

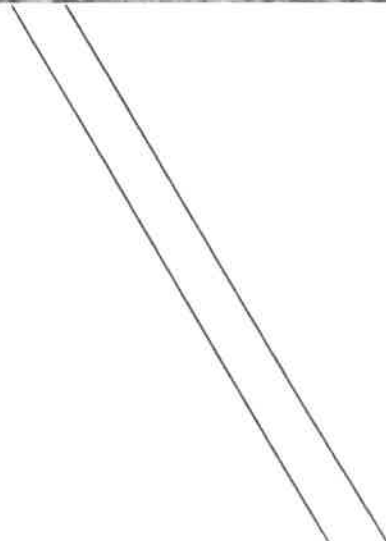
**Level of Assessment: Level 3 Sustainability**  
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**Worldviews Portfolio: Buddhism VS Hinduism**  
**Education for Sustainability**  
**AS 91736 Version 1**



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## Executive Summary

Buddhism focuses on improving a person's life for the better whereas Hinduism focuses on the search within one's self to finding the eternal truth. Both religions originated in the Indian subcontinent, both share a very long but rather peculiar and uncomfortable relationship. The Buddha was actually born in a Hindu family. The teachings of the Buddha created hope for those who had no hope of salvation and was therefore gained popularity in India and it helped release people from the oppression of tradition and orthodoxy. Despite the differences between the two religions that are alike in so many ways they both influenced each other in many ways. The Buddhist notion of non-injury and compassion toward all living beings took deep roots in the Indian soil, where Mahayana Buddhism took cue from the traditional Indian methods of devotional worship. Buddhism influenced the growth and the development of Indian art and architecture and contributed richly to the practice of breathing and meditation in attaining mindfulness and higher states of consciousness.

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## Section 1: Explanation of two different worldviews

**Buddhism:** The Buddhist worldview is basically monistic. The existence of a personal creator and Lord is denied. The world operates by natural power and law, not by divine command.<sup>1</sup>



**Hinduism:** Hinduism is a collective term applied to the many philosophical and religious traditions native to India. Hinduism has neither a specific moment of origin nor a specific founder. Rather, the tradition understands itself to be timeless, having always existed.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism focuses mainly on improving a person's life for the better. They try to enlighten (awaken to the awareness of one's ignorance) themselves as much as possible to live life to the fullest. Buddhism is the philosophy of awakening.

Hinduism is the search within one's self which is focused on finding the eternal truth. Truth of the world and one's self is most important in this religion. Hinduism comes from a Persian word that refers to the Sindhu River in North Eastern India. Hinduism is believed to have started around 4000 years ago. Buddhism comes from the word, buddhi, which means "to wake up", thus Buddhism being based off of awakening oneself. It is 2500 years old.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated in the Indian subcontinent and share a very long but rather peculiar and uncomfortable relationship, which in many ways is comparable to that of Judaism and Christianity. The Buddha was born in a Hindu family, just as Christ was born in a Jewish family. Some people still argue that Buddhism was an offshoot of Hinduism and the Buddha was a part of the Hindu pantheon, a view which is not acceptable to many Buddhists. It is however widely accepted that Buddhism gained popularity in India because it released the people from the oppression of tradition and orthodoxy. The teachings of the Buddha created hope and aspiration for those who had otherwise no hope of salvation and freedom of choice in a society that was dominated by caste system, predominance of ritual form of worship and the exclusive status of the privileged classes which the Vedic religion upheld as inviolable and indisputable.

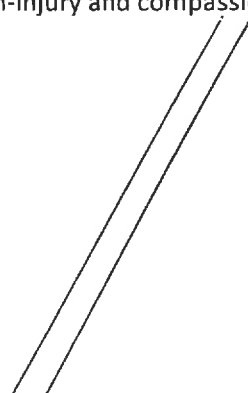
Long ago, over 1500 years ago, Hindu tradition accepted the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. However, strong rivalry exists between both traditions in the subcontinent for a very long time. The followers of Siva and the Buddha could hardly stand each other in the earlier times. There were instances of Buddhist persecution by Hindu rulers, though a great majority followed a policy of religious toleration. Sasank, a ruler from Bengal and contemporary of Harshavardhana vandalized Buddhist monuments and burnt the Pipal tree under which the Buddha got enlightenment.

Despite the fundamental differences between both the religions, Hinduism and Buddhism influenced each other in many ways. The Buddhist notion of non-injury and compassion toward all living beings

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ism.intersity.org/resource/buddhism-101>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism.html>



took deep roots in the Indian soil, where Mahayana Buddhism took cue from the traditional Indian methods of devotional worship. Buddhism influenced the growth and the development of Indian art and architecture and contributed richly to the practice of breathing and meditation in attaining mindfulness and higher states of consciousness. The Hindu tantra influences the origin and evolution of Vajrayana Buddhism.

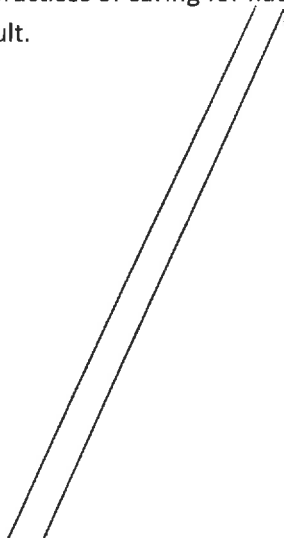
Hinduism is about understanding Brahman, existence from within the Atman, which roughly means “self” or “soul”, whereas Buddhism is about finding the Anatman - “not soul” or “not self”. In Hinduism, attaining the highest life is a process of removing the bodily distractions from life, allowing one to eventually understand the Brahman nature within. In Buddhism, one follows a disciplined life to more through and understands that nothing in oneself is “me,” such that one dispels the very illusion of existence. In doing so, one realizes Nirvana.

Hinduism and Buddhism have values and practices that are related to each other or similar, such as:

- Both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize the illusory nature of the world and the role of karma in keeping men bound to this world and the cycle of births and deaths.
- Both believe in certain spiritual practices like meditation, concentration, cultivation of certain bhavas or state of mind.
- Both hold that the whole cosmos is represented in the inner world a human being.

Buddhism: The teaching of non-violence, tolerance, moderation, generosity, and compassion is not limited to Buddhism. Most spiritual philosophies of the world, from indigenous animist thinking and Hindu yoga to branches of Islam and Christianity, such as Sufism and Liberation Theology, uphold the basic principles and ethics of the middle path. The ethical approach does not shy away from relatives of suffering at the individual or societal levels. It does not advocate passivity, denial, fear, fatalism, escapism or violence in the face of contemporary environmental, social and economic collapse. It calls for perception of reality with honesty and equanimity, exploration of the causes and evolution of current dilemmas and lessons to be banned from prevailing environments and social movements, it encourages rational action that is respectful of self and other and present and future generations.

Hinduism: Hindus revere sacred rivers, mountains, forests and animals, and love to be close to nature. For example, many Hindu villages have a sacred lake, and around it is a grove of trees to catch rainfall and protect the banks from erosion. These lakes and groves are places of tranquillity and sanctuaries for wildlife, but in the recent times the neglect of these simple techniques for gathering and protecting clean water has led to serious water shortages and advancing desertification in many parts of India. This is a common story in India: traditional Hindu practices of caring for nature are being forgotten and as a result human survival is becoming more difficult.



## Section 2: Analysis in relation to aspects of sustainability

There is an honest connection between Buddhism and sustainable living; nature is present in numerous parts of his teachings. The importance of Earth's elements and the connected organic symbiosis such as the water are significant insight to the right meaning of the Buddha quotes, *"To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one's own in the midst of abundance."* Today even water has been capitalized, this must end as we are a part of the water connect to our lives. Both sun and the water is the most sustainable sources of energy and has thousands of years supplied our daily basis need; however, there is another aspect to it Buddha teaches us; not to kill any living beings, including the grass, trees and mountains, that everything is connected and finally, the concept of true compassion.

In meditation, one of the main aspects and reasons to do it is the concept of being in the present time, nor in the past or future. When we walk we feel the goodness of the sun that warms our skin and raindrops cooing our face; this is to live in harmony with nature. When Buddha teaches us not to kill any living beings, he points out that other creatures have the same right to live in nature, and this is clearly to cherish diversity of ecology and balance. Buddha wisdom that everything is connected and that actions performed in a negative direction will have the impact now or in the future, here or elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Engaged Buddhism seeks to actively build a more compassionate, loving, nonviolent sustainable world. For engaged Buddhists, their faith transcends individual-centred belief, understanding, rituals and a search for "enlightenment" to also encompass social action across all dimensions of life. Drawing on basic principles, values and faith wisdom of Buddhism, engaged Buddhists have provided some helpful insights as well as concrete strategies and practices that promote "sustainable environment" and education for sustainable environment.<sup>4</sup>

The Buddha taught that respect for life and the natural world is essential. By living simply one can be in harmony with other creatures and learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of all lives. Buddhism teaches that if we wish to save the environment we must first analyse our lives to determine how our behaviour is destroying the world by depleting, overpopulating, and polluting the environment.<sup>5</sup>

Buddhism strictly limits itself to the delineation of a way of life designed to eradicate human suffering. The Buddha refused to answer questions which did not directly or indirectly bear on the central problem of human suffering and its ending. Furthermore, environmental pollution is a problem of the modern age, unheard of and unsuspected during the time of the Buddha. Therefore it is difficult to find any specific discourse which deals with the topic we are interested in here. Nevertheless, as Buddhism is a

<sup>3</sup> <http://buddhajeans.com/2013/05/04/the-connection-between-buddhism-and-sustainability/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/16%20Manuscript\\_Sweehin.pdf](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/16%20Manuscript_Sweehin.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Robert A White, "Spiritual Foundations of an Ecologically Sustainable Society," *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 7.2 (1995), Pages 47-74.



full-fledged philosophy of life reflecting all aspects of experience, it is possible to find enough material in the Pali canon to delineate the Buddhist attitude towards nature.<sup>6</sup>

According to Buddhism changeability is one of the perennial principles of nature. Everything changes in nature and nothing remains static. This concept is expressed by the Pali term *anicca*. Everything formed is in a constant process of change (*sabbe sankhara anicca*).<sup>7</sup> The world is therefore defined as that which disintegrates (*lujjati ti loko*); the world is so called because it is dynamic and kinetic, it is constantly in a process of undergoing change.<sup>8</sup> In nature there are no static and stable "things"; there are only ever-changing, ever-moving processes. Rain is a good example to illustrate this point. Though we use a noun called "rain" which appears to denote a "thing," rain is nothing but the process of drops of water falling from the skies. Apart from this process, the activity of raining, there is no rain as such which could be expressed by a seemingly static nominal concept. The very elements of solidity (*pathavi*), liquidity (*apo*), heat (*tejo*) and mobility (*vayo*), recognized as the building material of nature, are all ever-changing phenomena.



But there is sufficient evidence in the Pali canon to give us insight into the Buddhist attitude towards the pollution problem. Several Vinaya rules prohibit monks from polluting green grass and water with saliva, urine, and feces.<sup>9</sup> The Buddha and his disciples regarded natural beauty as a source of great joy and aesthetic satisfaction. The saints who purged themselves of sensuous worldly pleasures responded to natural beauty with a detached sense of appreciation.<sup>10</sup> The Buddha and his disciples revelled in the silent solitary natural habitats unencumbered by human activity. Even in the choice of monasteries the presence of undisturbed silence was an important quality they looked for.<sup>11</sup>

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Hinduism places the natural world on a high pedestal, worthy of utmost respect. Hinduism is very concerned with the relationship between humanity and the environment. Karma teaches that resources in the world become scarce because people use them for their own ends. People should unselfishly in order to maintain the natural balance and to repay God for the gifts he has given.<sup>12</sup> Animals and plants, mountains and rivers, all form part of the earth, and many are worshipped for the noble qualities they possess. E.g. Cows are highly revered that killing them is banned and those that no longer produce milk are retired, not slaughtered and special sanctuaries called goshalas have been created for them.

Ancient texts on Hinduism demonstrate an ecological awareness and great respect for the natural world. "Do not cut trees, because they remove pollution." (Rig, Veda, 6:48:17) , "Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere." (Yajurveda, 5:43) The Ganges River is the most sacred river to Hindus. It is worshipped as the Goddess Ganga in Hinduism, **BUT** it is one of the most polluted rivers in the world.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/desilva/attitude.html>

<sup>7</sup> Anguttara Nikaya. IV, 100.

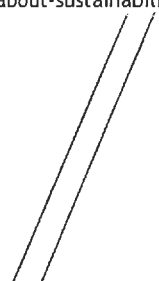
<sup>8</sup> Samyutta Nikaya. IV, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Vinaya Pitaka. IV, 205-206.

<sup>10</sup> Theragatha. vv. 1091-1145.

<sup>11</sup> Anguttara Nikaya. V, 15.

<sup>12</sup> <http://commonfuturethinktank.blogspot.co.nz/p/why-care-about-sustainability-multi.html>





### Section 3: Comparison of each of the two worldviews

Both Buddhism and Hinduism are well known religions. They are two of the most popular polytheistic faiths in the world. Some people believe them to be sects of the same religion, but they are mistaken. Buddhism and Hinduism have some similarities, but many things set them apart from each other as well. They are each their own religion in many aspects.

There are differences and similarities between Hinduism and Buddhism. Both religions believe in reincarnation, all living things will be enlightened at some point in time, there are many ways/paths to enlightenment, and there are spirits outside the physical world. These religions differ. In Buddhism there is no need for priests or rituals and there are no gods.<sup>13</sup> Buddhism and Hinduism both have their origins in India and Lord Buddha, the prophet of Buddhism, hailed from a Hindu family. In fact, Hindus even consider Lord Buddha to be a part of 'dasavatar' or 'ten reincarnations of Lord Vishnu'. However, there are quite a few fundamental differences between both the religions.

Both, Hinduism and Buddhism, are firm believers in nonviolence. In Buddhism the first five of the five precepts that all Buddhists must follow is to avoid any killing or harming of living thing. Nowhere in the Buddhist religion or in Buddhist scripture is violence described as a way of resolving conflict. In some instances firm Buddhist believers have refused to take up arms even if their death could result. Both religions express this concept of Ahimsa or nonviolence, as the most important virtue.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhism and Hinduism have a common past, and while there are many similar beliefs between the two religions, there are just as many differences between the Buddhist and Hindu religions. *Rebirth, Reincarnation, Samsara.*

Both Buddhism and Hinduism believe in (almost) endless cycle of births, known as Samara. They also both seek release from this cycle of rebirths. Hindus believe in everlasting soul (Atman) that is reincarnated more or less intact from birth to birth. Through spiritual practice, Hindus seek release (*moksha, also known as liberation*) so that the soul can join the Universal Divine Force (*Brahman, often simply translated as God.*)

The Buddha, however taught that there wasn't a constant soul, but a collection of feelings, perceptions, senses, and other intangibles that made up all living beings. The concepts of the lack of a constant soul are known as Anatta. For Buddhists, the ultimate goal is something more abstract: ending suffering by escaping the cycle of rebirths, and entering into a state of Nirvana. It is a common misconception to translate Nirvana as meaning "Paradise," or as "Heaven." Nirvana itself is something of an abstract concept. One meaning is "cool," which implies that one is far away from the fires of desire and Kilesa (*defilement*).

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<sup>13</sup> [public.wsu.edu/~brians/wcsyllabus/buddhind.html](http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/wcsyllabus/buddhind.html)

<sup>14</sup> <http://blebovitz.tripod.com/cc.html>

Both are very focused on nature, the things around them, though they both believe in several hells and heavens, or higher and lower worlds. Also, both religions focus on peace, and nonviolence towards all living things. They are compassionate, which ties into their focus on nature. Buddhism and Hinduism also believe in various spiritual practices such as meditation, concentration, and states of mind. Desire is the largest cause of suffering in both of the faiths.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Buddha's attitude towards Hindus*

Prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha was brought up in a traditional Hindu family. Before finding his own path, he went to Hindu gurus to find an answer to the problem of suffering. He followed the meditation techniques and ascetic practices as prescribed by the Hindu scriptures and followed by the Hindu yogis of his time. It is said that after becoming the Buddha, he showed special consideration to the higher caste Hindus especially the Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warriors). He exhorted his disciples to treat especially Brahmins with respect and consideration because of their previous births. It is said that certain categories of Brahmins had free access to the Buddha and that some of the Brahmin ascetics were admitted into the monastic discipline without being subjected to the rigors of probation which was otherwise compulsory for all classes of people. The Buddha converted many Brahmins to Buddhism and considers their involvement a sure sign of progress and popularity of his fledgling movement. Much later, we find a similar echo of sentiment in the inscription of King Ashoka where he exhorted the people of his empire to show due respect to the Brahmins.



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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/academic/article/313623/Buddhism-vs-Hinduism/>

#### Section 4: Complexities explored

Buddhism was originally practiced by the awakened one who taught them to end their sufferings, to get rid of ignorance, and to reach nirvana. Most Buddhists practice the 3 Jewels: The Buddha, The Dharma (teachings), The Sangha (community). Once the Buddhists follow the 3 Jewels, they will take a path that can distinguish them from a non-Buddhist. These teachings are linked to the Dhammapada and the Sutta Readings. There was more than one turning point in Buddhism. Firstly, his teachings were written down in many types of council and spread all over. Secondly, Emperor Ashoka of India introduced the teachings to Southeast Asia (3rd Century), this became Theravada Buddhism. Thirdly, Mahayana Buddhism appeared in India in the 1st Century CE. This type of Buddhism was a harsher version. And lastly, Buddhism spread to China, Japan, and Korea in the 1st Century, it then spread to the west in the 20th Century. Once Buddhism was spread over in the West, the people started to put their own twist to it. They lost touch of the main focus which was to reach enlightenment. Buddhism has not really changed over time. Its main focus has stayed the same over time. The main focus is to maintain enlightenment and to reach Nirvana.

Buddhist, like most of the great religions of the world, is divided into a number of different traditions. However, most traditions share a common set of fundamental beliefs.

One fundamental belief of Buddhism is often referred to as reincarnation - the concept that people are reborn after dying. In fact, most individuals go through many cycles of birth, living, death and rebirth. A practising Buddhist differentiates between the concepts of rebirth and reincarnation. In reincarnation, the individual may recur repeatedly. In rebirth, a person does not necessarily return to Earth as the same entity ever again. *He compares it to a leaf growing on a tree. When the withering leaf falls off, a new leaf will eventually replace it. It is similar to the old leaf, but it is not identical to the original leaf.* After many such cycles, if a person realizes their attachment to desire and the self, they can attain Nirvana. This is a state of liberation and freedom of suffering.<sup>16</sup>

Buddhism has come a long way since the Buddha was born till now. Even though many people have lost sight of his teachings, nuns and monks still teach his teachings and still try to find enlightenment in their life to reach Nirvana.<sup>17</sup>

Hinduism lacks any unified system of beliefs and ideas. It is a phenomenon and represents a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices which on one hand are akin to paganism, pantheism and the like, and on the other very profound, abstract, metaphysical ideas. Since religion and culture are nearly interchangeable terms in Hinduism, emotive expressions like 'bhakti' (devotion) or 'dharma' (what is right) and 'yoga' (discipline) are used to depict essential aspects of the religion.<sup>18</sup> Hinduism is not an organized religion, they have no single or systematic approach to teaching its system value. Nor do they

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.religioustolerance.org/buddhism1.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <https://prezi.com/f0x56zslk7fz/how-has-buddhism-changed-over-time/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hinduism101/a/tenets.htm>



have simple rules like the Ten Commandments to abide by. They are driven by practice influences through the interpretation and practice beliefs throughout the Hindu world.

Hinduism embraces a diversity of beliefs, a fact that can be initially confusing to westerners accustomed to creeds, confessions, and carefully-worded belief statements. One can believe a wide variety of things about God, the universe and the path to liberation and still be considered a Hindu. This attitude towards religious belief has made Hinduism one of the more open-minded religions when it comes to evaluating other faiths. Probably the most well-known Hindu saying about religion is: "Truth is one; sages call it by different names. Key beliefs shared among Hindus: **Truth is eternal** - hinds pursue knowledge and understanding of the truth, the very essence of the universe and the only reality; **Brahman is truth and reality** - Hindus believe in Brahman as the one true God who is formless, limitless, all-inclusive and eternal.



Hinduism is diverse in philosophy, mythology and practices. This diversity has come from a few millennia of development and integration of various sub-cultures. This dynamic nature of Hinduism makes it very flexible and it keeps adapting to times and climes. It is also amenable to be adapted to the temperament of the people who practice it. All these make Hinduism difficult to understand even by many Hindus. People of other religions and cultures find it almost impossible to comprehend Hinduism. This leads to a lot of misunderstanding, resulting in apprehensions. In this discussion, first various aspects of Hinduism as being practiced today are being presented. Then the dynamism of Hinduism is explained using language and cuisine as analogies. Finally, the problems faced by Hinduism today because of non-appreciation of the diverse and dynamic nature of Hinduism are discussed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <http://practicalphilosophy.in/2015/04/17/complexity-of-hinduism/>

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