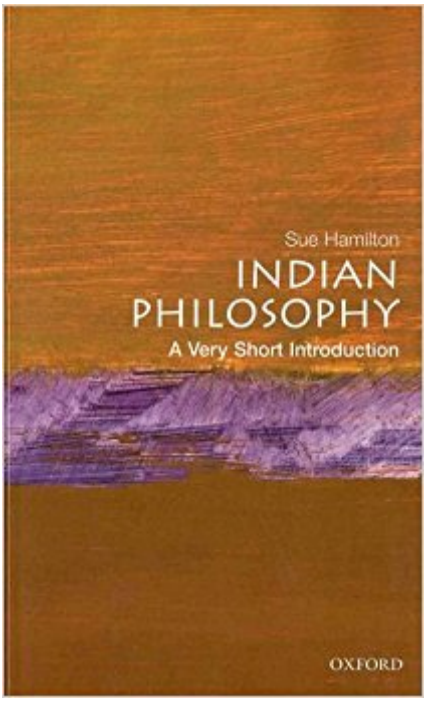
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# Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction




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## Synopsis

India has a long, rich, and diverse tradition of philosophical thought, spanning some two and a half millennia and encompassing several major religious traditions.In this intriguing introduction to Indian philosophy, the diversity of Indian thought is emphasized. It is structured around six schools of thought that have received classic status. Sue Hamilton explores how the traditions have attempted to understand the nature of reality in terms of inner or spiritual quest and introduces distinctively Indian concepts, such as karma and rebirth. She also explains how Indian thinkers have understood issues of reality and knowledge--issues that are also an important part of the Western philosophical tradition.About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

## Book Information

Paperback: 168 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (June 7, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0192853740

ISBN-13: 978-0192853745

Product Dimensions: 6.7 x 0.6 x 4.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #114,716 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #42 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Indian #226 inÃ Â Books > Religion & Spirituality > Hinduism #255 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Religious

## Customer Reviews

`Indian Philosophy by Sue Hamilton, the perfect gift for anyone who wishes to sort out their karma and nirvana' The Independent Weekend Review 02/06/01

Sue Hamilton is a Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Theology at King's College.

I've been looking for a book like this and have finally found it. Though NOT an easy read, Hamilton does not assume that the reader has background on the topic. How many Americans know

ANYTHING about the philosophical traditions of India? This book is a good place to start, if you are willing to sit down and concentrate on the text. Quotations from the various philosophers are well used.This text actually does what the title (and this entire series) claims to do: provide a readable short introduction. A good place to start.

This excellent entry in the VSI series would serve as a good introduction to philosophy in general, as it takes pains to define terms like metaphysics, epistemology, exegesis and soteriology, basic terminology that might be new to the non-specialist. It is a scholarly but very readable account, with useful illustrations.In the nineteenth century, specific schools of thought were presented to the West as 'Hinduism' or 'Indian philosophy', and these views - polytheistic and monistic - are very often still regarded as representative. This is rather like presenting Lutheranism as 'European religion' and Existentialism as 'European philosophy'. Another excellent book in this series - Hinduism, by Kim Knott - corrects the first misapprehension, and this present book corrects the second.Philosophy and religion have combined in Indian thought in a way that differs from the Western tradition - at least, since Kant and the Enlightenment. Thus, a work like this invites us to approach philosophical enquiry in a new way, or at least to recognize an alternative approach.Like all the authors in this series, Hamilton has the problem of encapsulating a vast subject into a small space. In Chapter 1, the author describes the selections she has made and why she has made them - in particular, why she chose to exclude Jainism. The book concentrates on the classical period beginning in the 5th century BC (interestingly, a history of Western philosophy would likely begin in the same era, with the same backward glance at the religious and mythical traditions from which it evolved). The 6 classical darsanas are mentioned, and enough authors and texts are referenced to give you plenty of scope for further study, if you wished.Highly recommended.[PeterReeve]

sent it as a gift to my brilliant granddaughter 16! Have not received any feed back yet.

Seven Systems of Indian Philosophy is much more accessible for someone wanting a short and captivating introduction. But well written and scholarly.

Perfect condition and great price!

Love it! The authors of the Very Short Introduction books do a great job, if done slightly dry, of laying out a quick-guide to whatever subject you'd like an overview of! Definately recommended if you are

in to life-long learning.

Arrived right on time and great quality for a good price. Will come back again for more books. Thanks alot.

Hamilton opens her book by invoking India’s past, which contains "a long, rich, and diverse tradition of philosophical thought," but hastens to remind us that the "role of philosophizing" in India is quite different from that of the West: India’s is a philosophy of "personal destiny," "spiritual quest," and not a "professional intellectual pursuit." Hamilton echoes the Orientalists of the early-20th century when she says that "what Westerners call religion and philosophy are combined in India": in other words, philosophy in India falls short of qualifying as an "academic discipline" (p. 1). Hamilton is probably right in pressing home the popular Western misconception about Indian philosophy that it is nothing but a "mystical," "magical" tradition of the East, where some "poor" Indians masqueraded as philosophers by elucidating their theory of the universe in "stories about an elephant supporting the earth and a tortoise supporting the elephant."’ Although the renowned modern Indian philosopher B. K. Matilal has tried to remove such misconceptions in one of his pioneering works, the tradition still remains. Matilal was not only responding to the 17th-century philosopher John Locke (who, incidentally, had not read any text on Indian philosophy but had only heard of the philosophy of ancient India) but was also commenting on the prejudices of some 20th-century Western philosophers, in particular one sweeping generalization about "philosophy" by Anthony Flew.Much water has flowed under the bridge since the time when such prejudices were warmly entertained, but the reluctance to pay due attention to rationality in Indian philosophy has not fully waned. It is a tribute to Indian philosophers like J. N. Mohanty and B. K. Matilal that Western philosophers have now begun to look at Indian philosophy beyond its "mystic" and "magical" charm. In her postscript (p. 139), Hamilton applauds those modern Indian scholars (read: Mohanty, Matilal, and Ganeri) who, owing to "the influence of Western ways of doing things," have tried, with the help of the Naiyayikas and the Buddhists, to overcome Western misconceptions -- for example, that Indian thought is "anything but rational" -- by "promoting Indian philosophy strictly in the sense of logical argument," and thus, only in the specific sense of logic and linguistic analysis, has it come to be recognized as an "academic discipline." One must applaud Hamilton, too, for her excellent effort in covering such a large number of topics in just 35,000 words!The narrative of the book throughout suggests an attempt to contrast Indian philosophy with that of the West, and more often than not Western philosophy becomes a yardstick to evaluate "the role of philosophizing" in India in its

"original" and "traditional" sense, that is, "religious" and "soteriological." Hamilton does acknowledge that, as in India so in the post-Greek West, too -- at least until Kant came on the scene -- philosophers, namely Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, and Hegel, mainly sought "to understand more about 'God's world"' (pp. 5-6). But the difference between the philosophy of the Christian West and that of India was that while the former tried to understand "God's world" through "rational means" the latter took refuge in soteriology as it dealt with personal destiny. What Kant did was to sharpen the process of philosophizing by separating belief from philosophical logic -- so much so that modern Western philosophers have almost given up on metaphysical questions, for they are considered by most either to be "too speculative" and beyond the pale of "intelligibility" or "intrinsically nonsensical" (pp. 6-7). And this is what has always been lacking in India. Hamilton virtually sums up the modern, professional way of "philosophizing" in the West: "Topics such as ethics and goodness, that earlier philosophers had discussed in the context of how they should live their own lives as they sought wisdom and understanding, tend to be considered and argued for as intellectual abstractions" (p. 7).Be that as it may, in the short space that she has been allowed, Hamilton has attempted to present almost all the salient points of what in the Western view is considered Indian philosophy: from reason and belief in soteriology to the virtues of the world renouncer, from the methods of communication and polemics to the fruits of meditative disciplines; and in so doing Hamilton has successfully met the objective of the VSI series: accessibility and stimulation. The reader will surely not be disappointed with this very short introduction to the complex world of Indian philosophy.

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