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# What “Makes” a Religion?:

## Interactions of Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy in Hinduism

*Eva Rosenthal*

### *Abstract*

*This paper explores the complexities of the following question: In being Hindu, in what ways does one “practice” and in what ways does one “believe?” To what extent are ancient texts considered an un-debatable “source” for faith in divine presence? Gaining an understanding of what these texts are and how exactly they relate to both ritual and belief (because, as we will come to find, both ritual and belief are present in every facet of Hindu worship; what we are looking at is their interaction with one another and which seems to be of more importance in each given circumstance) will be instrumental to exploration of the “bigger question.”*

Those who have grown up within any given religious tradition often grapple with the question of what makes them a “good” Christian, Muslim, Jew, or whatever their religion might be. In weighing such a subjective and introspective question over and over again in their minds, new questions often arise, such as, “How often to I attend services? When was the last time that I got myself out to church, to mosque, or to synagogue?” They might then wander to the bigger questions: “Do I even believe in God, or in heaven? Do I need to believe in those things in order to call myself a Christian, Jew or Muslim?” Such questions, while very commonly asked by people of Abrahamic faiths to this very day, sometimes seem to shift and permute into new questions when we ask them of a Hindu. A Hindu, when asked those same introspective questions to discern whether or not they are a “good” Hindu, might press further and specify based on the situationally-sensitive aspect of Hinduism. They might say, for example, “Not many people in my family or even town attend temples in order to worship. Does this, then, make us bad Hindus? What if we worship in our homes instead? Is a worship valid if it is not officiated by a religious authority?” In other words, those questions that seem to be straightforward on asking seem to become even more complex. This paper, therefore, explores the complexities of the following question: In being Hindu, in what ways does one “practice” and in what ways does one “believe?” Does the proper conducting of the self, one’s morals, and one’s inner beliefs (also known as orthodoxy) constitute what it means to be a Hindu, or is it rather the observance of authorized Hindu ritual in the everyday (also known as orthopraxy)?

In questioning the relative importance of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, various other questions will naturally arise along the way. For example, is it the everyday

rituals or the *belief* in a certain divine presence as written in sacred texts and taught by spiritual leaders that is more important? How does this belief in the divine interact with and support the observance of ritual? These questions are explored in multiple subsections. I first look briefly at the texts included in the Vedas and the Upanishads. I then look at different Vedic texts, and their functions in different Hindu rituals. The Vedas and other ancient texts are used by higher castes in order to perform and to tell stories, and are heavily ingrained in Hinduism on an everyday basis, providing instruction and explanation for people on how to carry out earthly ritual. To what extent are ancient texts considered an un-debatable "source" for faith in divine presence? Gaining an understanding of what these texts are and how exactly they relate to both ritual and belief (because, as we will come to find, both ritual and belief are present in every facet of Hindu worship; what we are looking at is their interaction with one another and which seems to be of more importance in each given circumstance) will be instrumental to our exploration of the "bigger question".

I will then explore the different responsibilities and practices of Brahmins, the spiritual leaders at the top of the caste system, and apply the analysis to the other social castes. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the personalized beliefs and rituals of people not in the Brahman caste differ from those invoked in the elaborate Brahmanic rituals. I suggest that, across the board, Vedas are certainly a *source* of everyday ritual, and that they require a base belief in the very existence of otherworldly deities, but that these situationally-specific rituals have been routinized and solidified over time so that they themselves indeed constitute much of the content of what it means to be a "good" Hindu. In other words, the Vedas presuppose belief (orthodoxy), but their contents focus on practice (orthoprax). In addition, we will find that the Vedas are only directly utilized by Brahmanic figures, and are not largely referenced by the general public in everyday worship. Additionally, the transition to the Upanishadic era brings even more interaction between belief and practice into this conversation. Where sacred texts once clearly focused on the "how" and "why" of earthly ritual, the Upanishads brought a newfound focus on the eternal self, *atman*, and what comes before and after physical life on earth. There is no longer a focus at all on earthly ritual. Therefore, I ask questions of *how* the practice and belief balance shifts with the transition from the Vedic to the Upanishadic texts.

It is clear that, in trying to understand the respective roles of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in Hinduism, their relative importance must be placed on a flexible spectrum. Practice and belief interact with each other in different ways in every

aspect of Hinduism. Therefore, what I am attempting to do here is not to absolutely prove the concrete importance of belief over practice, or vice versa. Rather, it is necessary to look at the different “sources” of Hindu practice: ancient texts, sometimes referred to as “scripture.” It is also necessary, however, to look at how different groups of people define their own way of being Hindu, and whether it lies more heavily in everyday, earthly ritual, or in reflective, philosophical thought and an inner set of beliefs.

### **Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy in the Vedas**

Can the contents and resulting practices of different Hindu texts indicate their propensity toward either orthodoxy or orthopraxy? I would like to assert that texts such as the Upanishads, which focus on bigger philosophical questions such as life, death and the eternal self, articulate more the importance of “proper belief.” They often require a teacher or guide to help a willing student understand such big questions. Therefore, it is clear that there is a certain intrinsic goal in each of these teachings. In other words, the teacher has a specific enlightened idea that has been reached through an intense journey of experience and thought. The student is attempting to attain this level of enlightenment; only then can they move closer to achieving *atman*, their eternal self that outlasts earthly ritual. In tandem with this, I will also argue that the Vedas fall on the spectrum between practice and belief as well, but are much closer to the “practice” side of the spectrum. This is based on their focus in instructing people how to perform strictly earthly ritual in order to connect with different deities, to give them things and in turn to receive. Because the Vedas focus on such earthly ritual, and because much of their larger-scale end goal has to do with making life while on earth of higher quality for whomever is performing such ritual, I classify them on the spectrum closer to the “practice” side.

Since our analysis of ritual across social caste (but starting with the highest “priest” caste) is instrumental to understanding the relative importances and interactions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in Hinduism, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which not every group of people will be analyzed. What I mean by this is that I will not be delving into the exclusionary nature of both the Vedas and the Upanishads toward women in this particular study. While women were and are indeed excluded and denied participation in Vedic ritual and learning, this is a larger-than-life topic that should be (and has been) tackled much more in-depth in separate studies. For the purposes of this paper, which is to cross-examine the interactions between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and to determine what types of

lengths people go to be a "good Hindu", we will be sticking to a caste analysis of ritual and practice starting with Brahmins and ending with the "average" person. We must therefore acknowledge the fact that a large part of the population is being left out of Vedic practice and Upanishadic thought, and move on in analyzing the practices and thought that we can indeed access, always with their explicit sexism and exclusion in mind.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Vedas is the elaboration and specifics of the different texts. Many of the Vedas contain mantras that were chanted by priests or the *yajamana* during rituals, explanations, and regulations concerning those rituals.<sup>1</sup> The earliest Vedic text is known as the *Rigveda*, which comes from the word *rc*, meaning "verse". Indeed, the *Rigveda* is organized into verses, which include compositions that are spoken to different deities.<sup>2</sup> Such *suktas*, as they are called, are often spoken or sung to various deities in order to help one ask for different favors or good fortunes, whether it be rainfall, victory in war, or simply enough food to eat. The *Rigveda* sets up such appeals to the deities intentionally and in a way that allowed them to be sung during different rituals. The Vedas are often referred to as a "core" text of the Hindu faith, compared in importance with the Bible in Christianity, or the Qur'an in Islam faith. A few distinguishing differences between such texts in different religions should be acknowledged, however. For one thing, the Bible is the singularly most often used text in Christianity, but is not structured in a way that specifies how exactly different rituals should be performed. It is a collection of stories constructed in times of upheaval or questioning that were intended to bring different ethnic or social groups together within the Christ movement. The Vedas, on the other hand, are specifically arranged in ways that allow for rituals to be performed in specific ways. They were designed to be referenced and used during rituals in the future. I'm confident that the various scribes and scholars who wrote the texts included in the Bible never thought that their stories would be referenced thousands of years later for ritual in religious institutions. The Vedas, however, were composed partially for that exact purpose: so that people could know how to use earthly ritual to communicate with different deities or to simply deal with different side effects of being an earthly human (disease, famine, and the like). For example, the *Atharvaveda*<sup>3</sup> contains different

<sup>1</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Vedas, Hinduism, Hindutva* (Kolkata : Ebong Alap, 2005), 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> There has been much debate in studies of Hinduism over whether or not the Atharvaveda can be considered "Vedic enough" to be included in the set of texts known as the Vedas. Based on the popularity of certain beliefs and practices over the years, it has not been seen as necessarily as prestigious as the other Vedic texts. For the purposes of this paper, however, I have decided not to include this debate in my use of the Atharvaveda to make my argument, as it is still an ancient text which contains the use of ritual that is interesting to my thesis. I am less concerned with a text's level of acceptance on a popular basis and more concerned with what its contents reveal about the significance of orthodoxy versus orthopraxy.

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spells that are meant to help one overcome such earthly problems.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there were often priests, known as *adhvaryu*, who were assigned to carry out much of the manual labor during such rituals, such as arranging sacrifices a certain way, preparing fires and reciting different mantras or sung texts from Vedic texts.<sup>5</sup> Another piece of evidence that seems to push the Vedas further toward the “ritual” side of the spectrum is that, as Kumkum Roy specifies, they were composed “by and for ritual specialists.” The Vedas were first composed by those of *varna* identity (since Brahmin identities were not fully in play at that time). The later Vedic texts, however, were both composed and preserved by priests, who were extremely well-versed and practiced in carrying out ritual.<sup>6</sup> Here, we can see how, in order to be qualified to initiate and lead ritual described in the Vedas, it is assumed that one should be a priest of the highest class, a Brahmin. Such a person must be exceedingly well-educated in the Vedas, knowing them front to back in order to follow different procedures and to recite the texts properly. Here, it appears that “proper practice” is what encapsulates the Vedic texts: Hindu worship through the Vedas has less to do with an internal, philosophical journey, and instead with a material, physical *performance* of one’s faith, recognition of, and communication with otherworldly deities. It appears, therefore, that through practicing rituals that were laid out in the Vedas, one is both performing ritual and referencing ancient text as a source of such ritual. The Vedas are by no means purely utilitarian, as they have many qualities of lyricism (many of the texts are in fact meant to be sung).<sup>7</sup> In addition, I would argue that the establishment and maintenance of communication and transaction with a deity is in itself a creative act: one conjures and sees the deity through their prayer and ritual, and the deity sees them in return. The two worlds interact with one another in a creative manner. On the other hand, the Vedas are largely meant to help one create and maintain relationships with different deities, teaching them to serve the gods and goddesses in different ways so that they in turn may be served. It is true that this reciprocal relationship requires an inherent, base “belief” in the *existence* of otherworldly and incomprehensible deities, but the Vedas focus more on the earthly rituals that must be performed in certain ways than on the philosophical question of the *existence* of deities in the first place. Again, the philosophical base, the belief in otherworldly deities is presupposed in the Vedas, rather than a philosophical set of beliefs being the com-

<sup>4</sup> Roy, *The Vedas, Hinduism, Hindutva*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison, “Çle,a in the ,g Veda?: Poetic Effects in ,g Veda X.29.1,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 19 (2015): 157-170.

plete focus as they are in the Upanishads. Such issues as creation and the meaning of life are focused on more in the later Upanishads, which stress an individual journey to the discovery of the atman, the eternal self, with the help of a teacher.

### Ritualistic Brahminism

It is necessary to acknowledge the extent to which the ‘belief versus practice’ question is dependent on the specificities of different situations. The ways in which one goes about being Hindu depends not on some broad, overarching rule for how all Hindus should practice, but instead ties in with the intersecting identity of the person in question. What specific city, town or village do they come from, and who is the chosen god or goddess of that city? What is their position in the Indian caste system? Do they have the means to worship in the same way as someone of a higher social class would be able to? Geographical location, age, gender, and social class all contribute to the ways in which Hinduism is practiced. For this reason, we will explore the ways in which practices can differ and compare across different social classes, starting at the highest class, the Brahmin, or the priests of Indian society. In doing so, I present a “model” for Hinduism as a whole, and subsequently to see how the other social classes than Brahmins differ or compare. We will be asking how Brahmins utilize ancient texts as sources for the rituals that they perform, how those ritual-specific texts have shifted over time into philosophical texts focused more on belief than ritual, and finally show how ritual and belief work alongside one another to constitute one’s whole entire practice of Hinduism (again, across social caste). Again, the point here is not to invalidate ritual or belief in importance, but to look at the ways in which ritual and belief interact with one another and to ask ourselves questions based on such interactions. In what cases do Brahminic texts require a heavy focus on earthly, meticulous ritual? In what cases do they seem to more emphasize an internal and philosophical set of beliefs in a less materialistic sense? In asking such questions, I create an analysis, ranging from the highest caste, Brahmin, to the everyday, common “practicing” Hindu.

Brahminism did not have one singular starting point, but rather developed over a long period of time. It is a multifaceted idea that stems from Vedism, and that is known to contain both ritual and philosophical thought.<sup>8</sup> It is necessary for us to ask, then, what are the ways in which ritual and philosophical belief interact within Brahmanism? How do the two either convene or depart from one another? As we already know, there are passages of text added to each Vedic text, generally written in verse or in prose. These passages are addressed directly to the Brahmins

<sup>8</sup> Monier-Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India: Vedism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), 115-116.

and tell of the ways in which they should carry out the more complex ritualistic ceremonies, which were heavily focused on sacrifices to the Gods. Such sacrifices were meant to act on multiple levels: they were meant to first merely say thank you, then to nourish the gods so that they could have the energy and power to maintain the balance of the universe.<sup>9</sup> As we also know, however, humans wished to attain earthly goals in performing such sacrifices, such as a successful crop or the birth of a child. It is important to emphasize the intricacy of these rituals, as this segment of duties assigned to Brahmins can be considered earthly ritual. There was much emphasis placed on the importance of carrying out each tiny aspect of the rituals correctly and consciously, with *sankalpa*, meaning an active desire to attain the goals of the ritual and an earnest drive to push the ritual toward achieving that goal. These hyper-specific and complex rituals were meant to provide the person with a righteousness of soul and body to be pure.

Although the ritualistic aspect of Brahmanism is a visible and tangible aspect of Hinduism, in which we can clearly see the function and hierarchical importance that a Brahmin holds in society, there was a philosophical shift in the Vedas that began to question the effectiveness or necessity of earthly ritual, and began to favor attempts by the religious elite in particular to gain knowledge of their own spiritual selves, and thereby the spiritual essence of everything, known as *atman*.<sup>10</sup> This new tradition sought to emphasize a more individualized journey toward a knowledge of the eternal, spiritual self. Such a transition meant a challenge to the old Brahminic sensibility, because it undermined the need for such specific earthly rituals that had been performed in the past. The Upanishads, texts from this later Brahminic period, sought to help humans escape from their repeated existences on earth, and to let their specific inner spirits (*atman*) be reconnected with the ultimate Spirit of the Universe. What this reconnection had to do with was a continuation of the individual human spirit in existence, as part of an endless and absolute whole. Hindu speakers of the Upanishadic persuasion most often believed that this human spirit and the spirit of the Universe were identical, built from the same substance, and therefore are meant to be reunited with one another (“reunited” is the term used here because popular Upanishadic belief stated that our spirits have existed, completely united as one in the past for all of eternity, and that this spirit will outlast earthly existence forever).<sup>11</sup>

In order to emphasize the “belief” side of Upanishadic Hinduism, the two different bodies will be described. In order to truly learn the ways of the Upani-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 76.



shads, it was understood that one had to earnestly believe in two different body coverings. One was the "subtle" body, *ativahika*, which was thought to carry the universal spirit in three different forms through the vessel of the body, which allowed it to be thought of as the individual spirit. The second covering was known as the "gross" body, the *sthula-sarira*, which was the more physical vessel in which the individual spirit could reside.<sup>12</sup> Notice here that the body is no longer instrumental to attaining earthly things through ritual, as in Vedic Brahmanism, but is now merely a physical and lower-status vessel that carries the truly important inner spirit that wishes to move and reconnect with brahman. What needs to be attained is no longer outside, but inside the physical body. Such "internal" practices no longer require a strict adhering to a physical set of rules that a person can read; they require an internal knowledge and awareness of the individual spirit that exists within the self, and a *departure* from such earthly ritual in order to transcend the cycle of earthly existence. If one does not believe in these different internal and eternal spiritual presences, their soul's lifting-up from earthly existence and rejoining to brahman does not have a basis or a source. Here, therefore, belief, rather than written prose or practice, is the source of Brahmanism. The end goals of the Vedas and Upanishads are clearly at odds with one another: the Vedas seek to attain good and bountiful things in one's earthly existence and the Upanishads do not even seek earthly existence itself. What I would like to assert here is that the responsibilities of Brahmans gradually developed from more ritual-based practices toward more belief-based groups of intellectual development, in tandem with Vedic ritual becoming progressively more routinized over time. The different time periods in Brahmanism have reflected different combinations of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. What we have found here is that, while both Vedic and Upanishadic Brahmanism require at least a base amount of belief (as earlier mentioned, belief in otherworldly deities in the Vedic sensibility was required for the rituals to *mean* anything), the Upanishads require that the practices of the Vedas be left behind completely in favor of a complex, philosophical set of beliefs that allow one to be aware of (and thereby navigate) the path of their individual soul to brahman.

Now that we have explored the subtleties in the interactions between orthodoxy and orthopraxy through a comparison of the Vedas and the Upanishads, it is necessary to take a step back from Brahmanism as a whole. In asking the broad and difficult question of whether it is "correct practice" or "correct belief" that more accurately describes what it means to be a "good" Hindu, one must go beyond the elite caste and ask, "*What is it that the average Hindu person is*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

*actually doing in his or her everyday life that makes them Hindu? How do Hindus worship? What is it about their way of thinking that they feel makes them Hindu?"*

### **Symbolism in Everyday Worship of the Divine**

In understanding the ways in which Hindus go about worshipping in their everyday lives, we must ask ourselves how their varying icons and symbols of the divine function. We must distance our thinking about orthodoxy and orthopraxy from the elaborate and meticulous Brahmanic sensibility, and move toward trying to understand how Hindus who are not the religious elite think about and worship the divine. What we find in asking ourselves questions about Hindu worship, ritual and thought is that "everyday" Hinduism is steeped in both belief and practice. One must both sincerely believe in the presence of the deities with whom they attempt to connect with, and must earnestly have the desire to see and be seen by them, an act known as *darshan*.<sup>13</sup> These divine-earthly relationships, for the reason that they require personal desire and sincere belief, constitute a more balanced mix of orthodoxy and orthopraxy than the Vedic rituals that I previously discussed. This is not to say that they do away completely with ritual sourced in ancient texts, but simply to suggest that, due to the personal nature of everyday non-Brahmanic Hindu worship, a large amount of sustained, steady and sincere belief is required. Such a strong base in belief and devotion to various chosen deities is what allows for daily rituals to be performed with pure intent and ingenuity, whether such ritual takes place in local temples dedicated to the *gramadevata* of the village, in the home of the worshipper, or simply in nature. Based on such a balance and reliance between belief and practice, it is safe to say that everyday Hindu worship falls somewhere in the middle of the spectrum (albeit closer to the "practice" end) where the two interweave and interact heavily. We see that such everyday worship is still, however, a bit closer to the orthopraxy end of the spectrum. This is because, as ritual is performed repeatedly over a number of years, whether once a day or once a week, it becomes routinized and its sources and underlying beliefs can fade in importance. For example, in first bringing flowers and other small gifts to a small temple devoted to Ganesh as a young person, one will likely consider the underlying spiritual reasons for what he or she is doing. They might feel excitement or nervousness in first encountering the divine, and those feelings might stay with them as they adorn the statue, recite different songs or some such, and take *prasad* once the worship is over. After twenty years of worshipping that deity, however, it has become routinized with experience and repetition. The underlying

<sup>13</sup> Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Columbia University Press, 1981).

philosophical reasons for the worship simply will not be considered as often after enough times performing a ritual. It is now simply what is done. Ritual, in many cases, constitutes an implicit belief that does not need to be elaborately articulated or vocalized by interpretation or interaction with scripture. In other words, the sources have been covered up by repetition of the norms.

In Abrahamic religions, it is often the case that praying to images of God is considered a sin, a worship of "false idols." Only through engaging in a prayer and in deep thought about God can one access the one true, transcendent God. In Hinduism, however, images of the gods and goddesses are regularly worshipped, both in temples and in the home. The use of icons and symbols representing different deities is very common for Hindus, and does not constitute an improper practice in the least. Rather, such symbolism is the expression of the divine in that very representation.<sup>14</sup> When someone stops to worship a statue of Shiva at a roadside temple in Mumbai, therefore, they are acknowledging a divine presence in that very statue. It is not merely a representation of Shiva, some sort of substitute, but instead Shiva himself is engaged in their worship of him, taking in their image and personhood as they in turn experience his endless energy. As such, sculptures in different temples must be elaborately decorated with garment, jewelry and whatever gifts people have chosen to bring, depending on the importance of the occasion (in a more momentous ritual, such as a marriage or a birth, more elaborate gifts will generally be given to the temple).<sup>15</sup> Once a statue or other icon of the deity is properly adorned, lamps will be lit, as fire is considered to be a sign of divine energy. Once everyone has come into contact with the fire, there is usually a dispersion of holy water to each of the devotees in acknowledgement of the opposition of the primary elements, fire and water.<sup>16</sup> Once these rituals have been performed, the worshippers in question may go about their days again, whether they return home to care for children or run to work for the day. My point in describing the general sense of ritual worship by individuals is partially to show how inherently fulfilling they can be. One can nourish their faith and commitment to a particular deity in lighting fires, preparing food and gifts, and reciting different prayers with which they are familiar. This nourishment of faith and inner belief, in this case, is achieved through earthly ritual. This interplay between orthodoxy and orthopraxy nominally shows how the two can be at an equilibrium, existing in a space in which the two need each other to go on. In this next small section, however, we will see that, over time, such individual earthly ritual can become routinized and can gradually move toward the "practice" side of the spectrum.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen P. Huyler, *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

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As we have seen, much of what being close with different deities for Hindus means is indeed ritualistic prayer, and often gifts, directed at such icons of the transcendent. For example, flowers and food are often offered in puja rituals, in which the deity is believed to be metaphorically taking in the different gifts. In consuming the gifts, the divine makes them sacred in their contact with them. Therefore, after the ceremony, the worshipper takes in turn the sacred power now present in their gifts by eating part of the food, a part of the ritual known as prashad.<sup>17</sup> Through these rituals, one can maintain the balance of their lives, in addition to establishing a rhythm of worship. In such worship, however, the worshipper acknowledges that the deity they are attempting to connect with and honor is transcendent; they will never be able to fully grasp it as a whole. The divine is and always will be, in certain ways, beyond comprehension. It is understood that through prayer, a practicing Hindu can only hope to see different angles and glimpses of the divine. In addition, they can experience darshan, the act of seeing and being seen by a divine presence.<sup>18</sup> Generally, small gifts and adornments are offered to the divine representations as a gift, and the worshipper asks certain things from the deity in turn. What we can take from this particular aspect of everyday Hindu worship performed by non-Brahmins is that interaction with the divine comes as the result of individualistic ritual and prayer, not just hyper-specific and intricate ritual carried out by Brahmins. In this case, I would argue that ritualistic prayer to and temple worship of otherworldly deities indeed falls closer to the “practice” than the “belief” side of the spectrum. At the same time, however, it is clear that such temple or home worship of gods and goddesses is closer to “belief” than the practice-based Brahmanic ritual worship we have already learned about. For one thing, an individual worship of a god or goddess is not necessarily based in specific Vedic texts, and can be personalized in subtle ways to the needs and circumstances of the individual worshipper. In other words, an average practicing Hindu most likely is not flipping through Vedic texts and carrying out the exact rituals of a Brahmin during their daily or weekly temple or home worship. They are more likely singing songs that they learned from older family generations about a particular deity, reciting different prose that they are accustomed to, or simply offering their gifts, full attention and admiration to that given deity. It has less to do with rigidly “doing ritual right” than with finding one’s own connection with a given deity. However, the presence of the divine in Hindu deity imagery can help us to understand just how interwoven the divine is into everyday life.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

### Conclusion

At this point, we have explored ancient Hindu texts, Brahmanic rituals, and elements of everyday Hindu worship in trying to understand the situational relationships between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. What we have found in each circumstance may seem to be vague or discombobulating in ways. The model of a "spectrum" can seem not a precise enough way to clearly answer the question. However, it is important to recognize that such a question cannot ever have one straightforward answer. What we have found is that orthodoxy and orthopraxy both actually support one another in different ways. In many cases, such as those of early Vedic Brahmanism, belief and faith form a base for the arguably more important performance of earthly ritual. In other cases, such as those of everyday Hindu worship, a sustained and earnest faith is needed, but is often routinized, at which point the focus of one's faith will shift more to the "practice" side of the spectrum. At the end of the day, however, it is also necessary to acknowledge that one's faith is always inherently personalized, because one brings their personal experiences and perspectives to the way that they practice religion. What we have done is to provide a brief overview of some of the most important elements of Hinduism in order to see how orthodoxy and orthopraxy interact on a larger scale.

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