



Attitude towards Hinduism: A Study from Kerala State, India

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Abstract

This study was carried out among 1000 randomly selected Hindus of Kerala State in India using a questionnaire containing the measure of Attitude towards Religion, and different characteristics of the respondents. The data was analyzed as proportion, score and through statistical tests. The results show that 77.5 % of the respondents have medium level of attitude towards Hinduism, which can be considered as promising in a religion, where religious beliefs and practices are not mandatory. Majority of the respondents agree to the positive attitude items and disagree with the negative attitude items. Statistically significant difference in the mean attitude score towards Hinduism was observed with respect to the following characteristics, namely, age, belief in God, and the importance attributed to religion. The importance attributed to religion, and level of belief in God contributes to a significant proportion of variation in the attitude towards Hinduism score. Even though caste and education wise statistically significant difference in the score for attitude towards Hinduism was not observed, difference in scores between various castes and education levels is there. The probable reasons for the findings are mentioned in the article. It is not because of less attitude towards their religion that many Hindus in Kerala do not have the habit of frequent worship in many of the temples in the State, but probably due to a feeling of laziness for temple worship, which is not mandatory for Hindus. Though the Hindu philosophy holds that true Divinity is there in everything, which can be meditated on at any time or place, having a physical form to pray as a Deity in temples is beneficial to employ the five senses in worship. Hindu Acharyas in Kerala can probably utilize the attitude of people towards their religion to make them more aware of the relevance of temple worship as a measure of promoting not only Hinduism, but also the temples in the State. The utility of undertaking studies on various aspects of religions in different locations in India among people with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds is also highlighted in the article.

Keywords: Hinduism; Attitude; Kerala; Temple Worship

Introduction

Hinduism is the most practiced religion in India. Hindus make up 79 % of the country's population in 2020. India is one of the three countries in the world where Hinduism is dominant. India contributes to 94 % of global Hindu population. Majority of the Hindus in India belong to Shaiva, Vaishnava and Shakta sects. According to the 2011 Indian Census, Hindus make up 54.7 % of the population in Kerala State of India. Hindus represent the largest religious group in all districts except Malappuram District of Kerala. Legends about the origin of Kerala are also based on Hinduism. The earliest religion in Kerala was that of the Dravidian people, who had many Gods, heroes and perhaps a kind of caste system. It had similarities with Hinduism practiced in North India. By the early centuries, many Hindu or Vedic faiths entered Kerala, including Brahmanism with its rigid caste system and beliefs in deities such as Vishnu, Shiva and Ganapati. Many aspects related to Hindu beliefs are mentioned in the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics.

Works on Hinduism in Kerala were related to the beliefs and practices handed down from Vedic Brahmanism. It also includes medieval devotional traditions. A publication has covered the history of Hinduism in Kerala, providing various details about the religion [1]. Other than major temples like Sabarimala, Guruvayur, Kadampuzha etc., many temples in Kerala do not have significant number of regular devotees coming for praying, except during important events/days like festivals. This is the situation, even when discourses by spiritual Acharyas mention about the importance of temple worship, its relevance in elevating the power of the deities and the consequent blessings it brings to people who pray there. It is in this context that the present study on attitude of Hindus in Kerala towards their religion was carried out.

Methodology

The study was carried out among a randomly selected sample of 1000 Malayali Hindus in Kerala State of India using a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained the measure of Attitude towards Hinduism [2] with the responses-Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly disagree, which were scored on a 4-point continuum, and various characteristics of the respondents [3]. The data was analyzed as proportion, scores and through statistical tests.

Results

Attitude towards Hinduism

75 % and more respondents have given the answers - strongly agree, and agree (Total proportion giving these two

responses) for the following positive attitudes regarding Hinduism:

- Believes in Hindu religion
- Spirituality is important in life
- Has a close relationship with God
- It is easy to understand Hindu religion
- Knowledge of concepts of karma helps to lead a better life
- Is happy to be a Hindu
- Religion helps to lead a better life
- Find Hindu scriptures inspiring
- Hindu rituals are easy to understand
- Benefit is obtained by praying in temples and attending spiritual events in temples etc.
- Prayer helps a lot
- The possibility of rebirth after this life gives hope
- Own experience and that of meditators shows that meditation gives good results
- Have understood the benefits of yoga practice
- Hinduism is relevant in the modern world

87.5 percent and more respondents have disagreed and strongly disagreed with the following negative attitudes (Total proportion giving these two responses):

- Finds it difficult to believe in God
- Practicing Hindu rituals is a waste of time
- Spiritual texts related to Hinduism are out of date

Score for Attitude towards Hinduism

Based on the mean score for attitude towards Hinduism and Standard Deviation value, it was observed that 77.5 % respondents have medium level of attitude, 12.5 % high attitude and only 10 % respondents have low attitude towards Hinduism.

Age-wise Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score

Age wise difference in the scores for attitude towards Hinduism based on ANOVA is shown in Table 1. Those above 60 years of age have the highest score of 84.1, followed by respondents in the age group of 40 to 60 years (score of 79), and those in the 20 to 40 years age group (score of 66), with statistically significant difference in the scores. The F value is significant at $p < 0.01$ (Table 1).

Age group (years)	Mean score for attitude towards Hinduism	F and significance
More than 60	84.1	4.02; p <0.01
40 to 60	79	
20 to 40	66	

Table 1: Age wise statistical difference in the score for attitude towards Hinduism.

Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score based on the Level of Belief in God

Statistical significance of the difference in attitude towards Hinduism scores based on the level of belief in God which

was analyzed through ANOVA is shown in Table 2. Those who reported full belief in God have a high mean attitude score of 80.3; those with some belief have a score of 75.2, while those who reported no belief in God have a low mean attitude score of 39. The F value is significant at $p < 0.01$ (Table 2).

Level of belief in God	Mean score for attitude towards Hinduism	F and significance
Full belief	80.3	10.37; p <0.01
Some belief	75.2	
No belief	39	

Table 2: Statistical significance of the difference in attitude towards Hinduism score based on the level of belief in God.

Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score based on the Importance of "Nama Japa"

Those who believe that "Nama Japa" will lead to more blessings of God have the highest mean attitude score (84.7),

followed by the score of 74.2 for those who feel that other methods of worship will also contribute to more blessings. Statistically significant difference in the scores is also evident (Table 3).

Mean score for attitude towards Hinduism of respondents who	
Believe that "Nama Japa" will contribute to more blessings of God	Believe that other methods of worship will also contribute to more blessings of God
86.7	74.2
t = 4.62; p <0.01	

Table 3: Statistical significance of the difference in attitude towards Hinduism score based on the importance assigned to "Nama Japa".

Caste-wise Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score

A strict social hierarchy through the caste system has formed among many Hindus in India. This has often made it impossible to move out of their position in this hierarchy, even though some changes took place later in some of the places. However, even though there are people of different castes in Kerala, caste-based disparity is mostly nonexistent in the daily life of people, except probably for political purposes. A major reason for this is probably the comparatively better education of people in Kerala, which also get them good jobs with a satisfactory income. Due to this, they may be having a more open mindset, preventing them from being segregated on the basis of caste. All the temples in Kerala provide opportunity for any Hindu to visit, pray and participate in spiritual programs, which may be contributing to religious

affinity. Even non-brahmins are allowed as priests in some of the temples. Under such a social setup, difference in attitude towards one's religion among different Hindu castes in the State cannot be expected. However, the results show that even though caste-wise statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism score was not evident in the study, those who belong to the "Nair" caste have the maximum mean attitude score of 80.8, followed by "Ezhava" caste (score of 79.7), and "Brahmins" with a comparatively lower score of 77.5. Those who belong to "Other castes" have the lowest attitude score of 70.6 only.

Education-wise Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score

Even though education-wise statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism score was not

observed, respondents having the highest qualification (PhD) got the maximum attitude score, while those with Plus Two/ Pre-Degree qualification had the lowest score.

Difference in Attitude towards Hinduism Score based on the Importance Assigned towards Religion

Those who reported that religion was important for them have a high mean attitude score towards Hinduism (81.6), while those who mentioned that it was not that important have a relatively low score (68.3). Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was also observed between the scores.

Characteristics of the respondents	Regression coefficient (r) and significance	R ²	F and significance
Importance attributed to Religion	12.53; $p < 0.01$	0.48	16.84; $p < 0.01$
Belief in God	11.69; $p < 0.01$		

Table 4: Results of Regression analysis of the importance of religion and belief in God on the score for attitude towards Hinduism.

Discussion

The results have shown that a very high proportion of respondents agree with the positive attitude items and disagree with the negative items considered in the study. Majority of the respondents are having medium level of attitude towards Hinduism. This implies that the Hindus involved under this study have a satisfactory attitude towards the beliefs and practices associated with their religion. Since belief in God, worship etc. is not strict in Hindu religion; many people may not be performing rituals like lighting lamps at home, praying at home and temples, reading spiritual scriptures etc. This might have probably led to majority of Hindus in this study having medium level of attitude only towards their religion. However, this need not necessarily be the case of other religions such as Islam, Christianity etc., where beliefs and rituals are mandatorily imposed mainly through the church. Hence, the relevance is there for more awareness creation on various aspects related to the religion among Hindus, especially youngsters, who are normally busy and stressed in their work, and hence may not probably have the time and motivation to understand them on their own. It would be worthwhile if such awareness programmes are conducted under the more effective "People's Participatory" mode, in which, after the initial awareness classes, the subsequent programme/s can have a session, in which the participants explain how far they have been able to adopt the knowledge gained from the awareness class in their life and also about constraints, if any in practicing them. Under this, instead of being just recipients of the knowledge transferred during the awareness programmes, they may produce better results due to a "sense of ownership" of the knowledge which they are able to transform into activities, rituals etc. in their life at least to some extent.

Contribution of the Importance of Religion and Belief in God towards Hinduism Attitude Score

Regression analysis revealed that the characteristics of the respondents, namely, Importance attributed by them to religion, and their level of belief in God contribute to 48 % (R^2 of 0.48) of the variation observed in the score for their level of attitude towards Hinduism. The regression coefficient (r) for these two characteristics is high (12.53 and 11.69 respectively), with statistical significance (Table 4).

Relevant aspects of the Vedas are quoted in important Hindu rituals such as wedding ceremonies. They are the source of many enduring Hindu thoughts. But, most of the Hindus are not aware of practicing them in life. About 40 % respondents in the present study also reported that are not sure about the importance of practicing Hindu religious rituals. In Kerala, there is no compulsory system for following the rituals of Hinduism. Hence, the need to be aware of them may occur for many of the Hindus. However, it is noteworthy that a total of 37.5 % respondents in this study strongly agree and agree to the importance of practicing Hindu religious rituals. This indicates the encouraging fact that some of the Hindus in Kerala have become aware of their religious rituals possibly by reading spiritual books, attending spiritual lectures, knowing them from elders at home etc.

The results of the study have shown that elderly people have better attitude towards Hinduism than youngsters. In Kerala, elderly people usually adhere more to the path of bhakti/ devotion than youngsters. Some youngsters also seem to have a feeling that they need to understand spiritual matters only after reaching a certain age or after retiring from work only, which is actually not true. Spiritual scriptures such as Bhagavad Gita show the right path for people who lack proper direction and are in a state of inertia with respect to their religion. In this context, religious teachers and gurus should try to improve the awareness and orientation of people, especially youngsters towards Hinduism. Enrolling the youth in committees of temples could also probably help to improve their attitude towards rituals and related spiritual aspects. This is very relevant in the present-day context, when many young people do not get / find time and interest to get involved in spiritual practices including temple visits. This appears to be important, since a study has

also reported about the lack of proper knowledge in temple rituals and Hindu culture in Kerala [4].

The results showed statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism scores based on the level of belief in God, with those who reported full belief in God having a high mean attitude score, those with some belief having a comparatively lower score, while those who reported no belief in God having the lowest attitude score. A stronger belief in God often leads to a more positive and committed attitude towards the practices and doctrines associated with that religion, including greater adherence to religious rules, a stronger sense of community, and a more profound personal meaning derived from faith. Conversely, a weaker belief might result in a more detached or critical attitude towards the religion itself.

The findings of the study indicate that those who believe that "Nama Japa" will lead to more blessings of God have the highest mean attitude score, followed by the respondents who feel that other methods of worship will also contribute to more blessings, with statistically significant difference in the scores. Chanting of Divine names or "Nama Japa" in Hindu religion is believed to help devotees remember and repeat a holy name or mantra to focus their mind and connect with God, and carries spiritual energy and significance. It acts as a bridge between worldly and spiritual people. "Nama Japa" reportedly produces positive mental tracks, helping people to gradually overcome spiritual darkness. A 1976 issue of Span magazine contains an article mentioning that experiments show that a person's metabolism changes when he/she goes to sleep. Blood pressure and other processes in the body function without any fluctuation. Next day, the person wakes up feeling refreshed. The article suggests that this state can be achieved by performing "Nama Japa" for 20 minutes twice a day. Chanting the names of Gods corrects all irregular body processes and enables good health.

India is one of the most segregated countries with respect to religion/caste system [5]. It was observed under the study that even though caste-wise statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism score does not exist, those who belong to the "Nair" caste have the maximum mean attitude score, followed by "Ezhava" caste, "Brahmins" and finally, "Other castes" having the lowest attitude score only. It is surprising that Brahmins rank relatively low in terms of the attitude towards Hinduism, considering the fact that religious practices and knowledge are usually more, as well as traditionally transferred among them in South India. The caste wise difference in attitude observed in the study cannot be attributed to better access to Hindu religious institutions like temples or religious practices for a particular caste, since Kerala does not have a strict caste-based system, except probably in politics. There are temples and other

related institutions controlled by different castes in Kerala, where people from other castes are also allowed to worship. In some temples, even non-brahmins perform poojas. Even though education-wise statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism score was not observed in the study, respondents with PhD got the highest attitude score, while those with Plus Two/ Pre-Degree qualification had the lowest score. Education positively influences religious participation and the importance of religion in daily life. Higher education can help shape a person's attitude [6]. Education is related to openness in life [7]. Higher education might have probably helped the respondents this study to be more open-minded, and thereby, improve the attitude towards their religion.

The results of the study have shown that those who reported that religion was important for them had a high mean attitude score toward Hinduism, while those who mentioned that it was not that important had a relatively low score, with statistically significant difference between the scores. Those who gave more importance to religion might have probably tried to understand more about it. Better knowledge could have contributed to a higher attitude towards religion. As pointed out by Dr. Rogers, the famous Sociologist in his Knowledge-Attitude-Practice concept, knowledge is the precursor for attitude formation.

The importance attributed by the respondents to religion, and their level of belief in God are the two characteristics, which are found to contribute to the variation observed in the score for attitude towards Hinduism? Higher importance attributed to religion and more belief in God might have probably motivated the respondents in the study to understand Hinduism better by reading scriptures, attending spiritual classes etc., which could have helped in improving their attitude towards the religion. The observations by the authors of this paper also substantiate the influence of more religious orientation on the interest of people to attend spiritual programmes organized at a temple near their house. People primarily form their attitudes from underlying values and beliefs (Personal beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviour).

Conclusion

The study has revealed that 77.5 % of the respondents have medium level of positive attitude towards Hinduism, which can be considered as promising in a religion, where religious beliefs and practices are not mandatory, unlike in Christianity or Islam. Majority of the respondents agree to the positive attitude items under the study and disagree with the negative attitude items.

Statistically significant difference in the mean attitude score towards Hinduism was observed with respect to the

following characteristics of the respondents, namely, age, belief in God, and the importance attributed by them to religion. The importance attributed to religion, and level of belief in God contributes to 48 % of the variation observed in the attitude towards Hinduism score. Even though caste-wise statistically significant difference in the score for attitude towards Hinduism was not observed, those who belonged to the "Nair" caste have the maximum mean attitude score, followed by "Ezhava" caste, "Brahmins", and "Other Caste". Similarly, even though education wise statistically significant difference in the attitude towards Hinduism score was not evident, respondents having the highest qualification under this study (PhD) obtained the maximum score, while those with the lower qualification of Plus wo / Pre-Degree had the lowest attitude score. The probable reasons related to various findings are mentioned in the article.

It can be inferred from this study that it is not because of less attitude towards their religion that many Hindus in Kerala do not have the habit of frequent worship in many of the temples, as observed in the State. This can be probably attributed to feeling of laziness for temple worship, which could be mainly due to the nonexistence of the requirement for mandatory temple visits for Hindus in Kerala. They may also be probably feeling that other modes of worship will contribute to the blessings of Almighty. Though the Hindu philosophy holds that true Divinity is there in everything on this universe, which can be meditated on at any time or place, having a physical form to pray as a Deity in temples is beneficial to employ the five senses in worship. A spiritual relationship or "Aatma Bandham" is presumed to exist between the manifest energy or aura ("Chaithanyam") in the Deity of a temple and the person worshipping there. In this context, Hindu Acharyas in Kerala can probably utilize the attitude of people towards their religion to make them more aware of the relevance of temple worship as a measure of promoting not only Hinduism, but also the temples in the State.

It will be worthwhile to carry out studies on various aspects of different religions among people with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in different States of India. The findings of such studies could probably help various stakeholders to understand the concepts of a religion

and the constraints, if any, in practicing / promoting it. This could also be useful for policy makers, religious and other related institutions to formulate and implement necessary programmes to promote religions in a better and fruitful manner among people in the country. This may probably help to reduce religion / caste-based rivalries among people of different religions/castes in the country. Non-availability of sufficient scientifically backed location / socio-economic background / culture specific data base related to religions is a draw back at present in a country like India having a large population, which is spread out among different religions and castes.

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