MONOTHEISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HINDUISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SELECTED MUSLIM SCHOLARS: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

Numerous studies by Muslim scholars have explored the monotheistic nature of Hinduism, with contrasting findings. Several scholars, such as al-Mas'udi, al-Maqdisi, and al-Biruni, assert that Hinduism embraces the unity of God. Conversely, another group of scholars, including Abu Zahra and Ahmad Jasim, contends that Hinduism is fundamentally polytheistic. Additionally, some authors argue that Hinduism partially, rather than entirely, advocates for monotheism. Some Muslim scholarly works also suggest that polytheism has been established in Hinduism more recently. Consequently, readers of these studies may find the monotheistic concept in Hinduism unclear. This article applies the traditional narrative method, describing and discussing prior literature from contextual and theoretical perspectives, to categorically explore and present Muslim scholarly works on the monotheistic characteristics of Hinduism. It also aims to address the extent and nature of disagreements among Muslim scholars on this concept. The significance of this study lies in understanding the views of Muslim researchers on the oneness of God in Hinduism, which will aid in

developing policies that promote better coexistence within a multi-religious community.

Keywords: Hinduism; monotheism; Oneness of God; *Tawhid*.

Abstract

Pelbagai kajian oleh para sarjana Muslim telah meneroka sifat monoteistik Hindu, dengan dapatan yang berbeza. Beberapa sarjana, seperti al-Mas'udi, al-Maqdisi, dan al-Biruni, menegaskan bahawa Hindu meyakini konsep satu Tuhan. Sebaliknya, kelompok sarjana lain, termasuk Abu Zahra dan Ahmad Jasim, berpendapat bahawa Hindu pada dasarnya adalah politeistik. Selain itu, beberapa penulis berhujah bahawa Hindu hanya sebahagian, dan bukan sepenuhnya, menganjurkan monoteisme. Beberapa karya sarjana Muslim juga mencadangkan bahawa politeisme hanya berkembang dalam ajaran Hindu pada masa kini. Akibatnya, pembaca kajian-kajian ini mungkin mendapati konsep monoteisme dalam Hindu tidak jelas. Makalah ini menggunakan kaedah naratif tradisional, dengan menerangkan dan membincangkan penulisan terdahulu dari perspektif kontekstual dan teoretikal, untuk meneroka dan membentangkan karya-karya sarjana Muslim tentang ciri-ciri monoteistik Hindu secara kategori. Ia juga bertujuan untuk menangani tahap dan sifat ketidaksetujuan dalam kalangan sarjana Muslim mengenai konsep ini. Kepentingan kajian ini terletak kepada kefahaman pandangan penyelidik Muslim tentang monoteisme dalam Hindu, yang akan membantu dalam membangunkan dasar yang mempromosikan kewujudan bersama yang lebih baik dalam komuniti pelbagai agama.

Keywords: Agama Hindu; monoteisme; satu tuhan; Tauhid.

Introduction

The oneness of God in Hinduism is often discussed in theological discourses. [1] Scholars from various backgrounds have different stances on the monotheistic characteristics of God in Hinduism.[2] Undeniably, Muslims also discussed the unity of God in Hinduism at an early age. [3] However, the views of Muslim scholars on the oneness of God in Hinduism seem dissimilar. One group of Muslim scholars believes that Hinduism is based on a pure monotheistic system.[4]

In contrast, several Muslim scholars assume that there are only some elements of monotheism in Hinduism, rather than it being based purely on a monotheistic concept. [5] Furthermore, they clarify that there is unity in the divine

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[1] See Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14, also; "Theology", Hindupedia, http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Theology, accessed on September 14, 2022.

[2] Anantanand Rambachan, "The Oneness of God and the Diversity of Religions: A Hindu Perspective," 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_pm_Aqj4l4, accessed August 19, 2022, also; K. Srinivasan, *Monotheism of Hindu Religion: Unity in Diversity of Hindu Worship* (Virginia: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 2014).

[3] For instance see: 'Ali bin Husayn al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'adin al-Jawhar* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 1987), Mutahhar ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi, *Kitab al-Bad' wa-al-Tarikh* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Thaqafah al-Diniyyah, n.d).

[4] Iman 'Ali Muhammad al-Ghananim stated that several scholars believe that Hinduism is one of the monotheistic sky religions. See: Iman 'Ali Muhammad al-Ghananim, "al-Uluhiyyah fi al-Diyanat al Hindusiyah," *Journal Dirasat 'Ulum al-Shari'ah wa al-Qanun* 46(1) (2019), 221-223.

[5] It is noticeable that most Muslim scholars confirmed the monotheistic nature of Hinduism. They assumed that numerous pieces of evidence in the holy sources of Hinduism prove the oneness of the divine essence of God and the oneness of names and attributes of God. Some of them also believe that there is an oneness of worship too in some holy scriptures of Hinduism. For further details see page no. 252 onwards of this article.

essence of God or unity in God's names and attributes, rather than in the worship of God. However, the existence of the unity of God's worship is also claimed by several Muslim scholars. [6] Therefore, a traditional review of literature by Muslim scholars will help to understand the characteristics of God in Hinduism from various aspects, as well as to recognize the reasons behind the diverse stances of Muslim scholars regarding the claim of monotheism in Hinduism.

Additionally, at first glance, upon reviewing prior literature and studies by Muslim scholars, it seems that several were prompted to study the notion of the unity of God in Hinduism in comparison to the Tawhidic nature of Islam. Consequently, they used the Islamic term *tawhid* to describe the unity of God in Hinduism. It appears that these scholars employed the term *tawhid* to make the concept of the oneness of God in Hinduism more relatable to Muslim readers and audiences familiar with the Islamic term. However, these studies provide few reports investigating whether Hinduism is a monotheistic religion or if there are only some aspects of monotheism in Hinduism. Subsequently, this review paper intends to highlight the general views of Muslim scholars on the concept of the unity of God in Hinduism and to categorically outline the outcomes of these studies.

Thus far, no comprehensive traditional narrative literature review on this topic has been presented. However, a brief review was submitted by Ghassan and Azhar. [7] Nevertheless, their article did not cover contemporary studies on the issue due to its focus on only a few early Arabic texts. Therefore, this paper aims to comprehensively review both current studies and prior literature on the topic,

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[6] See: page no. 267 onwards of this article.

[7] Ghassan Taha Yasin & Azhar Hadi Fadhil, "al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus fi al-Masadir al-'Arabiyyah al-Islamiyyah," *Majallah al-Tarbiyyah wa al-'Ilm* 19(5) 2012, 116-131.

which may help determine the current state of knowledge and reveal unexplored literature gaps for further research.

Methodology

In a literature review article, the reviewer adopts various methods since the data are extracted from prior studies.[8] The method adopted for this study is a narrative literature review, where primary and secondary research and literature on monotheism in Hinduism will be reviewed.[9] More precisely, the authors intend to present a narrative literature review of prior works of literature to investigate and analyze the views of Muslim scholars on the monotheistic nature of Hinduism.[10]

Furthermore, the previous studies will be presented categorically. The authors have utilized categories based on the aspects of unity mentioned throughout these literatures, namely, the unity of the divine essence of God, the unity of God's names and attributes, the unity of God's actions, and the unity of God's worship. The rationale behind this selection is that most Muslim scholars of comparative religion have used these same aspects of monotheism in their literature. Moreover, they have compared the Tawhidic concept between Hinduism and Islam using the same terminology. Therefore, it is essential to use consistent terms or categories for a better understanding of

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[8] Bart N. Green, Claire D. Johnson & Alan Adams, "Writing Narrative Literature Review for Peer Reviewed Journals; Secrets of the Trade," *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine* 5(3) (2006), 103.

[9] A. J. Onwuegbuzie & R. K. Weinbaum, "A Framework for Using Qualitative Comparative Analysis for the Review of the Literature," *The Qualitative Report* 22(2), 359-372, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2175; Williams, J. K., "A Comprehensive Review of Seven Steps to a Comprehensive Literature Review," *The Qualitative Report* 23(2), 345-349, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3374.

[10] Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie & Rebecca Frels, *Seven Steps to a Comprehensive Literature Review: A Multimodal and Cultural Approach* (U.K.: Sage publication Ltd., 2016).

their studies and to present their views on the Tawhidic concept in Hinduism more thoroughly.

Another justification is that these aspects of monotheism, rather than others, appear to be more effective in dealing with topics related to the divine characteristics of God in comparative discourses in general and in understanding Hinduism's stance on monotheism in particular. Due to these reasons, scholars in this field have preferred to apply the same approach to explore and explain the concept of the oneness of God in Hinduism.

Procedures

To review the literature, a number of procedures were followed. Firstly, all relevant primary and secondary literature that discusses the monotheistic concept in Hinduism—such as general literature on religious topics by Muslim scholars, religious dictionaries, comparative religious studies, scientific dissertations, journal papers, etc.—is reviewed in this paper. Secondly, the outcomes of these studies are categorized into four aspects of monotheism to determine the unity of God in Hinduism as per the findings of the research. Thirdly, arguments, explanations, and methodologies will be reviewed and discussed accordingly. Fourth, some researchers suggest that criticism is not necessarily a characteristic of a narrative review compared to a typical review.[11]

Therefore, the authors' intention is not to impose any criticism on the literature and research reviewed, but rather to represent them thematically to analyze to what extent Hinduism believes in monotheism according to Muslim scholars. Lastly, irrelevant research items, such as studies on the polytheism of Hindu religions or monotheism in modern Hindu movements, will be omitted.

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[11] Green et al., *Writing Narrative Literature Review*, 103.

Literature Review

To begin with, the word 'monotheism' is a combination of two Greek words: 'mono' and 'theism'. Monotheism refers to the belief in one personal God as the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the Universe. The oneness and unity of God are often referred to as monotheism and Tawhid in the academic domain.[12] Tawhid is an Arabic word that literally means "unity, unification, and consolidate".[13] However, when the term Tawhid is used in reference to God Almighty, it means realizing and maintaining God's unity in all of man's actions that directly or indirectly relate to Him.[14]

It is evident that monotheism and *tawhid* are often used as synonymous terms in the academic domain because both words center around the concept of the oneness and unity of God. Nonetheless, Abdurezak A. Hashi opines that monotheism is a broader concept than Islamic Tawhid, as the Tawhidic system of Islam teaches not only the oneness of God but also the unity or oneness of worship.[15] As a matter of fact, Muslim scholars often refer to the term Tawhid and its classifications to explain the state of monotheism or the unity of God in Hinduism. Therefore, in this review article, the authors intend to use the broader meaning of monotheism, which is synonymous with Al-Tawhid as per the prior literature. Moreover, in this research, the authors have used quad-divisions of *tawhid* as below:

    i.   The Unity of God's Divine Essence
   ii.   The Unity of God's Names and Attributes

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[12] Abdurezak A. Hashi, "Between Monotheism and Tawhid: A Comparative Analysis," *Revelation and Science* 3(2) (2013), 23-29.

[13] Muhammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1993), vol.3, 446-450.

[14] Abu Aminah Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publication House, 2005), 17.

[15] Abdurezak A. Hashi, *Between Monotheism and Tawhid*, 23-29.

   iii.   The Unity of God's Action

   iv.   The Unity of God's Worship

These divisions of *tawhid* are based on the classification of some Islamic scholars.[16] At the beginning of each section, the definition and explanation of each division are provided.

The Unity of God's Divine Essence

The unity of God's divine essence means that the essence of God is one and unique. More precisely, God's essence does not need any cause, nor is His existence a contingent being. Therefore, He exists independently. The unity of God's divine essence also means that God is not constituted by any parts, so He is not dependent on any components. Additionally, there is no sort of multiplicity or any kind of plurality in His existence and divine essence.[17]

Muslim scholars have certainly explored the monotheistic nature of Hinduism since the early ages. Al-Mas'udi, in his book *Muruj al-Dhahab wa-Ma'adin al-Jawhar,* discussed monotheism in Hinduism. He indicated that Hinduism believes in the oneness of God's essence. He argued that Hindus offer sacrifices to the idols and stars only to get closer to God and to please one Lord.[18]

Al-Maqdisi further explained the monotheistic concept in Hinduism. He classified Hindus into two main categories: those who do not believe in any god or the creation of the world, called al-Sumniyyah, and another

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[16] For example: Ibrahim bin Muhammad al-Bajuri, *Tuhfah al-Murid Sharh Jawharah al-Tawhid* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004); Muhammad bin Ibrahim, *Sharh Umm al-Barahin* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2009); Abu Bakr Ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *al-Insaf fi ma Yajib I'tiqaduh wala Yajuz al-Jahl bih* (Beirut: Dar A'lam al-Kutub, 1986).

[17] Muhammad Yusuf al-Sanusi, *Sharh al-'Aqidah al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006), 261; Muhammad bin Ibrahim, *Sharh Umm al-Barahin*, 209.

[18] Refer to al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, 1:261.

group called al-Brahma, who have faith in God. The al-Brahma are further divided into three subgroups as follows:

  i.   They are monotheistic and believe in the oneness of God. They also have faith in the messengers of God.

  ii. They believe in the oneness of God; however, they worship not only one God but others too. Thus, they do not believe in the oneness of worship. Also, they reject the concept of messengers.[19]

  iii. This group of Brahmans does not believe that the world is created by the will of one God only; instead, they believe that there are other powers along with God, and they all participated in the creation of the world. So, they completely reject the unity of God's essence.[20]

Ibn al-Nadim clarified that Hinduism acknowledges the existence of one creator and sustainer, the Supreme God who created the universe. However, they also worship other idols besides this God, believing that these idols are not the God or part of the God, but they are revered as great and believed to help them receive the blessings of the Supreme being.[21]

Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni was a great historian who visited the Indian Territory. He endeavored to explore and elucidate the prevailing thoughts and concepts of Godhead among Hindus of that era. His

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[19] Similarly, Ibn Hazm (1064 A.D) also emphasized that a group of Hindus, namely Brahma believes in the oneness of God as Muslims. Nevertheless, they refuse prophethood. Ibn Hazm, *al-Fisal fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (n.p: Maktabah al-Salam al-'Alamiyyah, 1964), 1:63.

[20] Al-Maqdisi, *Kitab al-Bad'u wa al-Tarikh*, 4:9-19.

[21] Muhammad Ibn Ishaq Ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dar al-Marfa, 1978), 487-490.

work on Indian cultures and civilization is also highly significant among historians and theologians. Al-Biruni deeply described the beliefs of Hindus about God. He emphasized that Hindus believe in one and only God, who is eternal, without beginning and end. Also, His sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness, and He does not resemble anything, nor does anything resemble Him.[22]

By extracting several quotes from the holy resources of Hinduism, al-Biruni proved the unity of God's divine essence in Hinduism. He divided Hindus into two categories: Elite and Common. Unlike the Common people, the Elite strive to conceive abstract ideas and define general principles. They call God 'Isvara', self-sufficing and beneficent, who gives without receiving. They consider the unity of God as absolute, but believe that everything besides God, which may appear as a unity, is really a plurality of things. They consider the existence of God as actual because everything that exists, exists through Him.[23]

Similarly, the unity of God's essence in Hinduism is claimed by 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani. However, he discussed the monotheistic nature of Hinduism briefly. He

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[22] See Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni, *Tahqiq Ma Li-al-Hind min Maqulah Maqbulah fi al-'Aql aw Mardhulah* (Hyderabad: Da'irat ul-Ma'arif al Uthmania, 1958), 23.

[23] *Ibid.*, 20. In an article, it is presented by Vinay Kumar al-Biruni opined that the common people (uneducated) of Hindus lean towards this sensible world, and have an aversion to the world of abstract thought which is only understood by highly educated people, of whom in every time and every place there are very few. Those who march on the path to liberation or those who study philosophy and theology, and who desire abstract truth, are entirely free from worshipping anything but God alone and would never dream of worshipping an image manufactured to represent him. Furthermore, the author also commented that al-Biruni has a hatred for idol worshipers due to an opinion of al-Biruni where he expressed that "'when the heathen Arabs had imported into their country idols from Syria. They also worshipped them hoping that they would intercede for them with God'". Refer to Vinay Kumar, "India as Described by al-Biruni," *Indian Horizons* 62(4) (2015), 70.

tended to state that Hinduism believes only in unity of Lordship [24] rather than other aspects of monotheism. However, Ghassan Taha and Azhar remarked on al-Shahrastani's view. They stated that al-Shahrastani had conflated the unity of Lordship with the unity of God's worship and considered all followers as believers in the unity of God's Lordship only. In fact, each sect of Hinduism has a different faith in God than others. Therefore, al-Shahrastani's study on the division of Hindus towards monotheism is brief and simplistic.[25]

In *al-Diyanat al-Qadimah*, the author Muhammad Abu Zahrah countered al-Biruni's view on the concept of monotheism in Hinduism. He claimed that although al-Biruni cited much evidence from the sacred books of Hinduism to prove that Hinduism believes in the oneness of God, there are many contrary proofs in the holy scriptures which indicate that Hindus have faith not only in one supreme God but also in many gods (pluralism) and in a trinity alongside the one supreme God.

Thus, in this regard, Muhammad Abu Zahrah asserted that it could not be claimed that the concept of the unity of God in Hinduism is similar to the doctrine of *tawhid* in Islam. Conversely, contrary evidence should also be considered simultaneously. Muhammad Abu Zahrah further elaborated that there is nothing in the holy sources of Hinduism that proves the elite did not deviate from their belief in monotheism. Additionally, he admitted that it is not fair to completely deny the presence of the concept of

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[24] Unity of lordship stands for that the God is the sole Creator and true Sustainer of the universe. He is the One who is absolute in His actions, such as creation, sovereignty, controlling affairs, etc. See: Mustaffa bin Abdullah & Ahmad Zaki bin Ibrahim, "*Tawhid Uluhiyyah, Rububiyyah* dan *al-Asma' wa al-Sifat* Menurut Tafsiran Muhammad Rasyid Rida dalam *Tafsir al-Manar*," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 31 (2010), 49-64.

[25] Ghassan & Azhar, *al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus*, 125.

the oneness of God in Hinduism. In fact, some Hindus are as monotheistic as Muslims, even though this is rare.[26]

In another literature, Rauf Celebi also confirmed that Hindus believe in monotheism, but they differ from others in their belief in the unity of God's essence.[27] He claimed that monotheism in Hinduism is formed by the trinity; therefore, Hinduism believes in a broader meaning of monotheism.

On the contrary, discussing monotheism in Hinduism, 'Ali Zay'ur opined that all statements in the Vedas about God and His attributes indicate that Hinduism believes in polytheism. Furthermore, there is much evidence proving that monotheism developed later due to philosophical influences.[28] Therefore, initially, the Hindus had faith in several gods, especially nature-based gods. Later, with evolving thoughts, they began to believe in monotheism, in one Supreme Being.

Similarly, Shohreh Javadi opined that Hinduism initially believed in the oneness of God but has been distorted by historical events. The author argued that the history of Hinduism reflects a belief in the unity of the creator. He further demonstrated that the Hindu-Iranian Aryans were never polytheistic and idolaters; rather, they were unitarians and believers in the unity of God. The author concluded that Hinduism originally taught the essence of a unique God, but over time, it changed from

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[26] Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Maqamat al-Adyan al-Diyanat al-Qadimah* (n.p: Maahad Dirasah al-Islamiyyah, 1965), 24. It might be possible that Muhammad Abu Zahrah indicated here to those who believe in the unity of God's essence and refuse idol worship like followers of Arya Samaj. See Arya Samaj, https://www.arya-samaj.org/index.php?site=intro, accessed on Nov 29, 2022, Brahmo Samaj, Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahmo-Samaj, accessed on Dec 22, 2022.

[27] Rauf Celebi, *Alihat fi al-Aswaq: Dirasat fi al-Nihal wa al-Ahwaʾ al-Qadimah fi al-Sharq* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1983), 105-108.

[28] Ali Zay'ur, *al-Falsafah fi al-Hind* (n.p: Mu'assasah 'Izz al-Din, 1993), 119-120.

monotheism to idolatry. Nevertheless, its monotheistic nature is not similar to that of the Semitic religions.[29]

Also, in a comparative study of divinity between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, Ahmed Jassim Mohammed examined the characteristics of God in Hinduism. Regarding the trinity in Hinduism, Ahmed believed that Hindus were originally polytheistic and worshiped nature-based gods. Later, approximately in the ninth century B.C., Hindus adopted the concept of the trinity. He stated that the nature of God is one of the most complicated beliefs in Hinduism. The author also claimed that there are two types of tendencies in Hinduism, namely monotheism and polytheism.[30]

The concept of the oneness of God in Hinduism is also discussed by Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghafur 'Attar. He argued that all deities other than the one supreme God are considered as the attributes, appearance and manifestation of the supreme God.[31] Thus, if someone worships any of these lower deities, they are, in fact, worshiping the one Supreme Being. The author also presented translations of several hymns from the *Rigveda* to support his opinion. Thus, in his study, Ahmad confirmed the unity of God's essence in Hinduism.

In *Mushkilat al-Ta'lih fi al-Fikr al-Hind al-Dini*, 'Abd al-Radi classified the trend of Hindus toward the Godhead as follows:[32]

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[29] Shohreh Javadi, "Hindi Beliefs: From Monotheism to Polytheism," *jocO Quarterly* 1(2) (2014), 6-11.

[30] Ahmed Jassim Mohammed, "Divinity in the Hindu and Zoroastrian Religions," *Journal of College of Education* 14 (2017), 17-38.

[31] Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghafur 'Attar, *al-Diyanat wa al-'Aqaʾid fi Mukhtalif al-'Usur* (Makkah al-Mukarramah: al-Maktabah al-Muhtadin, 1981), 90-97.

[32] 'Abd al-Radi, Muhamad 'Abd al-Muhsin, *Mushkilat al-Tathlith fi al-Fikr al-Hind al-Dini* (Riyadh: Dar al-Faysal al-Thaqafiyah, 2002), 33-68.

i. Monotheism: In this stage, they believe in one Supreme God (Brahman) who created the universe. His existence is formless, attributeless, and cannot be defined by any word.

ii. Anthropomorphism: Hindus felt the need to trust in and worship a physical God. Consequently, they started to accept the concept of the trinity, formed by Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer.[33]

Razaleigh also categorized Hindus into Brahmins, who believe in monotheism, and others (non-Brahmins, i.e., Kshatriya, Vishwa, Shudra), who believe in the existence of many gods.[34] He further explained that most Hindus[35] are monotheistic in belief only, while they are polytheistic in worship. The research presented the historical monotheistic characteristics of Hinduism and concluded that monotheism is a core and primary element of Hinduism.

Similarly, Tariq Khalil Sa'di also divided the narratives toward the Godhead in Hinduism into two, namely, monotheism and polytheism, with the latter being

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[33] Swami Sivananda defines the trinity in Hinduism through three primary aspects of God: Brahma (creative), Vishnu (preservative), and Siva (destructive). There are three additional aspects: Virat (manifested), Hiranyagarbha (immanent or Cosmic Mind), and Ishwara (causal). These represent the sum total of physical bodies, minds, and causal bodies, respectively. God's activities include creation (Srishti), preservation (Sthiti), destruction (Samhara), veiling (Tirodhana or Tirobhava), and grace (Anugraha). See: Swami Sivananda, "God Exist," 1998, http://www.rsl.ukans.edu/~pkanagar/divine/

[34] Razaleigh Muhamat @ Kawangit, "Kepercayaan Monoteisme di Dalam Agama Hindu," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 17 (2003), 153-162.

[35] Because the non-Brahmins are more in number than Brahmin.

more popular and practiced by the followers.[36] He claims that in 900 B.C., Hindus started to believe in the oneness of God as they connected all of God in one and named Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. He quoted evidence from the *Bhagavad Gita* where a monk asked Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva who the actual God is. God replied that there is no difference among them; the one and only God appears in any of the three forms (appearances); thus, all three are one. Therefore, whoever worships one of them, worships the supreme God. So, the author opined that Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are three in one God in Hinduism, where one is the primary and supreme God, also called 'Atma'. He supported his argument by quoting from the Upanishads, which state that Atma is the main power behind everything in the universe.[37]

In an article by Salahuddin et al. on Abu al-Kalam Azad's view on Monotheism in Hinduism, the authors analyzed the opinion of the Muslim scholar Abu al-Kalam Azad on the monotheistic nature of Hinduism.[38] They stated that, as Azad had studied and dealt with monotheism in Indian religions, he believed that the philosophy of Indians is the philosophy of faith in one God. However, Azad claimed that the Hindu community does not accept this reality. Nevertheless, the great scientists of India believe that idols are merely stones that cannot provide any benefit. Azad also pointed out that the understanding of

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[36] Tariq Khalil Sa'di, *Dirasat fi 'Aqa'id wa Masadir al-Adyan al-Samawiyyah al-Yahudiyyah wa al-Masihiyyah wa al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Ulum al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.), 227. In this statement, Tariq Khalil agreed with Razaleigh who claimed that today, most Hindus are polytheistic.

[37] See Kamil Sa'fan, *Mu'taqadat Asiwiyyah 'Iraq Faris al-Hind al-Sin al-Yaban* (n.p: Dar al-Nada, 1999), 172.

[38] Salahuddin Mohd. Shamsuddin, Zuraidah Mohd Don, Mat. Taib Pa & Sheena Kaur, "Belief of Monotheism in Ancient and Medieval Religions of the Nations: An Analytical Study of Abu al-Kalam Azad's Writings," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19(10) (2014), 92-108.

divine forces in India varied depending on the affiliations of social class, and for the attainment of divine knowledge, it was required for ordinary people to worship idols, while leading personalities could choose the direct path to God.

Samsuddin Abd Hamid also compared monotheism in Saivism (a stream of Hinduism) and Islam. The researcher opined that every stream of Hinduism believes in the unity of God; therefore, the belief in a Supreme being is the core of the trinity in Hinduism. He further argued that, like Muslims, the Shaivites believe in one and only God, who is Shiva as the Destroyer, Brahma the Creator, and Vishnu the Sustainer. The researcher also compared the monotheistic nature of the Shaivism stream in Hinduism with Islamic Tawhid and concluded that both Shaivism and Islam are similar in their belief in the oneness of God.[39]

Also, the author further claimed that the original Hinduism significantly differs from what is now common in Hinduism. The researcher figured out that over time, 'Brahma' distorted the true essence of the religion, and the popular religion gradually fell in a trend to becoming superstition and idolatry. This shift resulted in the rise of Brahmacharya and the emergence of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva).

In an article, Ghassan and Azhar confronted the monotheistic concept of Hinduism from the perspective of Islamic scholars. These Arabic scholars discussed the historical evidence of the existence of monotheism in Hinduism and found that, in the beginning, Hinduism affirmed the concept of one Supreme Being (Brahma). However, later on, they started to believe in polytheism, which led to the worship of idols, fire, animals, and other elements.[40] Also, this article discussed the Islamic Tawhid,

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[39] Samsuddin Abd Hamid, "Koncep Monoteisme dalam Aliran Saivisme: Analisis Menurut Perspektif Islam," Master Thesis, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2012.

[40] Ghassan & Azhar, *al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus*, 5.

which is based on *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah*, *al-Uluhiyyah*, and *al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*. The authors affirmed that Hinduism believes only in *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah* and *al-Asma' wa al-Sifat* rather than *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah*.

A comparative study by Abid Mushtaq Wani discussed the monotheistic nature of God in Hinduism and Islamic scriptures.[41] The author opined that monotheism is the core of both religions. He further explored the evidence from Hindu scriptures that confirm the unity of God's essence in Hinduism. Unlike previous research, he explained that the Hindu scriptures present a figureless and formless God, who is alone and called Nirgun Brahman. Additionally, this God is referred to as Sagun Brahman when the manifestation of God through cosmic illusion is meant.

Additionally, the author states that almost all Hindus have the omnipresent aspect of God in their minds, combined with his non-dual oneness. They see the same God (Brahman) in various incarnations and idols. He also shed light on the Tawhidic nature of Islam and affirmed that the concept of singularity in theoretical physics, metaphysical singularity of the oneness of God, is the ground of existence in Islam. He clarified that God in Islam is not imminent in creation but is transcendent and beyond time and space because he created everything ex-nihilo, out of nothing. The author concluded that there is only one supreme deity in both religions. Brahman in Vedanta or Allah in Islam is the same existent.

In his historical analysis of divinity in Hinduism, Iman Ali Mohammad al Ghananim came up with several results; most notably, he suggested that Hinduism was one of the monotheistic sky religions from the viewpoint of some

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[41] Abid Mushtaq Wani, "A Comparative Study of the Concept of God in Hinduism and Islam," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 3(2) (2013), 1.

scholars.[42] Subsequently, it turned into polytheism from *tawhid* (monotheism). He also classified the approaches of Hindus towards the Godhead into four, namely: *Tajrid* (Unity of God), Trinity, Polytheism, and Pantheism. Additionally, like Rezaliegh and Tariq Khalil, the author opined that today, it is rare to find Hindus who believe in the monotheistic nature of Hinduism.

The Unity of God's Names and Attributes
Unity of God's names and attributes (*Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*) is one of the aspects of the Unity of God that is often discussed by Islamic scholars. *Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat* means to believe in the oneness of Allah's beautiful names and attributes. According to the Holy Quran, the unity of Allah's names and attributes implies that Allah is One in His names and attributes; therefore, no other being possesses one or more of the divine names and attributes in perfection.[43]

Fadlan and others further explained this concept, stating that *Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat* is to believe and admit Allah's names and attributes as He describes Himself in the Qur'an and as explained by His Prophet in authentic prophetic traditions.[44]

Many scholars believe that Hinduism does not align with Islam in terms of the monotheistic concept, thereby rejecting the notion of monotheism in Hinduism. However, a group of scholars opposes this view, asserting that Hinduism is indeed a monotheistic religion. The perspectives of these groups of researchers are notably

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[42] Iman Ali, "al-Uluhiyyah fi al-Diyanat al Hindusiyah".

[43] Asma Kounsar, "The Concept of *Tawhid* in Islam in the Light of Perspectives of Prominent Muslim Scholars," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)* 6(2) (2016), 95-110.

[44] Fadlan Mohd Othman et al., "Interpretation Methodology of al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di in His *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 5(5) (2011), 422-431.

divergent. Some scholars argue that Hinduism embodies certain aspects of the oneness of God while lacking others, whereas others contend that Hinduism encompasses all classifications and aspects of monotheism.

Al-Biruni described attributes of God in Hinduism, stating that Hindus believe in an eternal God who acts by freewill. He described God as almighty, all-wise, living, giver of life, ruler, preserver, and sovereign in a unique way. According to him, God's sovereignty transcends all similarities and differences, and He is unlike anything else, just as nothing resembles Him.[45] Al-Biruni further quotes from *Patanjal* describing God as Eternal, Knowledgeable (with nothing absent from His knowledge at any time), Most Exalted and High. He is absolutely Good and also known as The Speaker, reflecting His eternal knowledge.

Ahmad 'Abd al-Gafur 'Attar demonstrated, based on the *Vedic Hymns*, that all deities other than the one supreme God are considered as the attributes, appearance and manifestation of the Supreme God.[46] Therefore, if someone worships any of these lower deities, they mean to worship the one Supreme Being. The author clearly stated that all lower deities are manifestations of a single God, appearing based on His attributes. Supporting his opinion by translating several Hymns from the *Rigveda*, the author further explained that Hindus do not name or use any word to describe the supreme God because God is beyond the limit of any name, word, and meaning. Thus, no one can define or confine the Supreme Being with any words.

Likewise, Ghassan and Azhar also claimed the concept of the oneness of God in Hinduism from the perspective of various aspects and classifications of monotheism. The authors confirmed that Hinduism

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[45] Al-Biruni, *Tahqiq ma li al-Hind,* 23.
[46] 'Attar, *al-Diyanat wa al-'Aqaʾid*, 90-97.

believes in the unity of God's names and attributes rather than the unity of God's worship.[47]

Similarly, Arqam Raes argued analytically that the Vedas contain hymns that not only discuss the names and attributes of God in Hinduism but also clearly state that these names and attributes refer to only one God, the Almighty. [48] Therefore, the researcher believed that the Vedas verified the unity of God's names and attributes in Hinduism. He also presented several statements from Hindu scholars to support the oneness of the names and attributes of God in Hinduism.

The Unity of God's Action

Muslim scholars often categorize the unity of God into subdivisions. The unity of God's action is one of the subcategories discussed by scholars. According to al-Bajuri, the unity of God's acts means the belief that all activities and whatever occurs in the world are ultimately acts of God.[49] He further explained that this unity means that God has no partner in actions, just as in essence and attributes.[50]

Some Muslim scholars, with different aspects of monotheism, use the term *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah* to refer to the unity of God's act. *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah*, or the unity of God's lordship, means that God is the sole creator and true sustainer of the universe. He is the One who is absolute in His actions, such as creation, sovereignty, controlling affairs, etc.[51]

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[47] Ghassan & Azhar, *al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus*, 19:5.

[48] Arqam Raes Raesuddin, "Mawqif al-Fidat Min al-Uluhiyyat 'Ard wa Naqd," Ph.D thesis, Islamic University of Medina, Kuala Lumpur 2018.

[49] Al-Bajuri, *Tuhfah al-Murid*, 70.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Mustaffa & Ahmad Zaki, "*Tawhid Uluhiyyah, Rububiyyah* dan *al-Asma' wa al-Sifat*," 49-64.

Upon review of the prior studies, it is found that many studies by Muslims claim that Hinduism believes in the unity of God's Action. To start with, the author of *Kitab al-Bad'u wa al-Tawarikh* discussed the unity of God's action. He believed that a group of Hindus, namely, Brahma (other than al-Sumniyyah), believe in the oneness of God's action. He further clarified that among this group of believers, there are Hindu Brahmans who say that the world is not created by the will of One Supreme God; instead, there is another power along with the God who participated in the creation. This statement from al-Maqdisi clarified that some Hindus don't believe in the unity of God's actions.[52]

Al-Biruni is among those who supported the oneness of God's action in Hinduism. He made several statements backed by the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, which confirmed that the God in Hinduism acts by free will. Also, God is responsible for giving life, ruling, and preserving the universe.[53] On the contrary, Muhammad Abu Zahrah countered al-Biruni's opinion. He claimed that Hinduism is based on both polytheism and monotheism. He also claimed that Hinduism also believes in trinity.[54]

Also, Rauf Celebi supported Muhammad Abu Zahrah's view. He stated that Hinduism believes in a broader domain of monotheism formed by the trinity.[55] Discussing God's actions in Hinduism, Shohreh Javadi confirmed that Hinduism expresses a belief in the unity of the Creator. The author emphasized that Hindu-Iranian Aryans were never polytheistic and idolaters.[56]

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[52] Al-Maqdisi, *Kitab al-Bad'u wa al-Tarikh*, 4:9-19.

[53] Al-Biruni, *Tahqiq ma li al-Hind*, 23.

[54] Tariq Khalil and Samsuddin also agree with Abu Zahrah's view. They claimed that Hinduism merged all Gods into one God and named Brahma (the Creator), Shiva (the Destroyer), Vishnu (the Sustainer), three aspects of one God.

[55] Celebi, *Alihat fi al-Aswaq*, 105-108.

[56] Javadi, *Hindi Beliefs*, 1:2.

After classifying the notions of Hinduism toward the godhead, 'Abd al-Radi explained that there is a group in the monotheistic stage of Hinduism that believes the universe is created by one God.[57]

Also, in exploring the oneness of God in Hinduism, Ghassan and Azhar explained that there is a concept of oneness of Lordship in Hinduism. Nevertheless, the authors did not discuss the extent to which Hindus believe in the unity of God's acts.[58]

Abu Bakr Zakariyya demonstrated the unity of God's actions in Hinduism. [59] He explained that Hindus are divided into three groups regarding the creation of the universe.

1. There is only one God who created the universe.
2. There is one creator of this universe; however, this creator is other than the Supreme Being.
3. The universe is created upon the order of God by someone other than God.

The author further discussed various theories of Hinduism toward the unity of lordship. He stated that one of the famous narratives in the Vedic era was that Hindus had faith in the unity of God's action.

Arqam Raes discussed the concept of lordship in Hinduism and presented several statements specifically related to the creation of the universe.[60] He analyzed these statements and found that all the names or aspects mentioned refer to one God. According to Raes, these names represent different aspects of one Supreme Being. Moreover, he highlighted the weaknesses in reports that suggest many gods created the universe. Ultimately, Arqam

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[57] 'Abd al-Radi, *Mushkilat al-Tathlith*, 33-68.

[58] Ghassan & Azhar, *al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus*, 19:5.

[59] Abu Bakr Muhammad Zakariyya, *al-Hindusiyyah wa Ta'assur ba'd al-Firaq al-Islamiyyah biha* (n.p: Dar al-Awraq al-Thaqafiyah, 1432AH), 463.

[60] Arqam Raes, *Mawqif al-Fidat*, 434.

Raes concluded that there is sufficient evidence in the
Vedas to confirm the unity of God's action in Hinduism
during the Vedic era.

The Unity of God's Worship

The unity of God's worship is an aspect of monotheism that
focuses on worshipping and offering *'ibadah* (devotional
acts) to one God. Al-Baqillani explained that the unity of
God's worship means there is no god beside Him and no
one is worthy of worship except Him. This concept
emphasizes that all acts of devotion, reverence, and worship
should be directed exclusively towards the one Supreme
Being, rejecting the worship of any other deities or
entities.[61]

In other words, the unity of God's worship is also
referred to as *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah*. Sajid Shapoo explained
that *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* is "the confession that God has
the essential right to be worshipped".[62] In reference to Ibn
Jarir al-Tabari's division of *Tawhid*, Asma Kounser
explained that the *Tawhid al-Rububiyah* is the devotion of
all acts of worship to Allah alone.[63]

Upon review of early works by Muslim scholars, it
seems that most of them refuse the existence of *Tawhid al-
Uluhiyyah* in Hinduism. In *Kitab al-Bad'u wa al-Tawarikh*,
al-Maqdisi opined that among Hindus, a group of
monotheistic Brahmans believes in the oneness of God, and
they also believe in the creation of the world by one single
God; nevertheless, this group of people does not perform
worship to one God.[64] Also, Ibn al-Nadim demonstrated
that Hindus have faith in one creator, the Only God.
However, they worship other deities believing that these

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[61] Al-Baqillani, *al-Insaf*, 49.
[62] Sajid Shapoo, *The Understanding of Tawhid*, 214-240.
[63] Asma Kounsar, "The Concept of Tawhid in Islam," 95-110.
[64] Al-Maqdisi, *Kitab al-Bad'u wa al-Tarikh*, 4:9-19.

deities are not God nor partners of God, but their worship can bring the pleasure and blessings of God.[65]

On the contrary, Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghafur 'Attar opined that all deities other than the one Supreme God are considered attributes, appearances, and manifestations of the supreme God. Therefore, the worship of lower deities is a means of worshiping the one Supreme God. Thus, the author justified that if someone worships any of these lower deities, they are essentially worshiping the one Supreme Being.[66]

In his dissertation, Abu Bakr Zakariyya elaborated that it is clearly mentioned in the Vedas that Hindus in the Vedic era worshipped only one God, whom they called by several names and ascribed multiple attributes. These names and attributes represented the one Supreme Being. Additionally, he proved that over time, people in India began to consider and treat each name and attribute as a separate deity. Consequently, the number of gods in Hinduism increased.[67]

Abu Bakr Zakariyya concluded that in Hinduism's recent trends toward monotheism, it is divided into two groups. One group believes in worshiping only one God without any image or picture, rejecting idol worship in any form. The other group also believes in the oneness of God but holds that God can manifest in various images and forms. Therefore, they engage in idol worship, viewing it as a means to worship the one Supreme Being.

Similarly, in his research on the position of Vedas on divinity, Arqam Raes presented several hymns from the Vedas that provide evidence of monotheism in Hinduism. The researcher argued that the Vedas affirm the unity of God's worship, particularly during the Vedantic era. He

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[65] Ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, 487-490. Also see: Ghassan & Azhar, *al-Tawhid 'ind al-Hindus*, 19:5.
[66] 'Attar, *al-Diyanat wa al-'Aqa'id*, 90-97.
[67] Zakariyya, *al-Hindusiyyah*, 549 onwards.

supported his assertion with evidence from Vedic hymns that demonstrate the singularity of God's worship.[68]

Conclusion

Upon reviewing the aforementioned literature, it becomes evident that early Muslim scholars recognized the monotheistic tendencies within Hinduism. Around 900 A.D., scholars such as al-Mas'udi, al-Maqdisi, and Ibn al-Nadim sought to illuminate the divine nature of God in Hinduism. Additionally, Ibn Hazm contributed to this body of knowledge in 1056 A.D.

Upon closer examination of these works, it is apparent that they provide a general rather than detailed description of Hindu beliefs regarding gods and the concept of God's unity in Hinduism. Al-Biruni's work in 1048 A.D. stands out as particularly significant in this field, focusing extensively on Indian religions and cultures. Al-Biruni meticulously studied Hinduism and its principles, quoting numerous statements from various Hindu scriptures. According to al-Biruni, Hindus can be classified into two groups: the Elite (*Khawass*) and the Common (*'Awwam*), based on their perspectives on God.

In contemporary comparative discourses, Muslim scholars have endeavored to delineate the concept of God's unity in Hinduism. They have reviewed previous scholarship on this topic, some challenging earlier views on Hinduism's monotheistic nature while simultaneously presenting evidence to the contrary. For example, Muhammad Abu Zahrah argued that sacred Hindu references indicate a belief in polytheism, dismissing the notion of Hindus being categorized into Elite and common groups.

Conversely, Abu al-Kalam Azad posited that understanding divine forces in India depended on one's social class. He suggested that ordinary people needed to

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[68] Arqam Raes, *Mawqif al-Fidat*, 434 onwards.

worship idols to access divine knowledge, whereas leading personalities could approach God directly.

Also, there is a contradiction among contemporary researchers regarding the concepts of polytheism and monotheism in Hinduism. While scholars like Shoreh Jawadi, Abid Mushtaq Wani, Ghassan, Azhar, and others assert that monotheism lies at the core of Hinduism, 'Ali Zay'ur argues that Hinduism has passed through several ideological stages, with monotheism developing relatively late in its history. Similarly, Tariq Khalil Sa'di identifies a pivotal moment around 900 B.C. when Hindus consolidated all gods into one entity named Brahma, thereby initiating a belief in the oneness of God.

Contrary to these views, Ahmad Jasim and Abdul Radhi suggest that polytheism, specifically the concept of the trinity, began to emerge in Hinduism in the late 900B.C. Iman Ali Mohammad al-Ghananim affirms these diverse approaches within Hindu thought, categorizing them into *tajrid* (unity of God), trinity, polytheism, and pantheism.

In his discourse, Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghafur 'Attar emphasizes that Hinduism also upholds the unity of God's worship. He explains that worshipping lower deities or idols is tantamount to worshipping manifestations of the Supreme God. Therefore, according to him, anyone worshipping idols or lower deities is ultimately worshipping the Supreme God.

Similarly, Samsuddin Abd Hamid opines that every stream of Hinduism believes in the oneness of God; thus, the belief in a Supreme being forms the core of the trinity in Hinduism. He further argues that, like Muslims, the Shaivites (a stream of Hinduism) believe in one and only God: Shiva as the Destroyer, Brahma as the Creator, and Vishnu as the Sustainer. The researcher also suggests that over time, Brahma distorted the true essence of the religion, leading the popular religion to gradually devolve into

superstition and idolatry, culminating in the emergence of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva).

Additionally, both Abu Bakr Zakariyya and Arqam Raes agree that Hinduism was monotheistic in the Vedantic era. After presenting several hymns from the Vedas, Arqam Raes claims that this evidence from the Vedas proves that Hinduism called for the worship of one Supreme Being during the Vedantic era. Moreover, Abu Bakr Zakariyya elaborates that the Vedas clearly mention that Hindus in the Vedic era worshipped only one God, whom they referred to by several names and attributes. He argues further that in contemporary trends toward monotheism, Hindus are divided into two groups: one group believes in only one worshipable God without image or picture. The other group also believes in the oneness of God but holds that God has multiple images and forms. However, this group clarifies that the worship of idols is merely a way to worship that Supreme Being.

Razaleigh bin Muhamat contradicted al-'Attar and others who assert that monotheism is fundamental to Hinduism and that Hindus are inherently monotheistic. He argued that while many Hindus profess monotheistic beliefs, their actual worship practices are polytheistic.

In conclusion, most Muslim scholars agree that Hinduism acknowledges the unity of God. However, those who deny its monotheistic essence often focus solely on evidence supporting polytheistic practices in Hinduism, rather than considering contrary evidence or the evolutionary stages of Hindu thought where polytheism gained prominence in various forms.

Scholars advocating for Hinduism's monotheistic status draw evidence from authentic Hindu scriptures. While some argue Hinduism is not purely monotheistic, they acknowledge elements of monotheism within it. Moreover, there is disagreement over the extent of this monotheism: some assert it pertains only to the divine

essence and actions of God, while others argue for monotheism in worship practices as well. Certain scholars also find evidence of the unity of God's names and attributes in Hinduism.

Furthermore, upon reviewing existing literature in this field, it becomes evident that there are many unexplored avenues for further research. For instance, there is a need to compare Hinduism's monotheistic features across various classifications of *Tawhid* in Islam, to study scholarly research on Hinduism's monotheistic beliefs from Hindu scholars themselves, and to explore opportunities for interfaith dialogue between Hinduism and other monotheistic religions to promote peaceful coexistence.

Acknowledgement

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