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Introduction To The Study Of The Hindu Doctrines (Collected Works Of Rene Guenon)

Introduction to the
Study of the Hindu Doctrines



René Guénon



Synopsis

René Guénon's first book, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, came (in the words of the eminent scholar S. H. Nasr) 'like a sudden burst of lightning, an abrupt intrusion into the modern world of a body of knowledge and a perspective utterly alien to the prevalent climate and world view.' In this book Guénon establishes the criteria which formed the basis of his later works and set the tone for the Traditionalist School that came after him: the meaning of Tradition, the relationship between 'religion', 'theology', 'metaphysics etc.-all leading up to an exhaustive definition and comprehensive overview of Hinduism, which Guénon saw as the most ancient and most complete spiritual tradition on earth, embracing the most profound and explicit metaphysics. The West is now overrun with many brands of compromised Hinduism, whose 'gurus' are considered charlatans by traditional Hindu authorities. For anyone drawn to the Hindu tradition, searching for a way to separate the wheat from the chaff and dedicated to gaining an understanding of the universe that is Hinduism in its own terms and not those imposed by modernist Western assumptions, this book is indispensable.

Book Information

Series: Collected Works of Rene Guenon

Paperback: 276 pages

Publisher: Sophia Perennis; Rev ed. edition (July 2, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 090058873X

ISBN-13: 978-0900588730

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #635,074 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #157 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > New Age & Spirituality > Theosophy #1293 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Hinduism

Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: French

Author Bio: René Guénon (1886–1951) was one of the great luminaries of the twentieth century, whose critique of the modern world has stood fast against the shifting sands of

intellectual fashion. His extensive writings, now finally available in English, are a providential treasure-trove for the modern seeker: while pointing ceaselessly to the perennial wisdom found in past cultures ranging from the Shamanistic to the Indian and Chinese, the Hellenic and Judaic, the Christian and Islamic, and including also Alchemy, Hermeticism, and other esoteric currents, they direct the reader also to the deepest level of religious praxis, emphasizing the need for affiliation with a revealed tradition even while acknowledging the final identity of all spiritual paths as they approach the summit of spiritual realization. René Guénon, of whom Jacob Needleman wrote in *The Sword of Gnosis* that "no other modern writer has so effectively communicated the absoluteness of truth," is gradually being recognized by deeper thinkers as one of the few who have truly penetrated the seductive veil of the modern age. As an expositor of pure metaphysics and its application to the science of symbols, Guénon is without peer; and his extraordinarily prescient critique of the modern world is attracting more and more attention among cultural commentators. Little known in the English-speaking world till the recent appearance of his *Collected Works* in translation, Guénon has nevertheless long been recognized as a veritable criterion of truth by a vanguard of remarkable writers who evince that rare combination: intellectuality and spirituality. After a lonely childhood, often interrupted by ill health, Guénon navigated the seductive half-truths of occultism toward a deeper, unified vision offering a way out from the confusion and fragmentation of our time. Regarded by leading scholars as the first truly authentic interpreter of many Eastern doctrines in the West, Guénon never tired, in face of the seemingly inexorable process of dissolution in the twentieth century, of pointing to the transcendent unity of all religious faiths and the abiding Truth that contains them all.

This book should be titled "Introduction to the Thought of René Guénon", for instead of presenting the Hindu doctrines from the beginning, the first part of the book "Introduction" is a large part which introduces key concepts and distinctions that should aid one's reading of other Guénonian works, such as "Crisis of the Modern World". That besides, I haven't yet finished it, but I'll say that it is quite enlightening and wonderfully translated.

The main thrust of the book is on the nature of traditional principles and the metaphysical knowledge that is based on true universal principles. In the second part of the book termed 'The General Character of Eastern Thought', Guénon gives an extensive exposition on Tradition and Metaphysics and brings out the essential characteristics of Eastern philosophy and mentality and the ways in which it differs from the modern western outlook. Guénon has chosen the Hindu

tradition in order to exemplify the fundamental principles of a spiritual tradition that embraces a complete and universal metaphysics. Guenon devotes the third part of the book to the exposition of the Hindu doctrines, where some of the questions he addresses concern the nature and the role of the Veda, the laws of Manu, the principles of caste system, essential characteristics of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, and the six orthodox 'schools' (darshanas, that represent, as Guenon describes, the principal points of view within the Hindu doctrine). Guenon manifests great understanding of Hindu doctrines. I have grown up in India and have spent many years studying Hinduism, especially the Vedanta. It would be hard to find another writer who expounds, for example, the principles of dharma and the related concept of caste system in such perfection. Very often, with recent thinkers, both western and Indian, there is a confusion between what constitutes true principles and how those principles were practiced in society. For example, the caste system gradually came to be practiced as a hereditary system, and many fail to realize that this was not how it was originally conceived of and such a practice actually was a distortion of the original principle. It is very difficult to find holes in Guenon's arguments and exposition. He writes with great care, taking into account all the subtleties and possibilities of a given idea or conception. His style of exposition of Hindu doctrines is very different as compared to Hindu teachers like Sri Ramakrishna, for example, whose presentation is filled with parables to bring out the essential characteristics of human nature and its divine roots, and where the bhakti (devotional) aspect is strongly emphasized. That is, the exposition of Hindu teachers serves more as a teaching guide in terms of putting into practice the spiritual ideas on a day to day basis. While Guenon's main focus is on the metaphysical perspective. A thing to note though is that the metaphysical perspective connected to spiritual traditions that Guenon expounds is intrinsically connected with the state of one's being. This metaphysics, Guenon explains, constitutes an intuitive, or immediate knowledge (intellectual intuition), as opposed to the discursive and mediate knowledge that belongs to the rational order. Such metaphysics affirms the fundamental identity of knowing and being; the very nature of intellectual intuition is such that the knowledge of metaphysical principles go hand in hand with self-realization. In terms of expounding the metaphysical principles of spiritual traditions and their applications at different levels of human sphere, this book is unique in its scope and depth, for it brings out with great perspicuity the intellectual, universal basis of religio-spiritual outlook. Guenon's works present a conception of the cosmos and man that is based on a very deep and comprehensive understanding of the nature of Reality. It is his encompassing, multiply layered and highly subtle vision that allows him to make essential connections between various ideas of Hindu thought, and other spiritual traditions, into a complete whole reflecting the intrinsic nature of reality,

from the most profound to the more grosser manifestations. I would also strongly recommend other works of Guenon. They are filled with extremely rich, extraordinary insights, which would greatly expand (both in breadth and depth) one's outlook. His works are extremely valuable, for someone like me, who is attempting to understand what order of reality modern science describes and what aspects it leaves out. Guenon's insights and analysis of traditional spiritualities have an immense potential to provide in modern times a wholesome and a complete conceptual framework to counter the profane, piecemeal theories of today that only give a very fragmented view of reality.

Surprisingly, René Guénon didn't approve the title of this that was his first book, "baptized" by his French editor; in chat with friends, he admitted that considered it excessively academic, capable of keeping away many persons that could be perfectly capable of understanding it. Actually, this book not constitutes only an introduction to the study of the Hindu doctrines, but to all the authentic oriental doctrines. Approximately 1/3 of the work brings a general approach about the basis of traditional knowledge and one of its 4 parts is dedicated exclusively to the hindus doctrines. The oriental thought differs of the modern Occidental thought, being in the fundamental aspects entirely opposite. If we want this knowledge to be useful to us, it is first of all necessary that we understand our own roots, that remount to the Christianity and to verify the points in common to the oriental doctrines that, until the end of the Middle Age, wore the true fundamentals of both. However, starting from the Renaissance the Occident began a process of increasing separation from these basis, lowering the eyes from the sky to the earth, that is, renegating the own religion to a second plan, in favor of the "material" progress, the individualism and the materialism. At this point, it is almost incomprehensible to the modern Occidental everything concerning the essence of the authentic oriental spirit. The second step is the understanding of the deep and exact meaning of some fundamental concepts, just as: Metaphysics, Doctrines, Religion, Philosophy, Science, Technology, Materialism. Guénon explains to us the meaning of the term "Tradition", the differences among Religion and Initiatic Doctrines and its respective domains; the characteristics of the symbolism, the difference between exoterism and esoterism. After this necessary preparation, we are introduced to the Hindu Doctrines, an universe of wisdom whose magnitude and magnificence snatches us immediately, through a magistral explanation, clear and deep at once. The reach of this magnificent work was recognized thoroughly, especially orientals, that said to be Guénon "the first contemporary Occidental that truly understood and transmitted to the Occident the spirit of the authentic oriental doctrines". The Institute René Guénon of Traditional Studies, ([...]) from several years teaches oriental themes based in René Guénon

GuÃfÂ©non's work. Our basic course, called "The Oriental Sight", it is almost entirely based on this book, that is a verily entrance door for the spirit of the East. We recommend, in the sequence of this reading, of the same author, "East and West", "The Crisis of the Modern World" and "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times ".

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