

This resource examines good practice in using quotations and references to scholars within an A02 answer. Read the following two arguments about whether ISKCON is a legitimate form of Hinduism and decide which one is a good example and which one is a poor example. Give reasons to justify your decision, particularly in relation to the use of quotations, references to scholars and the style of reasoning.

Is ISKCON a legitimate form of Hinduism?

1. There is no doubt that ISKCON is popular and it has many followers. Some Hindus may argue that ISKCON is not really a form of Hinduism. This may be because they focus on Hare Krishna rather than just Krishna in the traditional Hindu way and they seem to ignore the polytheistic aspect of Hinduism.

Hare Krishnas do worship through bhakti however, which is an important Hindu practice and also read Hindu sacred texts which are the basis of Hindu teaching. They also stress caring for murtis and trying to achieve darshan which are important practices and have been a part of Hinduism since ancient times. This shows that it is an important part of Hinduism and that it carries forward Hindu practices.

Prabhupada established ISKCON in America in 1965 when he was sixty-nine. He set it up in America and has travelled extensively since. ISKCON was popular in the USA because it arrived during a turbulent decade in which many people were campaigning for peace and arguing against America's war with Vietnam. The hippie culture was established by younger generations of Americans and they were all into love and peace. Prabhupada presented love and peace also so this provided a better alternative to other forms of authority that were supporting the war.

Some Hindus would say that ISKCON is not important and that it has little influence while others would argue that it has no place in Hinduism. Therefore the majority of Hindus would say that it is a legitimate form of Hinduism.

Summary

The first answer is poor; it begins with a misunderstanding of ISKCON. One glimpse of hope is the second paragraph that identifies areas of consistency with traditional Hinduism. However, it then

goes off track and loses focus by giving some AO1 background information that is NOT the focus of the evaluation. Be careful to avoid this as it happens quite a lot. In short, the arguments need to be developed and be more specific. There is very little evidence presented. This is a very basic answer in terms of analysis and evaluation because it does not focus at all on justifying the views given. As a result, the conclusion is weak and pure assertion as it has no supporting evidence or examples behind it. In addition, there is no reference to the views of scholars/schools of thought to support any argument presented.

2. Within orthodox Hinduism, ISKCON is often considered to have little or no legitimate connection to traditional Hinduism because it is a modern interpretation of a specific focus within Hinduism. Many elements of the traditional faith are removed. For example, ISKCON bases its teachings on those of Bhaktisiddhanta, rejected caste as a matter of birth, and taught that it was the state of one's heart that counted. This ultimately means that ISKCON unlike traditional Hinduism, allows anyone to enter the Brahmin caste. Traditional Hindus would not initiate non-Brahmins into the Brahmin caste. Another departure from traditional Hinduism is that the ISKCON movement regards the Bhagavad Gita as central to its teachings; however, for traditional Hindus this is not regarded as highly as is not a shruti text (that which is heard – directly from God) and is just a remembered smriti text. Moreover, ISKCON members follow the Bhagavad Gita as translated and commented on by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, which has its own particular interpretation that may contradict the views of traditional Hinduism. For example, ISKCON devotees see the Gita as being an open text which can be interpreted in many ways e.g. the story of the battlefield is allegorical – the field representing the human conscience, Arjuna representing humankind and Krishna being the charioteer who steered him in the right direction. The more traditional interpretation of the Gita within Hinduism is that the story is more literal and is proof that people should fight in a just war. The allegorical interpretation obviously appealed more to a peaceful approach to conflict and so was popular with the hippie culture.

Related to this, the missionary aspect of ISKON in its attempts to actively convert non-Hindus is not an important feature of traditional Hinduism. Kim Knott (A Short Introduction to Hinduism, OUP, 2000), states that ISCON promoted 'Public worship, processions, and pilgrimages take the name and form of Krishna on to the streets of India's villages and the cities of the West and beyond'. Traditional

Hinduism, which sees non-Hindus as being outside the caste system does not share ISKCON's drive to share their beliefs with others.

Finally, ISKCON venerates Krishna as the supreme being, the ultimate truth; this is not regarded by some as a legitimate form of Hinduism because in Hinduism, Krishna is seen as the 8th avatar of Vishnu and therefore Vishnu would be given higher status.

However, it can also be argued that ISKCON is a legitimate form of Hinduism. Ian Jamison (Hinduism, Philip Allan, 2006) does take a different line of argument when he states that that ISKCON 'is now largely considered not as a new religious movement, but as an authoritative part of Hinduism.' He argues that it still shares the same core beliefs such as karma, moksha and the transmigration of the soul and so has not totally separated itself from its traditional roots.

In addition, devotees of ISKCON tend to follow traditional Hindu practices regarding ritual purity before worship for example, shaving their heads (although with a slight variation regarding the shikha). Moreover, the ISKCON movement also follows the style of worship set out in the vedas e.g. singing hymns and the congregational chanting of Hare Krishna mantra.

It could be argued that bhakti yoga is central to wider Hinduism: as Krishna states in the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 9 v26 (to the warrior Arjuna) 'If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit a water, I will accept it.' Just as in traditional Hinduism, ISKCON follows the devotional aspect of bhakti worship in a temple (mandir).

In conclusion, it appears that whilst ISKCON shares many of the characteristics of Hinduism, such as forms of worship and some core beliefs, in other ways it appears to be a distinctive departure from traditional Hinduism, especially in views about the role and understanding of the Bhagavad Gita and the prominence given to Krishna. Overall, it may be the case that for some within the Hindu faith ISKCON should be considered to be a separate religion rather than a legitimate movement within Hinduism; however, one wonders whether or not those who are outside the Hindu faith would see any significant difference in the face of the diversity of beliefs and practices within Hinduism itself.

Summary

The second example is the better example of the two. It is a very good answer that successfully identifies and thoroughly addresses the issues raised by the question set. There is a confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue and this is sustained throughout. Reasoning is clear through arguments that are all supported by reasoning and evidence, including the views of scholars or schools of thought that are used appropriately. Alternative arguments are also presented and exemplified. The conclusion is precise and balanced, providing a mature response to the issue. Although there are aspects that could have been developed further, we have to carefully consider the time available and so answers do need to be appropriately selective. On the whole, this answer has succeeded at this and presents a confident and perceptive evaluation of the issue.

Was Prabhupada vital for the development and growth of ISKCON?

- Many would argue that without Prabhupada's influence ISKCON would not have grown or developed.
- Prabhupada travelled around the world many times and established more than 100 Hare Krishna centres, gathering more than 10000 disciples into the ISKCON movement.
- Prabhupada capitalised on the 'decade of discontent' in the USA where the feeling of anti-establishment and anti-war were widespread.
- Prabhupada brought the Hare Krishna Movement into the popular public domain by some very practical but effective means. For example, public chanting, creating a magazine in English for distribution and delivering lectures.
- Prabhupada's message of peace and love matched the counter-culture created by the hippie youth of America.
- Interest shown by groups such as The Beatles and the support of George Harrison in particular was effectively utilised by Prabhupada which made ISKCON high profile in the media.
- Prabhupada created an alternative lifestyle to traditional Hinduism like Gandhi had done with the ashram communities in India; this gave a close community of devotees but strength in numbers.

POSSIBLE QUOTES TO USE:

- For their authority, depth, and clarity, his books have won praise from professors at colleges and universities like Harvard, Oxford, Cornell, Columbia, Syracuse, Oberlin, and Edinburgh. (Wikipedia.org)
- Making these Vaisnava texts available is one of Srila Prabhupada's greatest contributions. Apart from the masses, his books have also reached well into academic circles and have spurred academic interest in the Chaitanya tradition ... The significance of making these texts available is not merely academic or cultural; it is spiritual. (Cox et al, *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: five distinguished scholars on the Krishna movement in the West*. New York: Grove Press, 1983)
- Devotees should not be lazy, idle...we are not afraid to work. Whatever our engagement is, by offering the result to Krishna we become Krishna conscious. (Prabhupada, *Charisma and Religious Innovation* in ISKCON Journal, 2008)
- If today the Bhagavad Gita is printed in millions of copies in scores of Indian languages and distributed in all nooks and corners of the world, the credit for this great sacred service goes chiefly to ISKCON. ... The voyage of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada to the United States in 1965 and the spectacular popularity his movement gained in a very short spell of twelve years must be regarded as one of the greatest spiritual events of the century. (Atal Vihari Vajpayee, Speech given on Vaishnava News Network, 1998)