed in different traditions. Therefore, we see increasing interest in the theology of religious communities, scriptural theology, doctrinal theology, theology of art, theology of ritual and liturgy, theological ethics, theology of social and political praxis, and spiritual theology.

In short, although the boundaries and concerns of theology and religious studies are separate, this is not a fundamental separation. The two are intertwined in the way stated, namely concerning Western models of knowledge and a general religious model. The conceptual quality standards of the Hindu tradition since the classical era, certain key concepts have become parameters for the way of life Hindu.

1. The Hindu concept is centered on the idea of *Brahman* as *the ultimate* reality behind nature,
2. *Atma* as self (*inner*) in humans,
3. Human karma is a continuous cycle of rebirth,
4. Salvation is an escape from rebirth,
5. Ways of awareness *inner* (*jñāna*), obedience (*bhakti*), and being actively involved in the world (under God's power) as a way of salvation, and the role of His various manifestations such as Śiva, Visnu, Devī, and two incarnations of Visnu (*avatar*) namely Ràma and Krisna.

John Hick explains that there are three central theological attitudes that religious traditions can apply to more expansive religious areas: (1) *Exclusivism*, an opinion that the only correct position is one's religious position, (2) *Inclusivism*, a view that other religious traditions also contain religious truths but in the last days will be included in the position they have, (3) *Pluralism*, the opinion that religious traditions manifest themselves in various conceptions of the actual (*the real*) and responding to it, from there emerged different cultural paths for humans. These three theological attitudes assume that someone seeks by starting from a particular theological system and using other systems as separate

entities. These attitudes think that theology means the specific theology of a particular religious tradition. Since the revelation of the holy book Veda, Hinduism has mandated its followers to develop attitudes of *inclusivism* and *pluralism*, which means recognizing that there is truth in other religious traditions and the existence of various true conceptions (*the real*) and responding to it, as seen in the development of Hinduism in USA, belief in the holy spirits of ancestors and respect for traditions and respect for followers of other religions still have their rightful place.

### 1. Humanist Hindu Theology

The Vedic scriptures are the primary and first source of all Hindu religious teachings. In the Vedic scriptures, you can find various instructions relating to humanist Hindu theology. Other Hindu literature also explains this matter besides the Vedic scriptures (including the Upanisad books). Here are the Vedic mantras that demonstrate this.

- a. Truth is beneficial to humanity.  
May Agni, who has the power and truth that is beneficial to humanity, the overflow of happiness, destroy all those who intend to harm or harm us and who show an enemy-like attitude towards us (Atharvaveda IV. 36. 1)
- b. All humans and creatures should be healthy (prosperous).  
All mankind and animals should be free from disease (Rgveda X. 97. 20)
- c. The ideal nation values humanity.  
Gods, You are the protectors of the whole world. May You provide us with an ideal nation (dream) that can feed the whole world (Yajurveda X.4)
- d. No one should suffer from hunger and thirst  
Heaven and earth (heaven and world), may this humanity, which is under Your guard, not suffer from hunger and thirst (Atharvaveda II. 29. 4)
- e. We need generous people  
We need generous personalities (philanthropist) (Rgveda IX. 2. 8.)
- f. Let the whole world be happy and healthy  
Rudra, do this so that the whole world can be free from disease, be happy (Yajurveda XVI. 4)  
Make humanity happy and remove their difficulties (Yajurveda XV. 59)
- g. The welfare of all beings  
Make all men and animals happy (Yajurveda XVI. 48)
- h. Love all and be loved by all  
Yes, Almighty God, may we be loved by the gods and national leaders. May we be loved by everyone, anyone who pays attention to (understands) us, whether a business person or a worker (Atharvaveda XIX. 62. 1)
- i. Feel oneness with all humanity  
When the intelligent person practices union with the entire animate (living) world and feels oneness, all attachments and calamities disappear (Yajurveda XL. 7)
- j. May we have harmony with all  
May we have harmony with people we know intimately and even strangers (Atharvaveda VII.54.1)

In addition to the mantra points of the scriptures above, in the Upanisad books (which later became the primary source of the Vedānta philosophical system), one also finds the view that all creatures originate from the Almighty God and ultimately return to Him. It is further explained that in all beings, there is *Atma* (the spirit) that animates it, and *Atma* is a spark of His rays called *Brahman*, and *Brahman* is actually identical with *Atman* as the life source of the universe and all its contents. In the Upanisad books there

are known five teachings that are based on the view of humanity called *Pañcamahāvākya* (the five great saying), namely *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art That), *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman), *Aham Ātmā Brahma* (This Self is Brahman), *Prajñām Brahma* (Consciousness is Brahman), from *Sarvaikhalvidai Brahma* (All indeed is Brahman) (Frawley, 1982).

In USA, to this day, humans are brothers with animals and plants. Even with animals and plants, we are still brothers. Why are we enemies with fellow humans? The view of the unity of all beings with the Almighty God, or all beings coming and ultimately being united with Him in the Vedanta philosophical system, is called Advaita or monistic (*monism*). This view is the basis for teaching true love, called Parama Prema.

The above view was more firmly stated by Mahatma Gandhi (Prabhu, 1987) as follows. My goal is friendship with the world, and I can combine the most incredible love with the most significant opposition to the wrong. My ethics permit me to claim and require me to own kinship with not merely the ape but the horse and the sheep, the lion and the leopard, the snake and the scorpion. Not so need these kinsfolk regard themselves. On another occasion, Mahatma Gandhi's message about humanity was: "Love others. Look for what unites you, not what divides you, each other" (Ellsberg, 2013). On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda (Richards, 1996), as a genuine humanist, stated: look within everyone, both men and women and all as God. You cannot help anyone, and you can only serve: serve God's children, serve God himself. If God can give you a gift to help one of his children, then you are blessed; don't think too highly of yourself. Blessed are you for having all this when others do not. Do all this just as worship. I had to see God in the poor, and it was for the sake of my liberation that I went and worshiped them. The poor and suffering are for our deliverance so that we may serve God, who comes from sickness, madness, heartache, and sinners! I'm telling the truth, and I will repeat what I have said: It is an excellent opportunity in our lives that we are permitted to serve God in all these forms.

## 2. Pluralist and Dialogical Hindu Theology

The Hindu religious view of pluralism and dialogism is the foundation or foundations of true religious harmony, as mandated in the following mantras of the Vedic scriptures.

- a. Respect pluralism (differences) of religions/beliefs and cultures and realize shared prosperity.  
Give appreciation to your people who speak various regional languages and who adhere to multiple beliefs (religions). Appreciate those who live together on this mother earth. The earth, which provides balance, is like a cow that gives its milk to humanity. Thus, Mother Earth provides happiness, which is abundant to His people (Atharvaveda XII.1.45.).
- b. Creating unity and unity to achieve common goals (peace, prosperity and happiness)  
I unite your thoughts and steps to create harmony between you. I guide those who do evil to the right path (Atharvaveda III. 8.5.).  
O humanity! Be united and be in harmony like the unity of the gods. I have granted the same thing to you, therefore creating agreement among you (Atharvaveda III.30.4).
- c. I am realizing a harmonious and dialogical life.  
O humanity! Live in harmony and harmony. Be united and work together. Speak with one language, and make decisions with one mind. Like the saints of the past who have fulfilled their obligations, you should not waver in fulfilling your obligations (Rgveda X.191.2.)
- d. I am realizing a democratic life through deliberation and fostering mutual understanding.

O humanity! Think together. Deliberate together. Unite your hearts and minds with others. I grant you the same thoughts and the same facilities for the harmony of your life (Rgveda X.191.3.)

O humanity! I have the same concern. Cultivate mutual understanding between you. In this way, you can realize harmony and unity (Rgveda X.191.4.)

e. Develop a sincere heart and true friendship.

O humanity, I give you the qualities of sincerity, the same mentality, friendship without hatred, just as a mother cow loves her newborn calf, so you should love your neighbor (Atharvaveda III.30.1).

f. Develop true harmony, both with people you know and even with strangers.

There should be harmony with complete intimacy between you, with people you know, and strangers. May the God Asvina grant His grace for peace between people (Atharvaveda VII.52.1.).

In an effort to increase intra, inter, and inter-religious harmony based on humanist, pluralist, and dialogical theology, Svami Vivekananda's statement was quoted at the closing session of the World Parliament of Religions, precisely on September 27 1893 in Chicago, United States, because of the information conveyed by a very famous Hindu thinker at the end of the last century (108 years have passed) is always relevant to the current situation. The speech that shocked the world and received high appreciation was written by an American newspaper: "An orator by divine right and undoubted greatest in the Parliament of Religion" (Walker, 1983). This precious quote was also reviewed by Jai Singh Yadav (1993) as follows: "Much has been said about the general foundations of religious harmony. Now, I'm not just staking my theory. However, if there are people who hope that this harmony will be achieved through the victory of one religious teaching over the destruction of other religions, then to him, I will say: "Brother, your hope is just an impossible dream" (Mumukshananda, 1992).

In addition to the mantra mentioned above, it is necessary to understand the theological foundations of federal and state life as mandated in the Vedic scriptures and other Hindu literature to realize religious harmony in the context of national integration.

## Conclusion

Hindu theology in the Vedic scriptures and Hindu literature is called Brahnavidyà or divine knowledge, which teaches various aspects of divinity, especially those related to His creation, namely humanity, to develop a humanist, pluralistic, and dialogical life. A humanist life is based on the teaching that all creatures come from God Almighty and will return to Him. The realization that the àtmà (spirit) that gives life to every creature comes from the Almighty God emerged a teaching called Pañca Mahàvākya Upanisad yakani: Tat tvam asi (*Thou art That*), Aham Brahmàsmi (*I am Brahman*), Ayam àtmà Brahma (*This Self is Brahman*), Prajñàm Brahma (*Consciousness is Brahman*), from Sarvaikhalvidai Brahma (*All indeed is Brahman*). The Vedic scriptures and Hindu literature mandate the realization of diversity (pluralism) and to foster true harmony, developing a dialogical attitude by deliberation to reach consensus to realize shared goals.

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