Introduction

Good evening to all of you. I am thankful to David Burgess for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to share my knowledge on Hinduism with the members of your church. It is a unique and special occasion for me to talk to the non-Hindus.

The topic given to me is the Human Face of a Hindu. I was asked to focus my talk on my personal experience of Hinduism, dealing with matters of practice and belief and how it interacts with my daily life. The scope of the topic covers several aspects and within the allocated time of 45 minutes, I will try my best to do justice to the topics. This is part of righteousness or dharma preached by Hinduism. Being a Hindu, I first recognise the expectations of the audience and I have designed my talk to meet these expectations. I recognise that it may not be possible to discuss many aspects of Hinduism in this short time to my full satisfaction. However, I hope that my talk would provide a glimpse on Hindu believes and practices from my personal point of view. Through the questions and answer session following my talks, I hope that with God grace I will try to answer your questions.

My Background

I was born into a traditional Hindu (Saivite) family in a village, called Nallur, which is located in the North of Sri Lanka where more than 99.9% of its population are Hindus. I grew up in a Hindu environment up to the age of 17 years. A catholic church (St. Xavier's Church) was located next door to my house. My primary school was in a Hindu school near to my house (Senguntha Hindu College). I had my secondary schooling in a Christian school (St John's College). For my undergraduate studies in Civil Engineering, I moved to South of Sri Lanka (Moratuwa) and lived in a Buddhist environment for nearly eight years. I regularly went to a Saiva temple (Panandura,
Kandaswamy Temple) in a nearby Buddhist town. I graduated with a Civil Engineering degree in Sri Lanka in 1971 and lectured at my university for over two years.

I moved to Sheffield in England in 1974 to work as a Research Assistant and obtained my Doctor of Philosophy in Civil Engineering from the University of Sheffield, England in 1977. There were no Hindu temples in Sheffield and during the three and a half year period, I was unable to practice my religion fully. However, my devotion to God had not suffered. I always believed in God's grace.

In 1977, I came to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and joined the University of Malaya as a lecturer in Civil Engineering. Although I lived in an Islamic environment in Malaysia, I was able to practice my religion fully without any restriction. There were thousands of Hindu temples in all parts of the Malaysia. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians lived in a harmonious way and I was fortunate to live in such an environment in a beautiful country. While I was in Malaysia, I married to a girl from my village who has qualified as medical doctor. I was fortunate to have her as my wife since both of us had and having the same interests in religion and spirituality. Like many other Hindu, my wife and I jointly practiced the Hindu religion at home and outside.

In 1981, I joined the National University to Singapore and stayed in Singapore for nearly 8 years. In the same way as in Malaysia, we lived happily and practice our religion fully in Singapore. We brought up our three boys in the same way as my parents taught me in religious practices. They also have faith in Hindu Gods. We adopted all the necessary rituals suggested by the Hindu practices at home and go to temple occasionally.

In 1988, I joined the University of Technology, Sydney as a lecturer in civil engineering. For the first two months, we stayed a unit in Auburn and lived among many Muslims and Christians. In January 1999, we bought a house in Castle Hill and later shifted to a bigger house in Baulkham Hills.

We continued to observe Hindu practices at home. My mother-in-law who is highly spiritual helped me and my family to take us a spiritual
path. At the time, there was only one Hindu temple (Venkateshwara Temple) in Helensburgh. This is very far from my house. We visited this temple during few occasions. Later with the opening of the Sydney Murugan Temple in Westmead, we are able to practice my religion effectively as I used to when I was in Malaysia and Singapore. However, the absence of a Hindu environment in my neighbourhood is a drawback to live fully as a Hindu. As a migrant, I accept the reality of the situation.

Due to my interest in my religion and to help the Hindu community in Sydney I became a member of the Sydney Murugan Temple organisation (Saiva Manram). In 2000, I became the Director for Educational Activities of Saiva Manram and involved myself in the activities of the weekend Saiva schools for both adults and children. I helped in organising religious talks to promote non-formal education among the Hindu community.

My work-related activities helped me to travel to more than 30 countries to all parts of the world. I used these travel opportunities to visit several Hindu and other temples in South Africa, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bali, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, China, India, Sri Lanka, UK, USA, Canada and Europe. My interest of videography helped me to record many interviews and activities in these temples.

In 1998, I started Aum Muruga Society, which is a non-profitable organisation for the purpose of helping the Hindus to understand their religion. The limited activities of Aum Muruga Society are to support the temple functions and filling the gap to a certain extent. I edit a quarterly journal on Hinduism (Aum Muruga Journal), which is the only periodical on Hinduism from Australia.

At this stage, I wish to emphasis the following. I am not a preacher of Hinduism and I am only playing my role to explain my religion to best of my ability in relation to its basic philosophy and practices of Hinduism. I feel that I have a limited knowledge on Hinduism and eager to learn more and to live as a true Hindu as much as possible.
Philosophy of Hinduism

Firstly, I wish to speak on the Hindus view on God and Individual soul. Hindu philosophical thought is characterised by a belief in the principle of Brahman, the “Universal soul”. **Brahman is uncreated, limitless, all embracing and eternal. Brahman is the ultimate reality.** It is the subtle essence that underlies the universe.

At the same time, it constitutes the innermost soul of each individual. A person’s realisation of the identity and unity of soul and Brahman is believed to bring about liberation known as *moksha*. In that moment, he or she is freed from all restraints of the mind and body, and thereby transcends all distinctions. The purpose of human birth is to achieve God-realization or *moksha*. To realise that Brahman and atman or Universal Soul (God) and soul are ultimately the same is not easy task. Several paths are prescribed in the sacred texts to achieve the final goal. To name few: service path; devotional path, and knowledge path.

Facts of Hinduism

The four facts, karma, reincarnation, dharma, worship are the fabric of every Hindu’s life.

**Law of Karma**

God’s cosmic law of karma governs our life experiences through cause and effect. As God’s force of gravity shapes cosmic order, karma shapes experiential order. Through karma, one’s thoughts, emotions and deeds – whether good, bad or mixed – return to him or her, known as **Boomerang effect**. Thus, karma is your teacher. It imparts the lessons you need and able to meet. For it is a divine law that no karmic situation will arise that exceeds one’s ability to resolve it. **Karma is not fate. You have free will.** No God or external force is controlling one’s life. It is all one’s karmic creation. To be responsible for one’s karma is one’s strength. To blame another is weakness. Remembering God’s great law of karma, Hindus are expected to act wisely.
Re-Birth or Reincarnation

Your soul is an immortal body of light. It’s Absolute and super-conscious essence is identical with God. Yet, this identity needs to be realised and unfolded within the soul. Toward this goal your soul undertakes many, many lifetimes in a physical body. You are now the sum of total of all your past lives. You undergo every conceivable human experience as the forces of body, ego and desire manifest. In the latter lives these forces are transmuted towards spirituality. Finally your soul realises God. After resolving all residual karmas, your soul no longer enters into a human form. The soul continues its evolution in the inner worlds. Therefore, it lives joyously and blissfully at the feet of Lord Shiva as Saivites believes or emerged with God as other Hindus believe. Therefore, the soul strives for spiritual unfoldment and do not fear death.

Law of Dharma:

Dharma is God’s Divine Law, the law of being. Dharma in the individual what its normal development is to a seed-the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny. When you follow dharma you are in harmony with the cosmic order; you abide close to God. The moral dimension of Hindu dharma is embodied in the eight restraints and eight observances.

The restraints are: non-violence; not stealing; disciplining desire; abjuring lust and greed; curbing arrogance and anger; not lying; avoiding injustice; shunning wrongdoing and evil company.

The observances are: be pure in body, mind and speech; love mankind; seek contentment; cultivate devotion; develop forbearance, give charitably; study the scriptures; perform penance and sacrifice.

Worship:

Worship expresses our profound love of God. Rituals, devotional singing, prayer and meditation are worshipful means of direct, personal communion with God. God is real beings dwelling in the inner aspect of your life. Daily prayers at home keep you God-conscious and
your home holy. Temples allow Hindus to intimately communicate with God. **Temple rituals open a channel to God.** Through His personal presence and power, prayers are answered, karma softened, spiritual unfoldment guided. Surrender, worship with intense love, and God hears.

**Religious Practices:**

Hinduism originated from India and practiced in many countries in south-east Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America and West Indies. Imported labour force from India mainly by British to these countries brought their religious practices with them. They build and keep building many temples and maintained Indian lifestyle and religious practices. However, Hindus living in Cambodia and Vietnam and Indonesia are not Indian origin and their practices are mixed with their culture. Bali Hindu rituals as reported in the media after the Bali bombing included animal sacrifices. **These practices are mainly cultural and not religious.** There is no doubt with the increased awareness of the philosophy of Hindu religion. These practices will change for the better in the future. While I was in Bali, I have noticed evidences for the changes in their practices. Many of the Balinese who are highly religious are becoming vegetarians.

I must emphasis here in a pure form, Hinduism preaches non-violence and seeing God in every creation. It should be considered as a universal practice of Hindus.

**My Personal Belief of Hinduism**

There are numerous Hindu temples dedicated to many Hindu deities. Unfamiliar visitor to a Hindu temple may have puzzled to see many deities. To give a simple explanation, I wish to state that **Hindus believe in Nameless and Formless God.** God is ultimate reality. However, recognising many aspects of God’s powers Hindus have created numerous forms having different names to the only one God to help the Hindu to worship God.

Even the same form has numerous names. Hindus worship these deities and offer prayers to them. Deity system is similar to having
many branches to a particular bank. The money deposited in any one of the branches of the bank branch will finally reach the same bank. Similarly, whichever deity one chooses to pray, the prayers go to the same formless and nameless God. One thing is certain that Hindus wish to associate God's image in a human form (male and female), since one should be grateful to have the human form.

My daily life as a Hindu

I have the free will to perform many actions both good and bad. However, I do not have any control over the results of these actions. If my action is a right action then it should not cause any pain or problem to others. However, I am sure that you will agree that it is not always possible to guarantee that all my actions are right actions.

Recognising that all my actions have both positive and negative effects, I feel that remembering God at all times is useful and necessary to develop right thoughts while performing these actions. I strongly believe that any destructive action, which brings suffering to others, will not have God's blessings. God is Love and he loves all his creations. How can I consider anyone of my actions as right action when someone is hurt?

If I am serious about achieving God-realisation, then I have no choice other than to perform my actions accordingly to the restraints and observance prescribed by the sacred text. That is, I should have a dharmic or righteous life. For me, it is not good enough to have a blind faith in God and performing regular prayers and worship. Any gain from these actions will be negated by other actions, which bring unhappiness and sorrow to others.

I recognise that doing self-less service to needy, under-privileged, helpless elders, disable persons and to the community in anyway will leads to my self-transformation. These will take me closer to divinity and help me to achieve self-realisation in the future, maybe after few more births.

I recognise that unlimited Divine Grace is available to everyone. However, God will help to those who help themselves. Our
effort plus God grace will determine the outcome of our actions. In many instances, we are happy when we get an unexpected benefit. I will not call it as luck, in Hindu terminology there is no such word as luck. One gets whatever he deserves, according to his past karma. Some may reap the benefit immediately for the same action but others have to wait for a longer period for their turn. This approach helps me to recognise that outcome is in God’s hand and I have no control on it. More I believe in God’s power, less I become disturbed. It may be either in my personal or professional life.

Grace of God: Trip to Karaikuddy in India

Like many of you, I have experienced many incidents when God’s helped me without any expectation. To highlight God’s grace, I wish to narrate one of my experiences. In 1999, I travelled in a night train from Chennai to Karaikuddy about 200 km away to deliver a talk in one of the research institutes. Karaikuddy station was not the last destination of the night (mail) train which I took.

I boarded the train at 8pm in Chennai in a second class birth compartment. This was my first long night train journey in India. When the train stopped at intermediate stations, many passengers without any reserved tickets entered in my reserved compartment. Some of these passengers changed into more comfortable dress and slept on the floor.

Being the main train, it stopped at many stations which were either poorly lit or without any lights. However, I was not worried about the situation and hoping that some how I will be able to get down at my station. To my surprise, I found out that a lady who was sitting in front of me with her daughter was going to the same station. She was working as the librarian at the research institute where I was hoping deliver my talk on the next day.

Once the passengers went to sleep in their respective berth, the light was switched off. I could not sleep and being first time traveller, I did not have any clue about the time of arrival at my destination. In addition, I was very hungry since I missed my dinner. There was no
announcement in the train. Somehow, praying that I should not miss the station I went to sleep. At about 4am, the lady alerted me to get down at the next station. There was no light inside and outside of the train. Passengers were sleeping on the floor. I picked up my bag and got out of the train with a great difficulty.

I was told that I will be picked up by some one from the station. I was unable to find no one came to pick me up. Considering my plight, once again this lady came forward to help me. She negotiated with a car driver and arranged my transport to the rest house of the Institute. I safely arrived in at the Institute’s rest house and knocked the door. I was shocked to find that the person who is supposed to pick me up from the station is sleeping there and surprised to see me.

You can image my plight if I have not met the lady in the train in front of me. For me this incident is the proof for God’s grace. Divine help came to me at the appropriate time in a human form. I am sure that each of you may have similar experiences in your life time. I believe that once I connect God in my life I have no fear. **Why Fear When I am Here.** This is saying which I recall at all times.

I believe that there are always some positives in many circumstances. Also, I believe that **there is nothing wrong in God’s creations. In order to appreciate God’s creations we must correct our vision.** If we look for positives we can always find many positives even in many apparent negative circumstances. We cannot appreciate positive outcomes if we are able to experience the negative outcomes. I always expect positive outcomes at all times. This is more like one’s investment in share market.

**Vegetarianism**

Life force (soul) present in every God’s creation is scared. Any action we perform should not directly or indirectly harm any other life, animal or human. This brings us to discuss the vegetarianism and Hindus. Most Hindus are vegetarians and by being vegetarian they do not support slaughtering animals and birds for human consumption.
For the health reason, many non-Hindus are also becoming vegetarians.

I have to be honest with you in declaring me as a vegetarian. This is not because of religious or health reasons. From early age, my parents brought me as a vegetarian and I have no interest in non-vegetarian food. In the past, due to the circumstances, I have taken meat without much interest. Now for the past several years I take only vegetarian food. There are many Hindus who are non-vegetarians due to their habits. Hinduism is a very liberal religion and through the Law of Karma it tells us that we have to face the consequence of our actions.

I must stress a point that Hindus are refraining from eating non-vegetarian food on the days when they go to the temples. They consider meat has the capacity to pollute the mind and recognises that inner cleanliness is needed at the time of temple worship.

**Conclusion**

Hindu religion is a very liberal religion and it only recommends dos and don’ts. Hindus are free to perform any actions freely both good and bad. The law of karma dictate that Hindus are the masters of their own destiny and God will make sure that they will get what they deserve.

**Human face of a true Hindu cannot be different from that of any other true religious person.** All religions promote love, forgiveness, harmony, peace and happiness. If any Hindu is not practicing the Hindu teachings it is not the fault of the religion. This is also true to all other religions. Hinduism recognised other religions as different paths to achieve the same God. No religion is better than other religion and a true Hindu will not claim that Hinduism is the only true religion in this world. Vedas (sacred Hindu texts) does not recognise difference in Gods, since there is only one God with many names. Hinduism is the oldest religion in this planet and hence many other religions share the same values as recognised by the Hinduism.

I am one of the many millions of the Hindu faces in the world. I recognise that it is hard to find any true Human Hindu face or any
other religious face. **A true spiritual person is beyond any religions and we must try to grow spiritually through our religious practices.**

Misinformation on religions and misinterpretation of the religious teachings are causing considerable suffering to the innocents as evident from the world events. The atrocities we hear are not new and going on for centuries. Now with the revolution of the communication technology all events, both good and bad, are brought into our living rooms in a split of a second, instantaneously. This is the difference.

Blessings and Grace of compassionate God are always with us. We should not doubt this fact. It does not matter whatever the names or forms one choose to identify the Supreme. Let us unite to understand our religions in which we are born. One cannot choose his or her parents. In the same way, a child born into a family having a religious belief. All parents want best for their children. Every religion wishes best for their followers to achieve happiness. As a religious person, I urge all of you to highlight on the positives to promote harmony among the societies in Australia.

Finally, again I like to thanks the organisers for inviting me and giving me a golden opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you.

**God bless you all.**