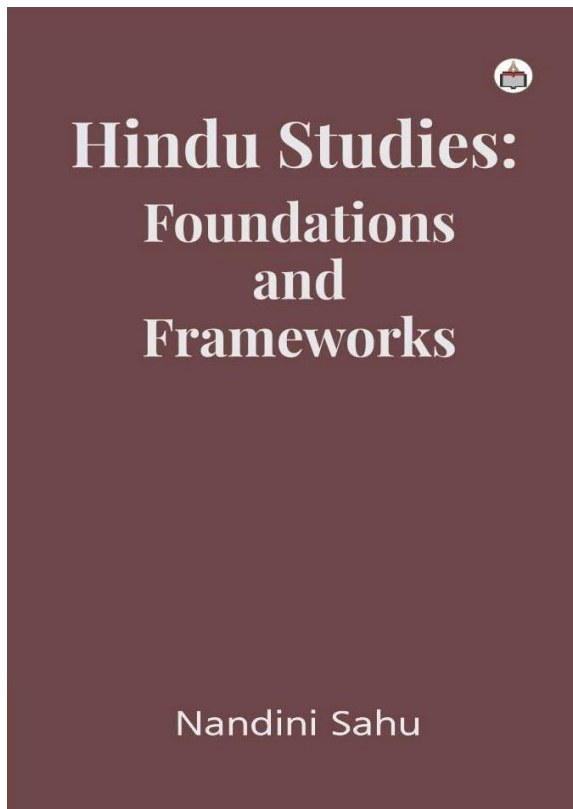


**Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks by Prof. Nandini Sahu, New Delhi: Authorspress, ISBN: 978-93-6095-358-4, 2024, Price-1200/-Pages-243**

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*Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks* is a meticulously planned exploration of Hinduism that seeks to offer a thought-provoking account of Hindu religious doctrines, rituals, and its socio-cultural significance. The book bases its arguments on primary sources such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Puranas*, that work as the theoretical premise; at the same time, the work acknowledges and critically presents the commentaries from important scholars of the field—both ancient and modern. With an interdisciplinary approach at its core, the book is structured in a way that ensures coverage of concepts like

cosmology, dharma, and yoga and meditation.

The author, Nandini Sahu, succeeds in covering both physical and metaphysical. Metaphysical aspect that she deals with may be seen in discussions on Atman and Brahman, whereas, discussions on temples and other architectures encompass the physical. Moreover, there are discussions included herein on various rituals associated with worships and festivals. This kind of inclusion makes the book interesting for general readers and scholars alike. Furthermore, there is an attempt to establish some kind of connection between the abstract and the concrete. Thus, there is more meaning in the discourses than the obvious.

*Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks* draws parallels between Hindu practices with the practices in other religions in the world. Highlighting the similarities and dissimilarities between Hinduism and Buddhism, and Hinduism and Christianity,

interesting discussions follow. References to Indian art, mythology, and folk, makes the discussions lively. The ten chapters of the book are thematically divided. Navigating through the various chapters is a journey from ignorance to pure knowledge.

The first chapter, “Introduction to Hindu Studies”, sets the tone and tenor of the book by introducing Hindu Studies as a multidisciplinary field that bridges theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and literature. Hinduism is inclusive—aligned with the idea of “sarv jan hitay, sarv jan sukhay”. The nature of Hinduism’s diversity, and its complexities, can be seen in the texts and scriptures—in Vedas and Puranas.

“Religious terms and literatures that encompass wide-ranging and profound philosophical, cultural and ethical impulses find a room in Hindu Studies which is the most promising platform of pedagogy and research in India” (Sahu 41). The second chapter, “The Hindu Texts and Contexts”, as Prof. Sahu herself clears at the beginning of this chapter, seeks to “embark upon an intricate journey through the labyrinthine interplay of theology, philosophy and the scientific theory of evolution” (Sahu 41). Two traditions – *sruti* (heard) and *smriti* (remembered) are discussed. Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and Smritis are studied under these two traditions – *sruti* and *smriti*.

A shared tenet among Hindu philosophical systems is their belief in the intricate workings of karma and the cyclical nature of rebirth – the cornerstone of their metaphysical and ethical frameworks.

The third chapter, “Hindu Philosophical Schools”, discusses six Hindu philosophical visions, the Shad Darshanas—Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. Concepts cardinal to the Hindu thought—the concepts of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita—have been discussed with great care to details and complexities. Any discourse on the philosophical underpinning of the composite culture of Hinduism requires deep knowledge and Professor Nandini Sahu displays the depth of her wit at her best. The expression of spiritual emotions happens through various moods, modes and mores in Hinduism. And the intersection and interaction of these expressions represents the religious totality within Hindu society. Chapter four, “Rituals, Practices and Devotional Traditions”, discusses this religious totality vis-à-vis Hinduism. Studying the variations in the different cultural and geographical contexts of Hindu rituals, understanding the connection between *Bhakti* and rituals, the connection between the sacred and the profane, etc., are some of the thrust areas.

The next chapter, “Hindu Social and Ethical Knowledge Systems”, delves into ethical

frameworks shaped by Hindu texts, addressing caste, gender, and *dharma*. It balances the examination of ancient interpretations with contemporary challenges, such as evolving gender roles and the dynamic nature of social hierarchies. Yet another engaging discussion follows in the sixth chapter of the book, on Hindu art, architecture and iconography. Art and architecture are celebrated as mediums through which spiritual and ethical ideas are expressed. Herein, the author discusses the symbolism of temple designs and the narrative power of Hindu iconography, drawing attention to regional variations amidst other things. Sahu writes, “The interplay between form and meaning in Hindu art serves as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms.”

Nandini introduces element of contemporaneity by bringing the discourse closer to the readers as it bases the discussion in modern age at this stage of the research—presented through this book. The seventh chapter investigates how Hinduism adapts to modernity, exploring its interaction with colonialism, nationalism, and globalization. Focusing on the Hindu diaspora, the book proceeds to examine the retention and adaptation of the Hindu traditions in multicultural settings. Practices like yoga and Ayurveda are explored as cultural ambassadors, while tensions between traditional practices and secular values are acknowledged.

Over a period of time, when the original idea of Hinduism got lost somewhere—due to conscious or unconscious ignorance of the Hindu scholars—such notions became popular: Hinduism, as a deeply intricate and multifaceted tradition, simultaneously upholds and interrogates social hierarchies, reflecting its dynamic interplay with societal structures. On one hand, its longstanding scriptures, rituals, and social norms have historically contributed to the perpetuation of hierarchical systems such as caste and gender roles. For instance, the caste system, rooted in ancient texts and societal practices, has often been justified and maintained through religious doctrines, creating rigid social divisions. Similarly, patriarchal interpretations of Hindu texts have traditionally assigned women specific roles within the domestic and spiritual spheres, often limiting their agency and participation in broader societal and religious leadership.

While the above mentioned is one the many examples of popular fallacies about Hinduism/Hindu Studies, while, as a matter of fact, Hinduism, at its core, offers a flexible and pluralistic framework that transcends rigid social hierarchies, and much of the perpetuation of such systems arises from societal misinterpretations rather than the essence of the religion itself. The caste system, for example, as envisioned in the ancient concept

of *varna*, was originally based on an individual's qualities and duties (*guna* and *karma*) rather than immutable hereditary divisions. Over time, socio-political factors distorted this concept into the rigid caste system seen in practice today, a transformation that cannot solely be attributed to Hinduism's scriptures or teachings.

Similarly, Hindu texts contain numerous examples that celebrate and empower women in diverse roles, ranging from goddesses embodying supreme power (*Shakti*) to historical figures who were scholars, warriors, and leaders. Vedic literature references women like Gargi and Maitreyi, who were renowned philosophers, and various sects within Hinduism continue to elevate feminine divinity as central to spiritual practice.

Moreover, the dynamic nature of Hinduism allows for continual reinterpretation and adaptation. Contemporary movements within Hindu society are increasingly challenging outdated patriarchal and caste-based norms by drawing on the more egalitarian and inclusive aspects of the tradition. This flexibility demonstrates that Hinduism inherently possesses the capacity to dismantle hierarchies, fostering equity and inclusion rather than perpetuating division. Therefore, the blame for social inequalities should be placed on historical and cultural distortions rather than the foundational tenets of Hindu philosophy. Within its scope and limits, "Class, Caste and Gender: Critical Perspectives and Discourses", the penultimate chapter of *Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks*, brings to the table its own perspective on these matters.

It is time for us to understand the emerging paradigms in Hindu Studies, such as digital humanities and environmental ethics. There is a need for inclusivity in interpreting Hindu traditions and emphasizing the role of technology in preserving knowledge systems. And, therefore, it is on this note that the author brings the book to a close with her concluding chapter, "Navigating New Frontiers: Critical Reflections and Emerging Paradigms". With the way the book closes its arguments, more books on the subject, and important books—as a reader I have a gut feeling—are surely lined up next!

Overall, *Hindu Studies: Foundations and Frameworks* is a valuable contribution to the field, combining scholarly rigour with an appreciation for Hinduism's spiritual richness. Its thematic structure and interdisciplinary approach make it an engaging read for students, educators, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of this ancient tradition.