

Vaishnavism

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Vaishnavism

- Heart of Hinduism - majority followers
- As old as Vedas/eternal Sanatan Dharma
- Supreme GOD (Brahm)- Vishnu and his incarnations: Ram, Krishna
- Started becoming weaker with the arrival of Kaliyuga- Blind rituals and animal sacrifices in the name of Vedas resulted in emergence and growth of Jainism and Buddhism
- Revival of the authority of the Upanishads and other Vedic literatures started by Shankarcharya and later on by Vaishnav Acharyas (Ramanujacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya)
- Reestablishment of Vaishnavism started in the 6th /7th century by the 12 Alvars and later on formally by great divine Acharyas (from 11th century)
- Acharyas were great divine human incarnations of Brahm/Vishnu

Vaishnav Deities vs Deities of other Hindus

- Vaishnavas worship Vishnu and his incarnations (usually as Krishna or Ram or as Radha and Krishna or Ram and Sita)
- Lakshmi (Radha/Sita) is the consort of Vishnu and accepted as the mother of the entire creation. Being inseparable from Vishnu, Lakshmi acts as the mediator between the soul & Brahm.
- Vaishnav Acharyas laid down the rules for the proper observance of festivals, fasts, vows & customs.
- Emphasis on Bhakti Yoga
- Shaivas worship Shiva (often in the form of the *linga*)
- Shaktas worship Shakti, also known as Devi (especially Parvati, Durga, Kali)
- Smartas worship five deities i.e. Vishnu, Shiva, Devi, Ganesh, and Surya (Shankaracharya tradition)

Vaishnav Scriptures and Beliefs

- Believe in scriptures as the absolute
 - Vedas and Upanishads
 - Vishnu purana
 - Mahabharat
 - Bhagvad Gita
 - Srimad Bhagvatam
 - Ramayana etc
- Concept of personal GOD (Special relationship with Brahm)
- Rebirth until “Moksha” - the ultimate aim and can be achieved through:

Bhakti (continuous thinking) about Vishnu

Prapati (total immersion/surrender) to Vishnu

Vaishnav Traditions

Guru Parampara

Guru is essential but Guru is not GOD

Rituals – Tilak on forehead (V or U shaped) vs

- Horizontal Tilak for Shaivites
- Dot shaped Tilak for Durga (Shakti) worship

Mala – Tulsi beads (Vishnavites)

- Rudraksh (Shaivites)

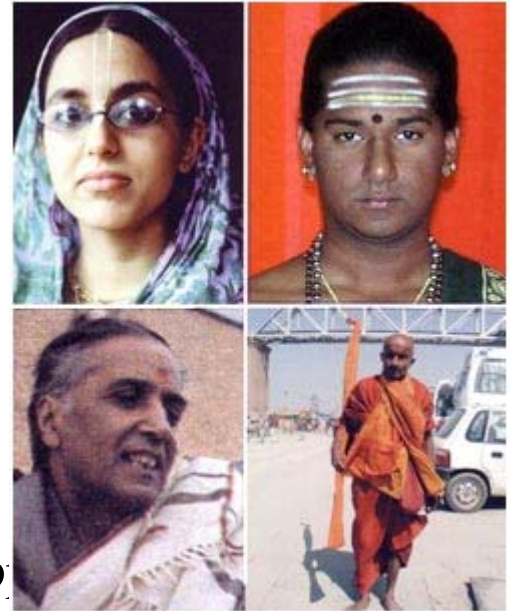
Clothing – Dhoti and un-stitched upper body cloth (*upavarna*)

Danda – Tridandi (Vasihnavism)

- Ek Dandi (Shaivism)

Worship – Bhagvan Vishnu or Narayan in different forms

e.g. Ram, Krishna, Ranganath, Vishnu, Satyanarayan,
Badrinath, Jagannath etc



Vaishnav Holy Places

- Most important holy places: Badrinath (Satyuga Dham) – In Himalyas

Dwarkapuri (Dwaparyuga Dham) – West Coast

Jagannath Puri (Kaliyuga Dham) – East Coast

- Other important holy places: Vrindavan Dham

Ayodhya puri Dham

Chitrakut

Shrirangam Temple

Thirupathi

Ananda Tirtha

Vaishnav Sampradays

- 4 Major Acharyas (those who wrote commentaries on vedas, Bhagvad Gita and other scriptures)- founders of Major Sampradays
- Acharyas debated with other pandits and were able to win them over with their arguments using the interpretation of Vedic scriptures
- Vaishnav Acharyas also spread their doctrines through sampradays
 - The Sri-Vaishnava sampradâya (Vishishtâdvaita/Sri)
 - The Mâdhva sampradâya (Tattvavâda, aka Dvaita)
 - The Vallabha sampradâya (Shuddhâdvaita/Pushtimarg)
 - The Nimbâraka sampradâya (Dvaitâdvaita)
- Other - The Gaudiya-Vaishnava sampradâya (Bhedâbheda)
 - The Smârta sampradâya (Advaita or Monism); Not all are Vaishnavas, but many are
- Vaishnav Acharyas integrated philosophy of Shankaracharya in to one unified explanation and some of them even opposed it as being incomplete and provided full explanation within the frame work of Vedas

Alvars (5th - 9th Century)

- Alvar = "immersed" in the experience of God
- 12 Alvars came from all walks of life and all strata of society in Tamil region and include one woman (Andal)
- Revitalized devotional worship throughout the subcontinent
- Traveled from place to place, composed exceedingly beautiful poetry to their Divine Beloved, Vishnu, as an expression of their love for Him
- Composed approximately 4000 Tamil verses
- Saint Nathamuni (9th -10th century) went to extraordinary efforts to recover these verses from near oblivion
- Nathamuni arranged them as the Divya Prabandham, or Divine Collection, set many of them to music, and rejuvenated the tradition of formally reciting them in temples
- Nathmuni and other Acharyas also laid down the rules for the proper observance of festivals, fasts, vows & customs

Philosophies of Different Acharyas (Sampradays)

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| | Advita Non-Duality (Monism) | Vishistaadvaita Non-Duality of reality | Dvaitâdvaita Duality Non- Duality | Tattvavâda, aka Dvaita Duality | Shuddhâdvaita Pure Non- Duality |
| Propagator/ founder | Shankaracharya (780 - 812) | Ramanujacharya (1017 – 1137) Alvars, Nathmuni, Yamunacharya | Nimbarkacharya (1125 – 1162) | Madhavacharya (1238 – 1317) | Vallabhacharya (1481 – 1534) Vishnuswami, Bilvamangal |
| Tradition/S ampradaya | Smarta | Shri Lakshmi | Sanakadik or Kumar | Brahma | Rudra/Pushtimarg |
| Philosophy | Jiva (Atma) is no different from Brahman (Parmatama) World (Maya) is an illusion Brahm is Nirakaar Worship: Ganesh, Sun, Devi, Shiva and Vishnu | Nirakaar Brahm is an aspect of Purushottam Brahm who is also sakaar. Jiva and Maya are also real. Maya is not an illusion but its effects are illusionary. Brahm can be realized within normal worldly activities. | Jiva and the world are separate (different attributes) from, and dependent on Brahm (controller). Chit- enjoyer Achit- object that is enjoyed (bhogya) | Vishnu = Brahm, World is real, 5 fold difference between God, living and non- living beings is an eternal fact All living beings are dependent upon Vishnu for their existence | Krishna=Brahm Jiva and World are real and dependent on Krishna's grace. In the absence of the effects of Maya- Jiva and Brahm are One not separate. |
| Emphasis | Yog and knowledge (but adored Krishna) | Humbleness and total surrender to Vishnu/Lakshmi. Devotion and Seva is the focus | Total surrender to Krishna & Radha | Goal of soul - selfless & wholehearted love & surrender to Krishna | Total submission to Baby Krishna with humble desire for His Grace |

Other Prominent Vaishnav Saints

- Tulsidas – 1497 – 1623 : Ram devotee
 - wrote Ram Charitmanas (Ramayan) in *Awadhi (dialect of Hindi)* to be understood by common men. While focusing on Bhakti – provides the knowledge contained in all scriptures (Vedas, puranas, Bhagvad Geeta, Srimad Bhagwad etc) in the form of poetry.
- Surdas – Krishna devotee- Famous Bhajans
- Meerabai – 1501- 1573 Krishna devotee – Famous Bhajans
- Ramdas – 1605- 1681 - Guru of Shivaji, wrote Dasbodh
- Chaitanya – Krishna devotee
- Narsi Mehta – Devotional poet
- Namdev – 1270 -1350
- Tukaram – 1608-1649 “devotional poems (Abhang)
- Gyaneshwar 1275-1296 : wrote Gyaneshwari at the age of 15

References for Further Reading

- <http://hinduism.iskcon.com/tradition/1201.htm>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaishnavism>
- www.Radhamadhavdivyadesh.org
- The lives of Hindu Saints
<http://www.dlshq.org/books/es93.htm>
- All about Hinduism
<http://www.dlshq.org/download/hinduismbk.pdf>