



Many Many Many Gods of Hinduism: Turning Believers into Non-believers and Non-believers into Believers

Swami Achuthananda

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Swami Achuthananda's casual, concise tone makes this an excellent primer on Hinduism.

Hinduism is the third-largest religion in the world, but many misconceptions surround it. With more than 330 million personal gods, the unfamiliar can find Hinduism overwhelming. Swami Achuthananda sheds light on this 5,000-year-old religion with humor and in plain language, offering an interesting and smooth introduction to a fascinating spiritual philosophy in *Many Many Many Gods of Hinduism*.

"In India, the religion is the culture and the culture is the religion," asserts Swami Achuthananda. "You cannot learn one without understanding the other." He has organized his book into three sections: Culture, Concepts, and Controversies. This structure allows readers to develop a foundation of knowledge about the history and culture of India in order to fully understand the ideologies of Hinduism. Section topics are presented in short lessons, each two to five pages in length, which are easily digestible. The author's casual tone delivers information in a clear and concise manner for those just beginning to learn about Hinduism. Though a list of references is not provided, it is clear that a great deal of research has been done to present a wide range of information.

In placing controversial topics at the end of the book, Swami Achuthananda dangles the carrot of a juicy payoff to propel the reader through the book. Not one to shy away from a difficult topic, he takes on, for example, several scholars of Hinduism who he feels misrepresent the religion. His love and respect for India and Hinduism is evident in his passionate dispute of academic works that he believes perpetuate misconceptions about the religion rather than present well-researched and balanced information and analysis. He takes particular exception with Wendy Doniger, an influential professor he calls the "Holy Queen of Sleaze," for what he perceives as an obsession with sex in Sanskrit texts.

Overall, this book is an excellent introduction for anyone interested in learning about Hinduism. Its short chapters make it easy to read selections as time permits, and Swami Achuthananda's casual and humorous voice makes presented concepts easy to follow. While the book's index is helpful, a glossary of terms unfamiliar to those new to the religion would be a useful addition, and an author's biography would also be welcome.

For those who find themselves drawn to join the religion, Swami Achuthananda offers this advice: "Once you have officially joined the Hindu fold, it's time to honor the age-old Hindu tradition by mounting an idol of Lord Ganesha in your car. From now on, may all your journeys be auspicious."

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (December 18, 2013)

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