

HINDUISM



A Supplemental Resource for **GRADE 12**
World of Religions

A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE



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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | ix |
| <hr/> | |
| Preface | 1 |
| How to Read these Profiles | 1 |
| A Note on Language and Terminology | 2 |
| <hr/> | |
| Introduction | 3 |
| What Is Hinduism? A Brief Summary | 3 |
| Hindus in Canada and the World | 7 |
| Hinduism in Manitoba | 9 |
| <hr/> | |
| Origins of Hinduism | 15 |
| Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart | 17 |
| <hr/> | |
| Significant Texts and Writings | 23 |
| Language | 23 |
| Key Writings/Scriptures | 24 |
| Overview and Relationships of Hindu Scriptures | 26 |
| <hr/> | |
| Foundational Beliefs, Concepts, and Ideas | 27 |
| Time and Creation of the Universe | 27 |
| One God with Many Manifestations | 29 |
| Conceptual Foundations | 31 |
| <hr/> | |
| Change and Evolution | 35 |
| Diversity of Hinduism | 35 |
| God and Gender in Hinduism | 35 |
| Worship of Specific Gods | 37 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Significant Persons/Founders | 45 |
| Historical Figures | 45 |
| Role of Women | 51 |
| Traditional Roles | 51 |
| Contemporary Roles of Women | 54 |
| Western Views on Women in Hinduism | 55 |
| Women and Equality | 56 |
| Women as Religious Leaders and <i>Purohita</i> (Priests) | 57 |
| <hr/> | |
| Practices, Rituals, Symbols, and Special Days/Celebrations | 59 |
| Social Organization and Roles | 59 |
| <i>Caste</i> System | 59 |
| Poverty | 60 |
| Child Marriage | 61 |
| Practice of <i>Sati</i> | 61 |
| Polygamy | 61 |
| Dowry System | 62 |
| Symbols | 62 |
| Prayer and Worship | 70 |
| <i>Pujas</i> | 70 |
| Sacrifices/Offerings | 70 |
| <i>Samskaras</i> : Rites of Passage | 72 |
| <i>Jatakarma</i> —Birth Ceremonies | 72 |
| <i>Upanayana</i> —Initiation (The Sacred-Thread Ceremony) | 72 |
| <i>Vivaha</i> —Marriage | 73 |
| <i>Antyeshthi</i> —Cremation and Rites for the Dead | 74 |
| Symbols, Art, and Aesthetics | 75 |
| Hindu Dress | 75 |
| Makeup/Body Art | 76 |
| Food | 77 |
| <hr/> | |
| Significant Times and Dates | 81 |
| Festivals | 81 |
| The Hindu Calendar | 83 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Places | 85 |
| Gathering Places/Places of Practice | 85 |
| <i>Mandirs</i> /Temples | 85 |
| Shrines | 85 |
| Ashrams | 85 |
| World | 86 |
| Gathering Places in Manitoba | 88 |
| <hr/> | |
| Modern Hinduism: Issues and Challenges | 91 |
| Caste | 91 |
| Being Hindu in the Diaspora: Adaptation, Identity, and Intergenerational Challenges | 93 |
| Impact on Manitoba and Canada | 94 |
| <hr/> | |
| Teaching/Learning Resources | 95 |
| Books and Articles | 95 |
| Profiles | 96 |
| Glossaries | 96 |
| A Note on Language and Terminology | 96 |
| Audio Glossaries | 97 |
| Text Glossaries | 97 |
| Local Resource People | 97 |
| Videos | 98 |
| Online | 98 |
| DVDs | 98 |
| Websites | 99 |
| Infographics and Images | 101 |
| <hr/> | |
| References | 103 |
| <hr/> | |
| Image Acknowledgements | 109 |

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Preface

How to Read these Profiles

These profiles are intended to provide an overview of a number of religious traditions and faith groups. Each profile focuses on a specific religious tradition and emphasises

- the origins and development of each religious tradition or faith group
- the continued evolution and change of each religious tradition or faith group
- the internal diversity (or intra-religious diversity) of each religious tradition or faith group

While we hope these profiles provide helpful and useful introductions to each religious tradition or faith group, we caution teachers and students to keep in mind the following:

- The profiles provide only an overview and not a detailed or in-depth review of each religious tradition or faith group. They also do not capture the totality of diversity within each religious tradition or faith group.
- Religions do not develop and grow in isolation from political, economic, social, and historical factors, including other religious traditions and faith groups. This knowledge is critical to understanding religious influences in specific social and historical contexts.
- Religious expression will reflect national, cultural, geographical, and other factors.
- While the authors of the backgrounders have taken efforts to present the information in a balanced and unbiased form, there may exist differing points of view and interpretations of historical developments and other aspects of the religious traditions or faith groups.

A Note on Language and Terminology

Throughout this document we have used transliterated versions of Hindu and Sanskrit terms as suggested by the experts and resource people that assisted in the development of this resource. In addition, instead of providing phonetic spellings of Hindu and Sanskrit terms, we have chosen to provide information on audio glossaries.

Please note that transliteration is not an exact science and there will be variations in the transliteration of the original terms used dependent on several factors. These include, but are not limited to,

- regional, sect, cultural, linguistic, and other variants in the spelling and pronunciation of the original Hindu and Sanskrit terms
- variations in the names and terms used for specific persons, items, concepts, gods and goddesses, and other elements of Hindu beliefs, rituals, icons, and practices
- regional, cultural, and other variants in the English language that will affect the transliteration of specific terms

A listing of audio and text glossaries of Hindu and Sanskrit terms can be found in the [Glossaries](#) section of this document.



Introduction

What Is Hinduism? A Brief Summary

Hinduism is one of the largest world religions, along with religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. It is also one of the oldest religions. In total, there are over one billion followers of Hinduism in the world today. What we currently refer to as Hinduism was historically and is still currently known as *Sanatan Dharma*, which means the eternal religion. (*Sanatan* means eternal and *dharma* refers to the spiritual path.)

Defining Hinduism is challenging as Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed to set of teachings. Hinduism has an extensive history with many key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books. For these reasons, Hinduism is often described as being a way of life or a family of religions rather than a single religion.

There are a few things that can be said with certainty about Hinduism. One is that it has its roots in India in what was the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan. Secondly, most Hindus revere a body of texts as sacred scripture known as the *Vedas*. Thirdly, most Hindus hold and draw on a common system of values known as *dharma*. In addition there are a few foundational aspects as follows:

- The Hindu concept of time and the origins of the universe is one that has no beginning and no end. This present universe was preceded by an infinite number of universes which will be followed by another infinite number of universes.



Figure 1: *Om* or *Aum*, Sacred Sound Symbol

- The majority of Hindus believe in one **supreme god** (*The Brahman*). Everything is a part of and a manifestation of *The Brahman*, the ultimate reality; however, *The Brahman's* qualities and powers may be represented by a great diversity of gods/deities all of which emanate from *The Brahman*.
- The concept of *The Brahman* and the relationship of the Supreme Being with nature and individual souls, as well as *The Brahman's* various manifestations are the subject of many different Hindu schools of philosophy/belief.
- The universe, Earth, and all creatures were created by **Brahma, one of the many gods that emanated from** *The Brahman*.
- The birth and dissolution of the present universe is directly connected to Brahma's life. Human time and that of the gods is different. The lifespan (*Maha Kalpa* or *Paradha*) of Brahma is estimated by some to be over 300 trillion human years. One day and night in Brahma's space and time (*kalpa*) is believed to be over 8 billion human years. Each *kalpa* is further divided into two *artha kalpas* (one day and night), and each of these is further divided into 100 *maha yugas*. Each *maha yuga* consists of a series of four shorter *yugas*, or ages, as follows:
 - *Satya (Krita) Yuga* (Golden Age)
 - *Treta Yuga* (Silver Age)
 - *Dvapara Yuga* (Bronze Age)
 - *Kali Yuga* (Dark Age)

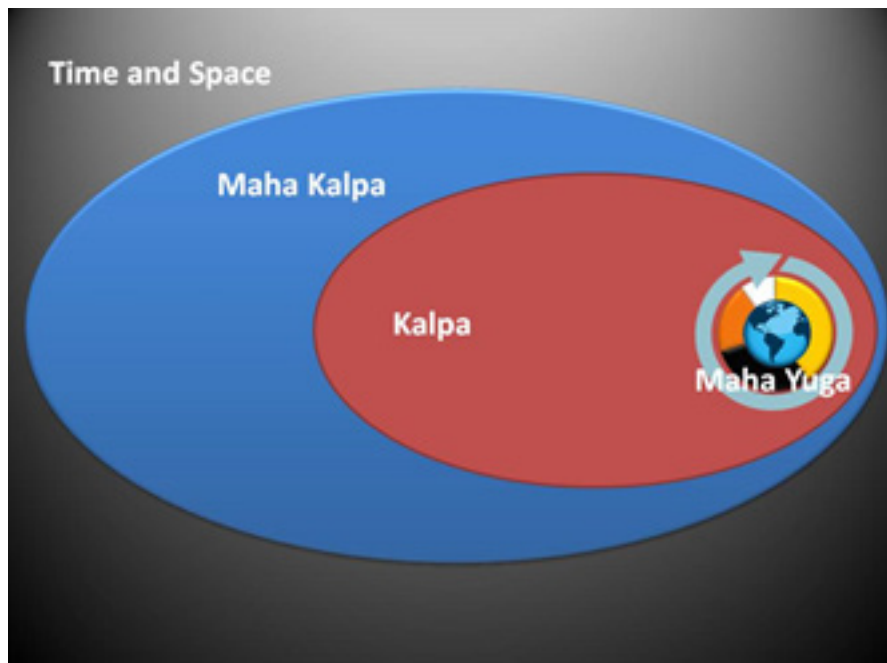


Figure 2: Hindu Concept of Time

- As the Hindu notion of time is cyclical, the universe is thought to continually flow through these four periods of time. As time progresses from one *yuga* (era) to another, human society degrades or diminishes in moral, spiritual, and other qualities to a level lower than before. Eventually, the cycle culminates in the destruction of the existing order at the end of the *Kali Yuga*. After this, the golden era of *Satya Yuga* begins anew. (More recently, based on new interpretations of scriptures, some Hindu's have come to believe that there is a descending and ascending order of the four *yugas*. As such, the order would be reversed moving from *Kali Yuga* to *Dvapara Yuga*, and so on.) Prevailing Hindu calculations and beliefs put us as currently living in the *Kali Yuga* stage.

- Hindus believe that the soul—the real self (*atman*)—is distinct from the temporary body made of matter (*prakriti*). As a result, existence is an ongoing **cycle of birth, death, and rebirth** (*samsara*), governed by *karma*.

- Hindus believe that each soul creates its unique destiny according to the law of *karma* (the universal law of action and reaction). Therefore, one's soul passes through the cycle of successive lives, evolving through many births.

One's next **incarnation** is dependent on how the previous life was lived. If this person has done good things in their life, the good *karma* will be in the soul's favour in the next life.

- The primary problem faced by humans is to be stuck in the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). The goal is to be liberated from this perpetual cycle of *samsara* and achieve *moksha*. *Moksha* is for the human soul (*atman*) to become one with god, to merge the *atman* with *The Brahman* (the ultimate reality, supreme god, or creator). This happens when one's soul is pure. Self-control, truthfulness, non-violence, and compassion are prerequisites for the path to become pure.
- There are different paths towards *moksha* (becoming one with god, liberation, or enlightenment). Different schools of Hinduism historically have debated about whether *moksha* can be achieved within one's life, or only after one's present life. Regardless of the school, Hinduism stresses *moksha* may only be achieved through strict adherence to universal principles through the practice of one's *dharma* (religious duties, rights, laws, conduct, and values) as revealed through Hindu sacred/holy books and usually revealed through one's *guru* (spiritual mentor).
- The term *yoga* is from the Sanskrit language and means union. In Hinduism, *yoga* refers to a variety of systems of philosophy-based practices which outline how one can unite body, mind, and soul, or their actions and thoughts, with divinity, in the quest for *moksha* (liberation/enlightenment).
- *Moksha* can be achieved through a combination of four paths (*Mārga/Yoga*). These are *Jnana/Gyan Yoga* (The Path of Knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (The Path of

Moksha

The final liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

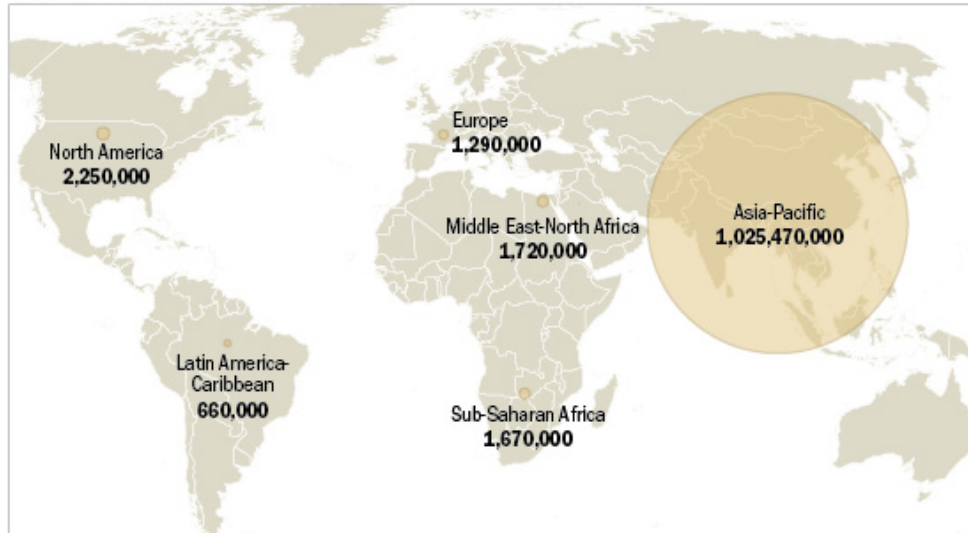
Loving Devotion), *Karma Yoga* (The Path of Selfless and Righteous Action), and *Ashtanga/Raja Yoga* (The Path of Physical Exercise and Meditation).

- There are four goals or objectives of life in Hinduism which collectively are called *purusartha*.
 - *dharma* (virtuous, proper, moral life, duty)
 - *artha* (material prosperity, income security, means of life)
 - *kama* (pleasure, sensuality, emotional fulfillment)
 - *moksha* (unification of the soul with god)
- In Hinduism, human life is believed to comprise four stages called *ashrama*. Ideally every person goes through each of the four stages, although most people do not enter the fourth stage. As well, some spiritual masters/saints may go directly from the first to the fourth stage.
 - First *Ashrama* = *Brahmacharya* (Student Stage)
 - Second *Ashrama* = *Grihastha* (Householder Stage)
 - Third *Ashrama* = *Vanaprastha* (Spiritual Stage)
 - Fourth *Ashrama* = *Sannyasa* (Renunciation Stage)
- Hinduism is a way of life. Every aspect of life—from waking to sleep—is attributed to god. Thus, in Hinduism everything is attributed to the Supreme God. For example
 - In the morning, you worship the sun and treat it like a god as it provides warmth and life.
 - Everyone reveres their parents as gods because their parents gave them life and provided the children with food, shelter, and an upbringing.
 - Knowledge is worshipped as god because knowledge leads the soul closer to *The Brahman*. When a student opens a book, they worship the book before reading it because of the knowledge that it will impart. Likewise, students worship their teacher because they will provide guidance in the students' quest to obtain knowledge.
 - Hindus worship other human beings as gods because they recognize that all souls have *The Brahman* within them. They put their hands together and greet them with *namaste* (originated from Sanskrit, *namah astute*— which, translated into English, literally means, *I bow to you*).
- The main **Hindu texts** are the *Vedas* and their supplements (books derived from the *Vedas*). *Veda* is a Sanskrit word meaning knowledge. These scriptures do not mention the word Hindu but many scriptures discuss *dharma*, which can be translated as code of conduct, law, righteousness, or duty.
- Hindus believe that all life is sacred, and must be loved and revered through *ahimsa* (non-violence).
- Hindus believe that there are many religious paths to salvation and that all religions offer paths that lead to god's love and light.

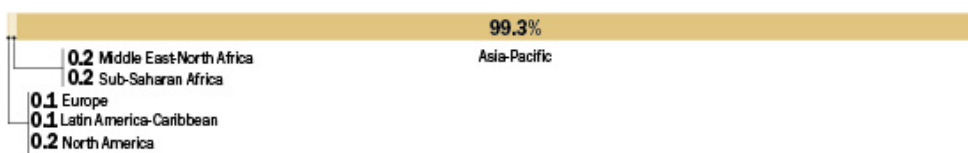
Hindus in Canada and the World

Regional Distribution of Hindus

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Hindu population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Map 1: Regional Distribution of Hindus: Population by Region as of 2010



Figure 3: Cremation of a Hindu Labourer Near Victoria, BC. June 15, 1907

Hinduism is the religion of just over one billion people in the world. It is estimated to be the third most common religious affiliation worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2012). About 95% of adherents reside in India, but Hindus represent a significant percentage of the population in many other countries. The United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa have significant Hindu populations, as does Canada.

Immigration from India and other countries to Canada over time has resulted in a significant Canadian Hindu community*. In 2011, almost 500,000 Canadians identified themselves as being Hindu, representing 1.5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey). It is estimated that Canada has over 90 Hindu temples, with 63 of them being located in the Toronto area.

Hindus and Sikhs first began immigrating to Canada from Punjab, India around the turn of the 20th century (from the late 1800s to 1910), primarily to British Columbia.



Figure 4: Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims Aboard the SS Komagata Maru

Early Hindu and Sikh immigrants were not well received in Canada and the United States. Laws were soon passed in both countries limiting immigration and other rights. An example is the **Komagata Maru** incident of 1914 that involved the Japanese steamship on which several hundred citizens from what was British India at that time attempted to immigrate to Canada but were denied entry.

The SS Komagata Maru sailed from Hong Kong, then also a colony of the British Empire, via Shanghai, China, and Yokohama, Japan, to Vancouver, carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, British India. Eventually, only 24 passengers were admitted to Canada and disembarked: the other 352 passengers were not allowed to leave the ship. The ship was forced to return to India with the remaining passengers. This was but one of many incidents in the early 20th century in which exclusion laws in Canada and the United States were used to exclude some immigrants.

Until the 1960s, most of Canada's (East) Indian community was of the Sikh faith. In the 2001 national census, 297,200 Canadians identified Hinduism as their faith. The present-day Hindu community in Canada is of diverse national origins, many immigrating from India and former British colonies in East Africa, as well as nations such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. As well, there are Canadian converts to the various sects of Hinduism that have occurred over time as a result of intermarriage with persons of other faiths, and through the efforts of groups such as the Hare Krishna movement, various *Gurus*, and other organizations. Toronto has the largest population of Hindu Canadians with approximately 200,000 living in that metropolitan area.

* The Canadian Encyclopedia, Hinduism, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hinduism/.

Hinduism in Manitoba

While it is likely there were a few Manitobans of Hindu origins prior to the 1960s, generally the history of Hinduism in Manitoba is traced back to the early 1960s. At that point, a few Hindu families had begun to settle in Manitoba and were mostly living in Winnipeg and Brandon. These early immigrants were well-educated professionals, such as teachers, university professors, medical doctors, engineers, and others. In the early 1970s, more families migrated to Manitoba and, in particular, Winnipeg.



Figure 5: Early Hindu Immigrants Faced Racism in Canada and the United States

This 1905 article from the Sunday Puget Sound American newspaper—Bellingham, Washington—warns of the Hindu “hordes invading” from Canada.

Winnipeg Area

Hindu Society of Manitoba



Figure 6: Hindu Temple and Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre

In 1970, a few members of the Hindu community in Winnipeg began to discuss the development of a common place of gathering or worship. This resulted in the incorporation of the Hindu Society of Manitoba as a religious and charitable organization on December 9, 1970.

An annual *Diwali* celebration sponsored by the Hindu Society was soon launched and held at a United Church on St. Mary's Road. This was followed by events related to the observation of major Hindu Festivals. Weekly Sunday prayer meetings were added. These meetings became very popular and, while they were initially held at the homes of various devotees, members soon began holding them regularly at the International Centre.

In 1978, the Hindu Society established Vidya Bhavan School to teach Hindi and introduce young children to basic Hindu beliefs and religion. The *Diwali Mela*, a social gathering of Hindus to celebrate *Diwali*, was started by the Society and was initially held in halls across the city. It was an instant success and became the most popular event in the Society's calendar. The *Diwali Mela* is now held annually at the RBC Convention Centre and is attended by more than 5000 members of the Indian community.

In 1979, the Society officially opened the Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre at 854 Ellice Avenue on a *Diwali* night. This first temple was important in bringing the Hindu community together. Eventually, the Hindu Society formed a Temple Building Committee to raise funds and construct a new and larger Hindu Centre. A new Hindu Temple, the Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre, was opened in 2005. It is a 30,000 sq. ft. facility that incorporates a temple, a *puja* hall, offices, four classrooms, a priest's residence, a library, a visiting saint's residence, a community kitchen, a cultural hall with a professional stage, and a gymnasium. Today, both temples are extensively used on a daily basis by the Hindu community.

Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha



Figure 7: Hindu Gods and Goddesses Statues at Hindu Temple and Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre

Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha was founded in 1978 by Hindu's of primarily Indo-Guyanese backgrounds. The group's temple and cultural centre is located at 240 Manitoba Avenue in the North End of Winnipeg. Religious and cultural celebrations are offered throughout the year. The Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha also holds its own independent *Diwali Mela* celebration.

Durga Devi Mandir (Shanti Seva Sabha and Cultural Centre Inc)

Durga Devi Mandir is a Hindu temple dedicated to the principal and popular goddess, Durga (also known as Devi, amongst other names). She is the central deity in the *Shaktism* tradition of Hinduism, where she is equated with the concept of ultimate reality called *The Brahman*.

This temple is one of three in Winnipeg that has strong Indo-Caribbean origins. The membership comprises mostly Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese families with a few with origins in India. Manitobans of other faiths and origins participate in some of the group's activities.

The group traces its origins to 1999 in Winnipeg with meetings in the home of Pundit Balram Mongru. Pundit Mongru has Guyanese origins. Its activities range from Sunday-morning worship to a variety of community-oriented services. In 2005, the current temple was formally opened.

Manitoba Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj was founded in the 19th century CE by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in India. It has and continues to be a reformist movement in India and within Hindu-*Dharma* worldwide. It is not a separate religion. Rather, it is a sect within Hinduism. The Arya Samaj doctrine is based on the *Vedas* and rejects the idea of caste, child marriages, and the exclusive role of *Brahmins* as religious leaders. Principles of Arya Samaj do not extol immunity from mistakes, except in the laws of *karma*. The movement teaches monotheism and opposes the use of images in worship, as well as many traditional Hindu rituals.

The teachings of Swami Dayanand reached Guyana in the early 1900s; however, the arrival of missionary Bhai Parmānand in 1910 led to a strong growth of Arya Samaj throughout the country. Manitobans of Guyanese origins, as with the Dharmik Sabha, were instrumental in establishing the Manitoba Arya Samaj.

Ramakrishna Mandir and Cultural Centre



Figure 8: Sri Ramakrishna Math Temple, Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math is a monastic group for men founded by Ramakrishna (1836–1886), a 19th-century religious Hindu leader from Bengal.

The Mandir is named for two of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu: Rama and Krishna. It is located at 903 Winnipeg Avenue, and was founded in 1998. The founding Hindu families were descendants of Indian indentured labourers born in Guyana, Trinidad, and other parts of the Caribbean. They brought with them their faith and scriptures. They strive to work and live in harmony with the people of diverse cultures of their adopted lands and, most importantly, continue to follow *Sanaatan Dharma*, the “Hindu way of life.”

The aim of the Mandir is to share the fundamental teachings of *sanaatan dharma* in that there are multiple paths to the One Supreme Divine. Ramakrishna Mandir recognizes and welcomes peoples of all faiths and diversities to partake in the religious and cultural activities, and to share the heritage and the wisdom of the *Vedic* scriptures, the *Epics*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* with rituals, chanting, songs, and celebrations. Weekly programs include *Satsang* on Sundays and *Shiv Rudra Abhisek* on Mondays.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

The Winnipeg ISKCON temple is dedicated to fostering consciousness of Lord Krishna (Lord Jagannath). ISKCON temples are devoted to Lord Krishna and his elder brother Baladeva/Balarama and younger sister Subhadra. Krishna is one of the most widely revered and most popular of all Hindu deities. Krishna is worshipped as the eighth incarnation (*avatar* or *avatara*) of the Hindu god Vishnu and also as a supreme god in his own right.

ISKCON was established in New York by A. C. Bhaktivedanta (also known as Swami Prabhupada). Swami Prabhupada was very successful in spreading his message, particularly to non-Indians. By the time he died in 1977, there were 108 temples spread throughout six continents. ISKCON temples are found in at least 9 Canadian cities from coast to coast.

ISKCON Manitoba provides devotees and seekers a place to find each other and perform spiritual activities. It also offers a program of educational activities to systematically train aspiring devotees. Members of the community include people of various backgrounds and origins. Many are converts drawn by the Hare Krishna movement.

Beyond Winnipeg

There are Manitobans of Hindu faith throughout the province, although the majority live in or near Winnipeg. Some communities with a significant Hindu population beyond Winnipeg include Brandon and Thompson.

Thompson

In Thompson, there is an active Hindu community. The Hindu Prathna Samaj of Thompson celebrates various special days, such as the Navratri festival, in the Thompson area. As well, some events and functions are held in collaboration with the Sikh community.

Brandon

As with Winnipeg, Hindus in the Brandon area have largely immigrated or migrated to the area since the 1960s. In 2002, it was estimated that there were approximately seventy-eight Hindu families living in the Brandon area. There is currently an initiative to open a temple in Brandon to serve the local Hindu community.

Notes



Origins of Hinduism

The origins of Hinduism have been traced to the Indus River Valley in the Indian sub-continent and the peoples who lived there. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and there is evidence of the existence of Hinduism dating back 4,000 years. By 1500 BCE, Hinduism had already reached a high state of philosophical and religious development which has been sustaining it to the present.

What has come to be called the Hindu faith, tradition, or religion is the result of a rich blend of human civilization, including many different practices and expressions of religious life. Many religious cultures, who spoke many languages and held many different concepts about the nature of the Divine, have contributed to its development and evolution.

Within Hinduism, there are a vast array of practices and beliefs. As such, defining Hinduism is challenging. The three other Indian religions—Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—have their roots in Hinduism and have close associations both historically and conceptually.

Unlike many other religions, Hinduism cannot be traced to a single founder, single scripture, or commonly agreed upon set of teachings. Throughout its long history, there have been contributions by many important figures who had different teachings and different philosophies, and who wrote many holy books. Therefore, some writers think of Hinduism as being a way of life or a family of religions rather than a single religion.

The term Hindu was historically used to identify people with a geographical and cultural connection to South Asia or who were indigenous to that region. It was only later that it became a religious identifier. By the 16th century, the term began being used to refer to the peoples who resided in the subcontinent who were not Turkic or Muslim. It is thought that, at that time, the term may have simply indicated groups that shared certain cultural practices such as the cremation of the dead and their styles of cuisine.

A more precise and widely used term for describing this belief system is *Sanatan Dharma* or *Hindu Dharma*. *Sanatan* means eternal, ever-present, universal, and unceasing; *Dharma* is harmony, compassion, truth, or natural law. *Sanatan Dharma* means eternal path, never beginning or ending. *Sanatan Dharma* places spiritual experiences above religious issues and cultural practices. The term *Hindu* is thought to have derived from the name of the river or river complex in northwest India, the *Sindhu*. *Sindhu* is a Sanskrit word used by the inhabitants of the region. Other groups who arrived in the land used the name in their own languages for the land and its peoples.

Although defining Hinduism is a challenge, it is correct to state that Hinduism has its roots in India. Most Hindus have a principal body of sacred scriptures known as the *Vedas* and share a common system of values known as *dharma*. Because of the antiquity of Hinduism, as well as its inclusiveness and acceptance of diverse expressions and beliefs, an extensive array of philosophical doctrines and dogmas has evolved. This has resulted in the appearance of additional scriptural texts, such as the *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, among others.

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| Indus Valley Civilization Period | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 2500–1500 BCE | <p>The Indus River Valley civilization developed and flourished in the basin of the Indus River which flows through present-day Pakistan. The civilization had developed by about 2500 BCE, although its origins go back further. By 1500 BCE, the civilization had largely faded away. Evidence of early Hindu practice is archaeologically dated to this vanished culture.</p> <p>The civilization was extensive, located from the eastern foothills of the Himalayas, to Lothar on the Gujarat coast, and to Sutgagen Dor near the Iranian border. Some cities of the Indus valley culture have yet to be excavated.</p> <p>Two major cities have been uncovered, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, which has given us the alternative name of Harappan culture.</p> <p>The Indus civilization did not develop as a result of contact with other civilizations such as Sumer or Egypt. It was an indigenous development growing out of earlier, local cultures.</p> |
| Vedic Period | |
| 1500 BCE | <p>There has been some debate about this period and the nature of the civilization. The two major theories about the early development of early south Asian traditions are as follows:</p> <p>The Aryan migration thesis is that the Indus Valley groups calling themselves Aryans (noble ones) migrated into the subcontinent and became the dominant cultural force. Hinduism, on this view, derives from their religion recorded in the <i>Vedas</i> along with elements of the indigenous traditions they encountered.</p> <p>The cultural transformation thesis is that Aryan culture is a development of the Indus Valley culture. On this view there were no Aryan migrations (or invasions) and the Indus valley culture was an Aryan or Vedic culture. Recent genome-based studies and other research suggests that this is the more likely development.</p> |
| 1500–1200 BCE | The Vedic Age in which the <i>Rig Veda</i> is written. |
| 800 BCE | The eleven major <i>Upanishads</i> are written around 800 BCE and become fundamental texts of Hinduism. These texts introduce the ideas of reincarnation and <i>karma</i> , and that those who are righteous in the current life will be reborn in a better life until they eventually reach <i>moksha</i> , or the holy bliss. |
| 600–500 BCE | Buddhism and Jainism break away from the main flow of Hinduism. |
| Epic, Puranic, and Classical Age | |
| 500 BCE | This period, beginning from around the time of Buddha (died around 400 BCE), saw the composition of further texts. The <i>Epics</i> and <i>Puranas</i> are written in approximately 500 BCE. The <i>Epics</i> , which chronicle the history of mortal men, and the <i>Puranas</i> , which chronicle the history of celestial figures, are written around 500 BCE. These signal the beginning of devotional Hinduism, in which followers commit themselves to one deity, particularly Shiva or Vishnu, though Devi is popular as well. |

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 400 BCE–800 CE | The Hindu response to Buddhism and Jainism results in further changes to the main teachings of Hinduism. |
| 326 BCE | Alexander the Great brings his army and the influence of Hellenic culture and ideas into the northern most regions of India. The Indian Mauryan Empire is created to counter this Hellenic influx of culture and ideas. |
| 268-232 BCE | <p>Ashoka became Emperor of the Mauryan Dynasty covering North India and Afghanistan to the Deccan plains to Mysore, except the coastal territory of Kalinga. The conquering of Kalinga was one of the bloodiest conflicts of ancient history. It caused a change in Ashoka's outlook as a ruler and a man. As a ruler, he renounced war and conquest by violence and, as a man, he became a follower of Lord Buddha. He ruled from 268 BCE to 232 BCE. Although he is believed to have been reborn to a Jain or Hindu family after embracing Buddhism, Ashoka promoted the living of a nobler life according to the laws of <i>Dharma</i> which had a great impact on both Buddhism and Hinduism. He distributed wealth, built monasteries, sponsored festivals, and brought peace and prosperity.</p> <p>He turned a tradition into an official state ideology and his support of Buddhism began its long transformation into a world religion.</p> <p>Buddhism and Jainism had a profound impact on Indian and Hindu culture. They discouraged caste distinctions, abolished hereditary priesthoods, made poverty a precondition of spirituality, and advocated the communion with the spiritual essence of the universe through contemplation and meditation.</p> |
| 52 CE–500 CE | The date of the first presence of Christianity in India is debated. Christianity is believed to have been introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who is reported to have visited Muziris in Kerala in AD 52. Generally, scholars agree that Christianity was definitely established in India by the 6th century CE. The Christian presence included some communities that used Syriac liturgies. Therefore, it is possible that Christianity's connection to India extends as far back as the purported time of St. Thomas' arrival. |
| 200 CE | Hindu laws are codified. |
| 320–500 CE | <p>The Gupta Empire is founded in approximately 320 CE. Maharaja Sri Gupta founded the Gupta Empire, which covers much of the Indian subcontinent. It ushers in an era of peace and prosperity that allows Hindu culture to stabilize and spread.</p> <p>The rise of the Gupta Empire (320–500 CE) saw the development of the great traditions of <i>Vaishnavism</i> (focussed on Vishnu), <i>Shaivism</i> (focussed on Shiva), and <i>Shaktism</i> (focussed on Devi).</p> <p>Many elements from this period, such as <i>Bhakti</i> (devotion) and temple worship, are visible in present-day Hinduism. The Gupta Empire saw the development of poetic literature. These texts were composed in Sanskrit, which became the most important element in the shared culture.</p> |
| 400–500 CE | Hinduism returns as the dominant religion of India. Temples and monuments are built to honour Hindu ideas, gods, and beliefs. This is the era of the Hindu Renaissance. |

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| Medieval Period | |
|-------------------|---|
| 500 CE | The Gupta Empire fell in approximately 500. Overrun by the invading Hun, the Gupta Empire fragmented into various weaker entities around 500. |
| 788 CE | This is the year of the birth of Adi Sankaracharya—Hindu <i>guru</i> , philosopher, and scholar. |
| 800–1000 CE | <i>Bhakti</i> movements rise. The <i>Bhakti</i> movement emphasized devotion to god and was an Indian response to various pressures, including the challenge that appeared in the form of Islamic religion, the pressures for conversion, the need for social change, and the need to attend to the ills prevalent in Hindu society at that time. The <i>Bhakti</i> movement's goal was the purification of Hindu religion and the freeing of the people from the monopoly and injustices of the priestly classes. |
| 900 CE | Shankara brought the concept of one Brahman or one god, introducing significant monotheistic beliefs into Hinduism. |
| 950 CE | Queen Sembiyan Madhavi spent her life building Hindu temples and monasteries. |
| 600 CE–1100 CE | <p>Around the 7th century CE, when Arab traders arrived at coastal Malabar and Konkan-Gujarat, Islam first came to the western coast of India. Cheraman Juma Mosque in Kerala, built in 629 CE by Malik Deenar, is believed to be the first mosque in India. As well, in the 7th century CE, immigrant Arab and Persian trading communities from South Arabia and the Persian Gulf began settling in coastal Gujarat.</p> <p>Ismaili Shia Islam was introduced to Gujarat in the second half of the 11th century, when Fatimid Imam Al-Mustansir Billah sent missionaries to Gujarat in 1073 CE.</p> <p>In Northern India, Islam arrived in the 12th century via the Turkic invasions. Since the 1100s, Islam has become a part of India's religious and cultural heritage.</p> |
| Pre-modern Period | |
| 1400–1700 CE | Europeans arrived in India to pursue colonization and commercial goals within the Hindu world. |
| 1542 CE | Mogul emperor Akbar, being religious, reformed efforts to unite Muslims and Hindus. |
| 1600 CE | The Hindu Renaissance began in approximately 1600. Scholars focused on modernistic interpretations of the sacred texts and social reform. |
| 1605 CE | Jahangir became emperor of India; Jahangir followed both Muslim and Hindu teachings. |
| 1669 CE | Mogul emperor Aurangzeb outlawed Hindu worship in India forcing many Hindus to convert. |

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| British Period | |
|----------------|--|
| 1757 CE | <p>Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey (1757) led to the end of the Mogul Empire and the rise of British supremacy in India.</p> <p>At first, the British did not interfere with the religion and culture of the Indian people, allowing Hindus to practice their religion unimpeded. Later, however, missionaries arrived preaching Christianity and actively promoting conversion.</p> |
| 1861 CE | <p>British Raj, under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, criminalized sexual activities that were deemed to be "against the order of nature", which included homosexual activities.</p> |
| 1894 CE | <p>Paramahansa Ramakrishna (1836–1886) inspired the Ramakrishna Order of monks and is regarded as the spiritual founder of the Ramakrishna Movement (<i>Vedanta</i> Movement). After the death of Ramakrishna in 1886, the monastic disciples formed the first <i>Math</i> (monastery) at Baranagore. Swami Vivekananda, a Ramakrishna monk, was a delegate at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions. The following year he founded the first <i>Vedanta</i> Society in New York, United States of America. He returned to India in 1897 and founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. The <i>Vedanta</i> Society sought to introduce Hinduism to the West and revitalize the Hindu traditions of service, volunteerism, and education. Swami Vivekananda urged his followers to be true to their faith but also respect all religions of the world as his <i>guru</i> Paramhansa Ramakrishna had taught that all religions are pathways to god.</p> |
| 1903–04 CE | <p>Immigration to Canada of people from India or of Indian origin began in 1903–1904. The census records of 1911 list a total of 1758 persons of Hindu or Sikh origins. Early Hindus fought to maintain their religious traditions in a mostly hostile environment which viewed 'coloured' immigrants, such as Hindus and Sikhs, as a threat to the British culture and way of life at the time. The male Canadian pioneers could not bring brides from India up until the 1930s, and did not have the right to vote in Federal elections until 1947.</p> |
| 1908 CE | <p>Through the "continuous journey" legislation, the Canadian government effectively banned further Hindu and Sikh immigration by requiring South Asians to purchase a ticket for a through passage to Canada from one's country of origin. The discriminatory immigration policies blocked immigration from the Indian subcontinent and other places for over 50 years.</p> |
| 1919–1947 CE | <p>The era of Mahatma Gandhi has a profound influence on Hinduism and India.</p> <p>Indian lawyer Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi launches a two-year campaign of non-cooperation beginning in 1920. He encourages Indians to leave British institutions, return British honours, and practice self-reliance. While Gandhi is forced to stop the campaign upon his arrest and imprisonment in 1922, he goes on to become the most recognized leader of the Indian nationalist movement and is given the title of Mahatma (great soul).</p> |

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| | |
|---|---|
| 1947 CE | In August 1947, after three hundred years of rule, the British make a hasty and poorly planned, departure from India. Their decision to partition the former colony before departing created major upheaval in the Indian subcontinent and led to a period of severe conflict and violence. In spite of opposition, including opposition from Gandhi, they decided to partition the colony into two independent nation states; a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. The partition led to a chaotic mass migration of people within the land. Millions of Muslims attempted to leave India for West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while millions of Hindus and Sikhs tried to move in the opposite direction. The resulting chaos led to religious sectarian violence and mutual genocide across the continent. Communities that had coexisted relatively peacefully for centuries began to attack each other. Violence was especially intense in Punjab and Bengal provinces which were on the border with the new Pakistani territories. By 1948, more than fifteen million people had been displaced, and between one to two million had been killed. The partition, chaos, and conflict that followed had a deep and lasting impact on the peoples of the Indian sub-continent. |
| Post Indian Independence—Modern Period | |
| 1955 CE | During this period, a number of Hindu beliefs and practices were incorporated into the laws in India. The Hindu Marriage Act was enacted by the Parliament of India. Three related acts were also enacted as part of the Hindu Code Bills during this time: the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956). These acts apply to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs as well. |
| 1960s CE | From the 1960s onwards, Hindu Indians migrated to Britain and North America, including Canada. <i>Gurus</i> travelled to the West to support and nurture these new Hindu communities, sometimes starting missionary movements that attracted Western interest. Transcendental meditation achieved worldwide popularity, attracting the attention of celebrities such as the Beatles. Perhaps the most conspicuous was the Hare Krishna movement, whose male followers' sported shaved heads and saffron robes. |
| 1966 CE | Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India. She served two terms, from 1966 to 1977 and from 1980 to 1984. Indira was the daughter of the First Prime Minister of India (after independence), Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. |
| 1979 CE | The Hindu Society of Manitoba opened its first Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre in Manitoba at 854 Ellice Avenue, in Winnipeg. |
| 1990s–Present | Hindu communities became well established in many nations throughout the world. Excelling socially, economically, and academically, they have built many magnificent temples (such as the Swaminarayan Temple in London, United Kingdom) and solidified their communities. |

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

| | |
|---------|---|
| 1997 CE | <p>Deepak Obhrai became the first Hindu-Canadian elected to Canada's Parliament. Obhrai was born on July 5, 1950, in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) to a Hindu family.</p> <p>K. R. Narayanan, of <i>Dalit</i> ('untouchables') origins, is appointed President of India. Narayanan was born in the southern state of Kerala and grew up in the 1930's. It was a time when <i>Dalits</i> were commonly denied many rights and faced many restrictions such as the right to enter Hindu temples, draw water from wells (reserved for <i>Brahmins</i> and other members of the higher castes), or walk along some village pathways. As well, <i>Dalits</i> from the 1850s onward experienced consistent denial of access to education in India. Despite the obstacles he faced, he was an excellent student and managed to overcome many of the challenges. When he was appointed, he had a long and distinguished career as a scholar, diplomat, and cabinet minister who once served as India's Ambassador to the United States.</p> |
| 1998 CE | <p>Shabnam Mausi became the first transgender person to be elected to public office in India. Shabnam served as a member of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly from 1998 to 2003.</p> |
| 2001 CE | <p>The Kumbh Mela Festival becomes the largest religious gathering in history. In the 2001 Canadian census, 297,200 persons declared Hinduism as their faith.</p> |
| 2007 CE | <p>In July 2007, the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir was consecrated in Toronto. It is the largest of its kind in Canada and was constructed according to guidelines found in ancient Hindu scriptures. The grounds spread over 18 acres and include a <i>haveli</i> and a heritage museum.</p> |
| 2007 CE | <p>Pratibha Patil becomes the first woman President of India.</p> |
| 2011 CE | <p>Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized in India; however, in 2011, the court granted legal recognition to a single same-sex marriage, involving two women.</p> |
| 2014 CE | <p>The Supreme Court of India recognized <i>hijras</i> and other transgender groups as an official third gender.</p> |
| 2015 CE | <p>The Rajya Sabha passed the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, guaranteeing rights and entitlements to transgender persons; for example, reservations in education and jobs, legal aid, pensions, unemployment allowances, and skill development for transgender people. As well, provisions prohibit discrimination in employment and prevent abuse, violence, and exploitation.</p> |
| 2016 CE | <p>Ontario legislature passed a bill proclaiming October as Hindu Heritage Month annually in the province.</p> |
| 2017 CE | <p>India's Supreme Court provided the LGBT community the freedom to safely express their sexual orientation.</p> |



Significant Texts and Writings

Language

Hinduism is traditionally considered to have and use two liturgical (religious) languages, Sanskrit and Tamil, although Sanskrit may be the more dominant language. Most of the Hindu scriptures, prayers, and *mantras* were written in Sanskrit. It is also the language used for most Hindu rituals around the world.

Nonetheless, Tamil is the language of some devotional hymns, especially those which were sung in almost every Shiva and Vishnu temple in Southern India (then Tamil majority) and even in some Northern Indian temples. As well, some Tamil texts are considered to be the basis for the *Bhakti* movement.

One of the ancient stories says that Sanskrit and Tamil emerged from either side of Lord Shiva's divine drum of creation as he danced the dance of creation as *nataraja* or the sound of cosmic force.

Nonetheless, as the religion progressed, time passed, and other languages evolved, many scriptures and prayers were composed in other regional languages. As Hinduism was traditionally concentrated in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and a few additional countries, these texts and prayers used the languages common to those regions.

It is, therefore, correct to say that Hindus pray in Sanskrit as well as languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Malyalam, Indonesian, Singhali, Bengali, Nepali, and Gujarati, among other Indian languages.

However, Sanskrit remains the language used for most of the prayers, hymns, ceremonies, *pujas*, and other rituals that take place in the home or in the temples. In many temples, in order to facilitate the participation of youth and other Hindus not familiar with Sanskrit or Indian languages, participants in temple events, rituals, and prayers use texts that are translated and transliterated (English phonetic spelling) so that they can understand what is taking place.

The following are examples of three Sanskrit terms, their transliteration, and their meanings in English.

| Sanskrit Terms | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Sanskrit Term | Transliteration | English Translation |
| शान्ति | <i>Shanti</i> | Peace |
| कमल | <i>Kamala</i> | Lotus |
| नमस्ते | <i>Namaste</i> | I bow to the divine in you |

Key Writings/Scriptures

There are countless Hindu texts and literary works, many of which are available in a multitude of languages. At the end of this section, a graphic overview of the major Hindu religious scriptures and their relationships follows. While it is impossible to do justice to this plurality in this profile of Hinduism, it is possible to note several especially important scriptures or key writings.

The *Vedas* form the foundation of Hindu scripture. They are comprised of four parts, from earliest to latest: the *Samhitas* (collection of hymns and *mantras*), the *Brahmanas* (manuals of rituals and prayers to guide priests), the *Aranyakas* (formal philosophical books for saints), and the *Upanishads* (book of philosophy dealing with divine revelation and spiritual thought). Initially, the *Vedas* were transmitted as part of an oral culture. They are known as *shruti* texts—which indicates that the sages who transcribed them heard the narratives directly from the Divine. While the *Vedas* were eventually recorded by human hands by *smriti* (from memory), they are considered to be of divine origin.

Though each of the *Vedas* is connected, one may also understand each as having a particular focus. The *Samhitas* is itself divided into four parts or *mantras*: *Rig-Veda*, *Sama-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, and *Atharva-Veda*. Collectively, they are concerned with knowledge of hymns and chants (*Rig-Veda*), sacrificial chants (*Yajur-Veda*), musical interpretations or accompaniments to chants (*Sama Veda*), and pragmatic prayers and incantations for health and to ward off sickness (*Atharva-Veda*). In some understandings, the *Vedas* consist only of the *Samhitas*. Others classifications include the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas*, the *Upanishads*, and part of the *Samhitas*.

The *Upanishads* are often considered the most sophisticated of the *Vedas*. Collectively, they are an assortment of some hundred written works. Initially, they were reserved for only the political and cultural elite. Their focus tends more towards the internal world rather than the external. Many key ideas and beliefs in Hinduism are explored in the *Upanishads*, including *samsara*, *moksha*, *dharma*, and *karma*. The *Upanishads* are largely recorded in the form of a poetic dialogue.

A second group of Hindu religious texts are the *Smriti* which are a body of texts usually attributed to a specific author, traditionally written down but constantly revised. In contrast, the *Shruti* are considered authorless, and were passed on orally across the generations and fixed. *Smritis* are derivative secondary works based on the *Shruti*. They are key scriptures in the *Mimamsa* school of Hindu philosophy.

An important and popular part of the *Smriti* is two epic stories, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—originally recorded in Sanskrit. Both of these recount why and how god Vishnu incarnated. The first, the *Ramayana* (arrival of Vishnu as Ram), centers around the Ram avatar (seventh incarnation of the God Vishnu) and battles between good and evil. In it, one can find lessons focused on conduct and virtuous life, relationships and responsibilities, social roles, and family values. Each year, parts of the *Ramayana* are acted out in India and abroad.



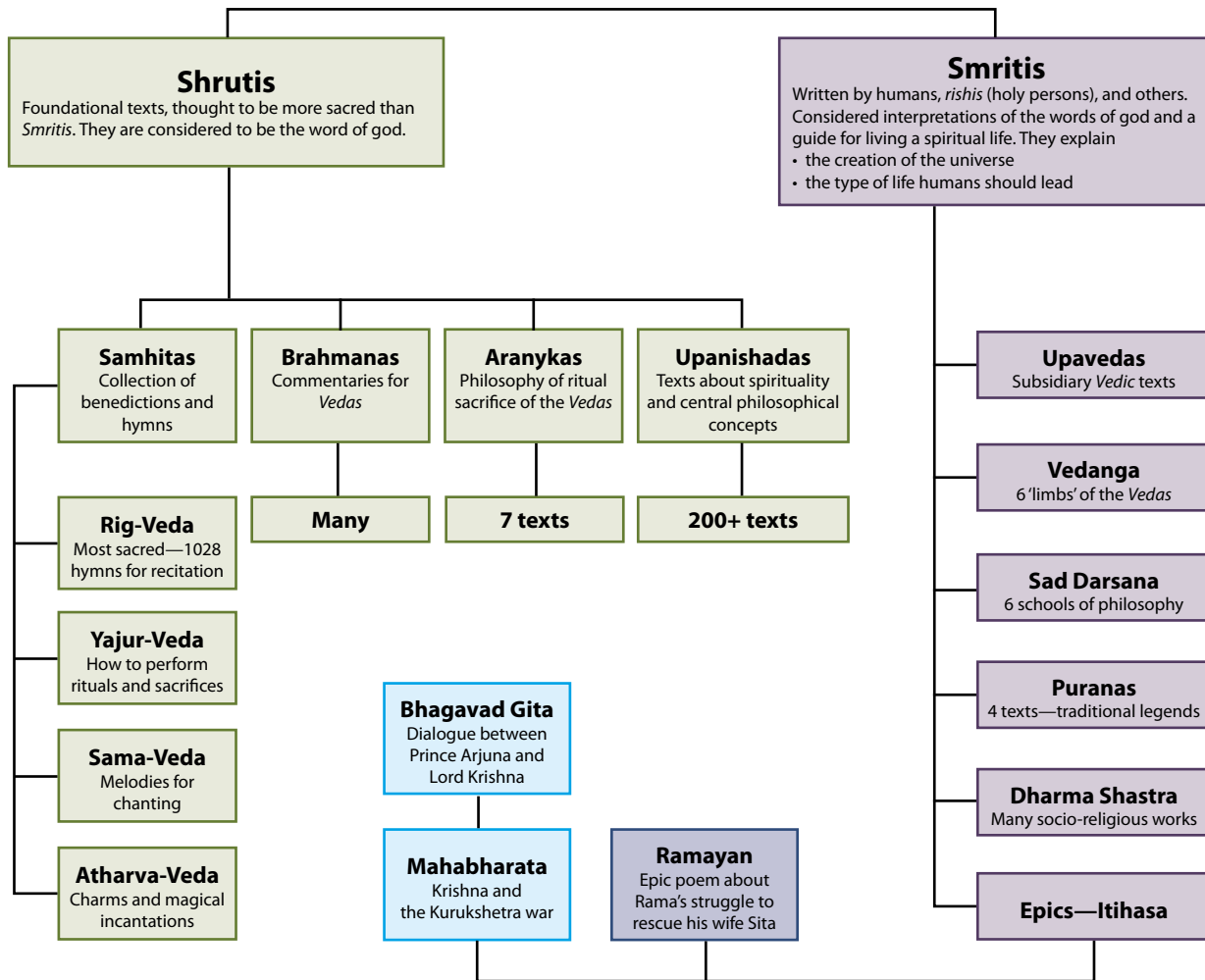
Figure 9: *Bhagavad Gita*, a 19th century manuscript, from North India

The *Mahabharata* (meaning great *Bharat*) is massively long, nearing two million words. In contrast to the *Ramayana*, it contains a realistic portrayal of human fallibility and weakness. The *Mahabharata* is divided into 18 parvas (books). The work is centered upon the story of a struggle for the throne by different parts of the family. It includes lessons on war and justice, family, the connection between one's happiness and that of others, and spiritual devotion. The *Mahabharata* recounts the role of Krishna (the 8th incarnation of Vishnu) leading up to and during the Kurukshetra war.

The *Mahabharata* contains the *Bhagavad Gita* (*Bhagavad* means god and *Gita* means song, thus the divine song of the Lord) as a structured dialogue, between a prince named Arjuna and his advisor Krishna, about self-realization and how human beings can establish their eternal relationship with god. The *Bhagavad Gita* may also be referred to as the *Gita*. Some interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gita* consider it an exploration of the concept of a just war; others (such as Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi) claim that it was a metaphor for the struggle against the internal and external moral dangers within each person.

Lastly, the Code of *Manu*, also part of the *Smritis*, was written around 500 CE, and contains a wide-ranging assortment of laws governing domestic, social, and religious life in India. Many of these either were incorporated into or influenced India's laws. These include food and dietary conventions, as well as marriage and social norms, and other ethical situations. Women are instructed to be dependent upon men, while men are reminded to treat women with reverential respect.

Overview and Relationships of Hindu Scriptures





Foundational Beliefs, Concepts, and Ideas

Time and Creation of the Universe

As indicated earlier, the Hindu concept of time (and the origins of the universe) is one that has no beginning and no end. This present universe was preceded by an infinite number of universes which will be followed by another infinite number of universes.

The majority of Hindus believe in one **supreme god** (*The Brahman*). Everything is a part of and a manifestation of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality; however, *Brahman's* qualities and powers may be represented by a great diversity of gods/deities all of which emanate from *The Brahman*. The concept of *Brahman* and the relationship of the Supreme Being with nature, individual souls, and *The Brahman's* various manifestations are the subject of many different Hindu schools of philosophy/belief.

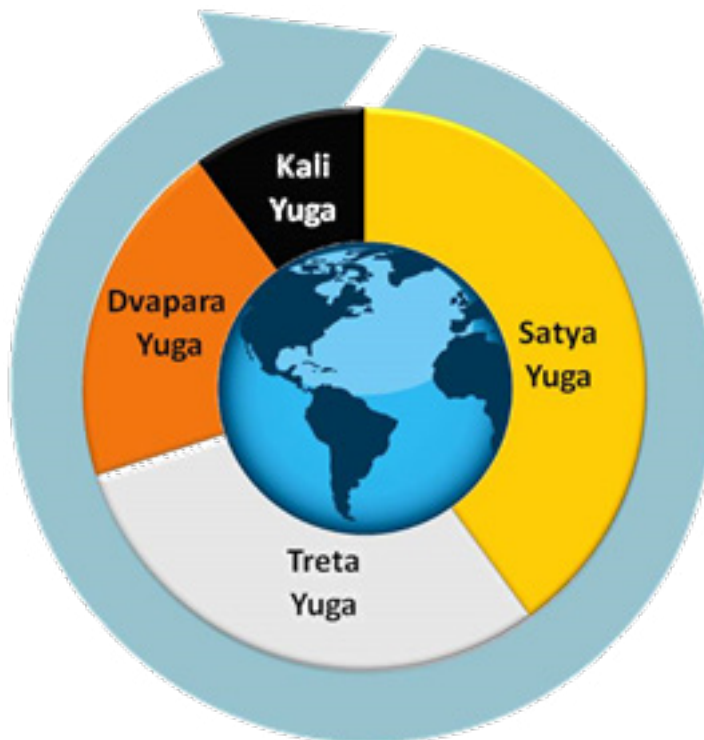


Figure 10: *Maha Yuga Cycle*

The universe, Earth, and all creatures were created by **Brahma**, **one of the many gods** that emanated from *The Brahman*.

The birth and dissolution of the present universe is directly connected to Brahma's life. Human time and that of the gods is different. The lifespan of Brahma (*maha kalpa* or *paradha*) is estimated by some to be over 300 trillion human years. One day and night in Brahma's space and time (*kalpa*) is believed to be over 8 billion human years. Each *kalpa* is further divided into two *artha kalpas* (one day and night), and each of these is further divided into 100 *maha yugas*. Each *maha yuga* consists of a series of four shorter *yugas*, or ages: *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dvapara Yuga*, and *Kali Yuga*.

- *Satya Yuga* (Golden Age) is the first and best era. It is a time of truth and perfection. It is seen as a golden age because there is just one *dharma*—one religious path—and all humans are saintly. As a result, they are not required to perform religious ceremonies. During this *yuga*, humankind possesses many virtues: they are physically large and powerfully built, and they are honest, youthful, vigorous, erudite, and virtuous. The *Vedas* (most ancient of Hindu scriptures) are one. All humans can attain bliss. There is no need for agriculture or mining as Earth yields those riches on its own. The weather is pleasant and everyone is happy. There are no religious sects. There is no disease, decrepitude, or fear of anything.
- *Treta Yuga* (Silver Age) is considered to follow the *Satya* even though *Treta* means the third part or the collection of three. During this era, virtue begins to diminish. At the beginning of this past *yuga*, many kings and emperors rose to dominance and conquered the world. Conflict and wars were frequent and the weather began to have periods of extreme conditions. Oceans and deserts were formed. Humans began to diminish in physical and other aspects compared to their ancestors. Agriculture, labour, and mining began to meet the needs of humans. During *Treta Yuga*, humans' virtue declined by a quarter of what it was in the previous *yuga*.
- *Dvapara Yuga* (Bronze Age) is considered to be the third *yuga*. *Dvapara* means two pair or after two. In this era, people become tainted with negative qualities (pessimism, laziness, criminal tendencies, and doubt) and are weak in comparison to their ancestors. The *Vedas* are divided into four parts. During this era, diseases are rampant and humans are unhappy and fight each other.
- *Kali Yuga* (Iron Age) is the final era or stage (current era). It is a time of darkness and ignorance. Humans are sinners and lack virtue. They are slaves to their passions and are barely as powerful as their earliest ancestors in the *Satya Yuga*. Social cohesion and respect are lost and humans become liars and hypocrites. It is a time when knowledge is lost and scriptures diminished. Humans eat forbidden and unclean food. The environment is polluted, water and food become scarce. Wealth is heavily diminished. Families become non-existent. At the end of this stage, the world and all living things are destroyed and then a new *Satya Yuga* follows.

The Hindu notion of time is cyclical, the universe is considered to be continually flowing through these four periods of time. As time progresses from one *yuga* (era) to another, human society degrades or diminishes in moral, spiritual, and other qualities to a level lower than before. Eventually, the cycle culminates in the destruction of the existing order at the end of the *Kali Yuga*. After this, the golden era of *Satya Yuga* begins anew. (More recently, some Hindu's, based on new interpretations of scriptures, have come to believe that there is a descending and ascending order of the four *yugas*. In this case the order would be reversed moving from *Kali Yuga* to *Dvapara Yuga*, and so on.) Prevailing Hindu calculations and beliefs put us as currently living in the *Kali Yuga* stage.

One God with Many Manifestations

In any Hindu temple one is likely to find many divine images, or *murtis*, in the form of statues or prints. Even when the central image in the temple may be of one particular deity, surrounding this central sanctum or image there may be a dozen subsidiary shrines to various deities.



Figure 11: Hindu Deities

In Hinduism, the concept of god varies from one sect to another. Due to its historical development, Hinduism tends to be a regional religion rather than a single doctrinal religion. Some describe Hinduism as encompassing a broad range of perspectives on the nature of god including

- polytheism: The belief that there are several or many distinct gods.
- pantheism: The belief that all reality is identical with a creator or god, or that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent god.
- monism: The view that attributes oneness or singleness to a concept.
- monotheism: The belief in the existence of a single god.

In Hinduism, god is one, but also many. This one ultimate reality, whether you refer to it as *The Brahman*, the Divine, or the Real, can be perceived in and through an infinite number of names and forms. The Hindu concept of god and deity varies from supreme god (known as Parameshwar or Paramatma) to a personal god such as in the *Yoga* school of Hindu philosophy to 33 Vedic deities, to hundreds of deities as described in the *Puranics*. For example, Ram and Krishna were reincarnated from the supreme god. So Hindus might worship *The Brahman*, Ram, and/or Krishna.

Hindus also believe that god permeates all things—animate or inanimate—and, as they enhance our well-being, intellect, and spirituality, one worships them. For example, the sun provides us with warmth and life, so we respect the Sun god; our parents protect us, feed us, guide us, and look after our well-being, so we respect our parents as gods.

Another way to think of the Hindu gods is to think of their different manifestations that relate to roles. For example, for a child and their siblings, the female parent is a mother; to the mother's siblings, she is a sister; and to her parents she is a daughter. She is also a granddaughter, an aunt, a friend, and a person. Although she is one, she takes on many different roles.

The philosophical system of *Advaita* or non-dualism (not-two) developed in the *Vedanta* school of Hindu philosophy is the belief that everything is part of one consciousness. Things can appear different without being separate. Just look at your hand for a moment. Your fingers are all different from each other, but are they really separate? They all arise from the same hand. Similarly, the objects, animals, plants, and people in the world are all different in their appearance and functioning; however, they are all connected at their source—they come from the same source. This one being that is behind all life has an infinite number of different expressions that we experience as different objects. *Advaita* is rooted in the *Upanishads* and was popularized by Adi Shankara in the 8th century. This perspective would become the basis of mainstream Hinduism as it developed in the medieval period. Non-dualism sees the identity of the Self or *Atman* with the Whole or *The Brahman*, and can be described as monism or pantheism.

Explicit monotheism is found in the sacred texts of the *Bhagavad Gita* and gave rise to several religious traditions.

- Explicit monotheism in the form of *bhakti* (emotional or ecstatic devotion) to a single, external, and personal deity (in the form of Shiva or Vishnu) became popular in South India in the early medieval period.
- Ecstatic devotion to Krishna, a form of Vishnu, gained popularity throughout India during the Middle Ages and gave rise to schools of *Vaishnavism*.
- Ecstatic devotion to the goddess Durga became popular in some parts of India in the later medieval and early modern ages and gave rise to schools of *Shaktism*.
- *Vaishnavism*, particularly *Krishnaism*, *Shaktism*, and some forms of *Shaivism* remain the most explicit forms of monotheistic worship of a personal god within Hinduism.

Other Hindus, such as many of those who practice *Shaivism*, tend to assume the existence of a singular god, but do not necessarily associate god with aspects of a personality. Rather, they envisage god as an impersonal Absolute (*Brahman*), who can be worshipped only in part in a human form.

The term *Ishvara* may refer to any of the monotheistic or monistic conceptions within Hinduism, depending on context.

While many Hindu deities have distinct and complex personalities, many adherents would insist that this diversity of expressions of god must be understood in relation to god's oneness. *Brahman* is the name of that one god that transcends all personal names. *Brahman* is one, though the "names and forms" of this one are many. This one god *Brahman* may be seen in and through an array of names and forms. Thus all the gods represented or present in a Hindu temple are different representations of the one Supreme Being—even though each has its own personality and attributes.

Thus, Hinduism may be considered a monotheistic religion as most Hindus believe in one supreme god whose qualities and forms may be represented by a multitude of deities, all which emanate from Him. Hindus believe that *The Brahman* is manifested as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. They comprise the Hindu Trinity, where Brahma is the Creator, Vishnu is the Preserver, and Shiva is the Dissolver.

Brahman also manifests as the world of multiplicity and plurality, and may assume divine physical forms (avatar) from time to time for the preservation of righteousness. Three prominent avatars are Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. The many Deities worshipped by numerous Hindus are considered various aspects of *The Brahman*, and not a substitute for the supreme impersonal *Brahman*.

Conceptual Foundations

There are many prominent concepts and tenets enshrined in Hinduism that have widespread relevance and applications. Some of these are as follows:

- The Immanency of Ishwara Avatara (Manifold incarnations of god—It is said in the Hindu scriptures that Lord Vishnu has already appeared in 9 avatars and the 10th avatara is to appear at the end of *Kali Yuga*.)
- The Law of Karma (Action and Reaction—When we choose happiness and success for others, the fruit of our *karma* is happiness and success.)
- The Theory of *Punarjanma*, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, governed by *karma* (Reincarnation—After death of the physical body, the soul is reborn in a new form. The



Figure 12: Vishnu

soul transmigrates from one body to another. As we cast off worn out clothes and put on new ones, so the soul casts off a worn out body and enters a new one.)

- The Doctrine of *Maya* (The whole world is illusionary and the soul is the only reality: The mind is a limited, purely physical, and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled.)
- The Principle of *Gunatraya* (There are three *gunas* of nature: *Sattva*—light of conscious awareness; promotes life, energy, health, contentment, and increased spiritual understanding; *Rajas*—energy of change; promotes passion, desire, effort, pain, unsteadiness, agitation, and unhappiness, *Tamas*—conceals presence of consciousness, dullness, ignorance, obscureness, lethargy, procrastination, and sleep.)
- The Proclamation of *Varnashrama Dharma*:
 - *Chaturvarga*—Four Objectives of Life: *Dharma* (faith and devotion to god and living a life of righteousness), *Artha* (acquisition of knowledge, health, and wealth), *Kama* (sensual gratifications and desires), and *Moksha* (merging of the soul with the Supreme; liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth)
 - *Chaturashrama*—Four Stages in Life: *Brahmacharaya* (the student stage—period of intellectual growth and formal education, preparing for the future), *Grihastha* (married family life—earning a living, pursuit of wealth, and indulging in sensual pleasures), *Vanaprastha* (the spiritual stage—renouncing materialistic and sensual pleasures and retiring from social and professional life), *Sannyasa* (the renunciation—giving up desires, hopes, fears, duties, and responsibilities; solely concentrating on god to prepare for attaining *moksha*)
 - *Chaturvarna*—Four Caste Division:
 - *Brahmin*: the priest class (the learned, teachers, performers of rituals, spiritual masters to link human beings to the Divine)
 - *Kshatriya*: the protector class (military and others who protect the community from aggression)
 - *Vaishya*: business class (those that carry on business and trade)
 - *Shudra*: physical labour (referred to as untouchables or *dalit*, they perform labour such as cleaning, pottery, carpentry, etc.)
- The Practice of *Sadharana Dharma*: principles and forms of self-restraint which are considered to be common to all, or universal (for example, virtues, practices of cleanliness and purity, austerity, detachment, morality, truth, self-control, non-stealing, giving donations, and non-injury)
- The Observance of *Sadhana*:
 - *Karma Yoga*—yoga of selfless and righteous action

- *Bhakti Yoga*—yoga of loving devotion
- *Ashtanga/Raja Yoga*—yoga of physical exercise and meditation
- *Jnana/Gyan Yoga*—yoga of knowledge
- The three *gunas* (tendencies or qualities): These categories of qualities have been widely adopted by various schools of Hinduism for categorizing behaviour and natural phenomena. The following are the three qualities/*gunas*:
 - *Sattva*: balance, harmony, goodness, purity, universalizing, holistic, constructive, creative, building, positive, peaceful, virtuous
 - *Rajas*: passion, activity, neither good nor bad and sometimes either, self-centeredness, egoistic, individualizing, driven, moving, dynamic
 - *Tamas*: imbalance, disorder, chaos, anxiety, impure, destructive, delusion, negative, dull or inactive, apathy, inertia or lethargy, violent, vicious, ignorant

Hindu beliefs vary by region, school or sect, and historical period, as well as in a myriad of other ways. What follows are several important beliefs which might be said to characterize the understandings of many, if not all, contemporary Hindus.

The Brahman is understood as the ineffable, invisible, and transcendent all-pervasive reality underlying the world of sense perception. *The Brahman* is eternal and formless and amounts to the highest form of truth within Hinduism. Furthermore, because all things participate in *The Brahman*, the concept suggests an essential underlying unity to existence. Glimpsing, sharing in, understanding, or joining with *The Brahman* are the focus of many Hindu spiritual and religious devotions and practices. All things come from *The Brahman*. This is the basis for the concept of interdependence and interconnection between all things: *Vasudaiva Kutubakam*—the whole world is one family.

The Brahman is an impersonal reality; many Hindus worship particular manifestations of *The Brahman*, such as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and others. In some sense, Hinduism appears as polytheistic; however, the various gods and goddesses are viewed strictly as embodiments of the Divine *Brahman*, and so the system is monotheistic.

Atman is the true inner self of the individual which carries on from one life to another. It is the soul or nature of all living things (not only humans). *Atman* refers to the way that individual existence is part of and intertwines in the Divine. Liberation from birth and rebirth (or death and re-death) consists in fully merging the *atman* with *The Brahman* or *Paramatma*.

Maya is often translated as “illusion” and refers to the transitory nature of daily, sensual experience. One aspect of *maya* is the common misperception

of things as separate; here, the deeper underlying truth is one of a pervasive interconnection.

Dharma indicates moral order, duty, and righteous conduct, and is related to the concept of *swadharma*—one's own duty as it relates to their role in their journey of life.

Karma is the belief that actions have both moral and pragmatic consequences. Each and every action, thought, and belief are thought to have consequences not only on one's current life, but on future lives. Thus the rebirth of an individual can take nearly unlimited forms and is dictated by one's accumulated *karma* in the present life and in previous lives.

Samsara is the wheel or cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. It is a cyclical process that continues until one reaches a state of enlightenment and freedom. Hindus believe that, upon death, one begins a process of rebirth into a new life. After death, the body is cremated to break the attachment of the soul to the physical body.

Moksha (also known as *nirvana*) is the term for liberation from the cycle of *samsara*. It is considered an honour to be born human, since only a human is capable of pursuing *moksha*. Typically, attaining *moksha* requires many birth-rebirth cycles and is a difficult, involved process.

Samadhi is union with the Divine brought about through meditative or ritual practice.



Change and Evolution

Diversity of Hinduism



Figure 13: Shiva *Bhagavad Gita*

Modern Hinduism can in part be traced to indigenous Indian practices several thousands of years old. What we now call Hinduism was once known as—and in many places is still preferred to be known as—*Sanatan Dharma*. *Sanatan* means eternal. *Dharma* may be translated as religion, law, order, duty, or ethics. *Sanatan Dharma* may be thought of as meaning the eternal path or way of life.

Sanatan Dharma was impacted upon by the arrival of Proto Indo-European speaking tribes from the Middle East and north, approximately four thousand years ago.

Due in part to its long life, the historical record surrounding Hinduism is not only complex and multi-faceted, but also fragmented and a matter of continuing debate. Many Hindus focus less on attempting to work out accurate historical reconstructions than on the challenges and opportunities posed by the interaction of their beliefs and faith in the world today.

God and Gender in Hinduism

In Hinduism, god is conceptualized in different ways with respect to gender. For many, their focus is upon an impersonal Absolute (*Brahman*) which is genderless. Some Hindu traditions see god as being androgynous, having both female and male aspects. Alternatively a supreme god may be seen to be either male or female while embracing gender henotheism; that is without denying the existence of other gods in either gender. The *Shakti* tradition conceives of god as a female. Other *Bhakti* traditions of Hinduism have both male and female gods. In ancient and medieval Indian mythology, each masculine Deva (god) of the Hindu pantheon was partnered with a feminine Devi (god).

As well, in the Hindu narrative tradition, there is great gender fluidity and there are stories of gods and humans changing gender. For example, the epic *Mahabharata* features the transgender character Sikhandin, and describes the warrior Arjuna cross-dressing to become Brihannala, teacher of fine arts.

Lesbian, gay, and transgender Hindus commonly identify with and worship the various Hindu deities connected with gender diversity. A few examples of these deities follow:

- Ardhanarisvara, the androgynous form of Shiva and his consort Parvati
- Aravan, a hero whom the god Krishna married after becoming a woman
- Harihara, an incarnation of Shiva and Vishnu combined
- Gadadhara, an incarnation of Radha in male form
- Bhagavati-devi, a Hindu goddess associated with cross-dressing

Within Hindu philosophy there is also a concept of a third sex or third gender (*tritiya-prakriti*—literally, “third nature”). This third gender category includes a wide range of persons with mixed male and female natures. The third genders and aspects of their lives varies by region and culture. Third gender sects include the *Hijra* of Northern India, the Aravani or Ali of the Tamil Nadu in southern India, and the Jogappa also in southern India.

However, in some cases the third gender lived in their own communities and were considered separate from the binary male and female genders.

Many argue that traditional Vedic culture allowed transgender people of the third gender to live openly according to their gender identity. *Hijras* participated in religious ceremonies, especially as cross-dressing dancers and devotees of certain temple gods/goddesses, and this was considered auspicious in traditional Hinduism. However, contemporary attitudes towards transgender persons or the third gender can vary greatly among different Hindu organizations and societies.

Worship of Specific Gods

While there are many forms of Hinduism, it is possible to partially organize the tradition into three groups. These groups are distinguished by the embodied, personal form of *The Brahman* they worship in particular. The groups are *Vaishnavites* (they worship primarily Vishnu and the incarnations of Vishnu: Ram and Krishna), *Saivites* (they worship primarily Shiva), and *Shaktas* (they worship primarily the feminine power of the Divine, the *Shakti*).

Vaishnavites give particular consideration to *The Brahman* as embodied in Vishnu. In the cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction, Vishnu occupies the middle role, that of the guard or preserver of existence. He is often understood and depicted as merciful, kind, and generous. Ram and Krishna are the popular, much-loved incarnation of the god Vishnu.

Shaivites worship Shiva (or Siva) as the supreme embodiment of the Divine. In contrast to Vishnu, Shiva is often understood as a god of destruction. This, however, is not meant in a negative sense, but as an essential part of the cycle of existence. Shiva is the Lord of Peace and is called upon to destroy the characteristics or qualities that prevent peace. Shiva is often connected to ascetic practices such as various forms of yoga and meditation and, in general, to ascetic figures. In Hindu narrative, Shiva and his wife Parvati are the parents to Ganesha, depicted with the head of an elephant. Ganesha is often called upon for auspicious events (especially those related to beginnings or openings, such blessings as marriages, the birth of a child, entering a new home, and so forth).

Shaktas worship various feminine expressions of the Divine. These expressions may be depicted as Durga, a gentle and beautiful woman bearing arms, or as Kali, a fierce and violent-looking figure. In each case, the goddess in question not only plays an essential part in both destruction and death, but also life, birth, and rebirth.

Charts providing an overview of the male and female forms of the major deities as well as some of the more popular deities follow.

Principal Hindu Gods and Goddesses

The *Trimurti* (Hindu Trinity)



Brahma—The Creator

Supreme god in diverse versions of Hinduism. Usually credited as being the creator of the universe.

Distinguishing Features:

Brahma is traditionally depicted with four faces, each pointing to a cardinal direction, and four hands. The hands hold symbols of knowledge and creation; one hand holds the *Vedas*, the second holds *mālā* (rosary beads), the third holds a ladle, and the fourth holds a utensil with water. The four mouths are credited with creating the four *Vedas*. Often depicted with a white beard, implying his sage-like experience. Brahma sits on a lotus, is dressed in white (or red, pink), and has his vehicle (*vahana*)—*hansa*, a swan, or goose—nearby.



Vishnu—The Preserver/Protector

In Vaishnism Hinduism, he is the Supreme Being.

Distinguishing Features:

Vishnu is usually depicted as having a dark or pale blue complexion and four arms. He holds a *padma* (lotus flower) in his lower left hand, *kaumodaki gada* (mace) in his lower right hand, *panchajanya shankha* (conch) in his upper left hand, and the *sudarshana chakra* (discus) in his upper right hand. Often depicted reclining on the coils of *Ananta*, accompanied by his consort devi Lakshmi as he dreams the universe into reality.



Shiva—The Destroyer/Transformer

He is a Supreme Being within the *Shaivism* tradition of Hinduism and has many benevolent and fearsome depictions. He is depicted as an omniscient *yogi* who lives an ascetic life on Mount Kailash along with his wife Parvati and their two children, Ganesha and Kartikeya. He is also often depicted slaying demons. Known also as Adiyogi Shiva, he is the patron god of yoga, meditation, and arts.

Distinguishing Features:

Shiva has a third eye on his forehead, the serpent around his neck, the adorning crescent moon, the holy river Ganga flowing from his matted hair, the *trishula* as his weapon, and the *damaru*.

Principal Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Shaktis (Trivedi of Female Forms)



Saraswati—Goddess of Knowledge, Arts, Wisdom, and Learning

She is worshipped throughout Nepal and India.

Distinguishing Features:

Saraswati is usually depicted as a beautiful woman dressed in pure white, seated on a white lotus, often near a flowing river or other body of water and usually shown with four arms. When shown with four hands, they symbolically mirror husband Brahma's four heads. The items held in the four hands are a *pustaka* (book or script), a *mālā* (rosary, garland), a water pot, and a musical instrument (*vīnā*). A *hamsa* or swan, a *citramekhala*, is often next to her feet.



Lakshmi—Goddess of Wealth, Health, Fortune, and Prosperity

Wife and *shakti* (energy) of Vishnu. She is endowed with six important and divine qualities, or *gunas*. Ancient scriptures of India view all women to be embodiments of Lakshmi.

Distinguishing Features:

Lakshmi is often depicted elegantly dressed in a red dress embroidered with golden threads. She typically stands or sits like a *yogin* on a lotus pedestal and holds lotuses in her hands. Her four hands represent the four goals of human life *kharma*, *kāma*, *artha*, and *moksha*. She is sometimes shown with an elephant and occasionally with an owl.



Parvati (also known as Uma)—The Divine Mother; Goddess of Fertility, Love, and Devotion

She is the central deity of the *Shakti* sect, the wife of Shiva, the daughter of the mountain king Himavan and queen Mena. She is the mother of Hindu deities Ganesha and Kartikeya.

Distinguishing Features:

Parvati is usually depicted as fair and beautiful, with golden skin, wearing a red *sari*, and sometimes a headband. When with Shiva, she is shown with two arms, but when she is alone, she may have four. Her hands may hold a conch, crown, mirror, rosary, bell, dish, farming tool such as *goad*, sugarcane stalk, or flowers. One of the arms may be in the *abhaya mudra* gesture (fear not). Often, Ganesha is on her knee while her younger son Skanda may be playing nearby.

Other Popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses

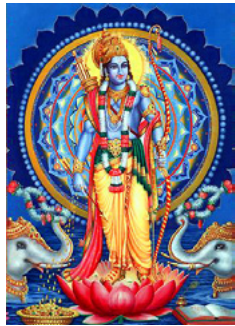


Ganesha (also known as Ganapati, Vinayaka, or Binayak)—Remover of Obstacles, Patron of Arts and Sciences, and Deva of Intellect and Wisdom

He is one of the best-known and most worshiped deities. As god of beginnings, he is honoured at the start of rituals and ceremonies.

Distinguishing Features:

Ganesha is almost always depicted with an elephant head. He may be shown in different poses—standing, dancing, fighting demons, playing with his family as a boy, and sitting down or on an elevated seat. Often depicted with four arms, he is usually holding an axe or a *goad* and a *pasha* (noose) in the upper arms.



Rama (also known as Ramachandra)—Avatar of Vishnu/ Supreme Being

He is a major deity (especially in *Vaishnavism*) and the seventh *avatar* (incarnation) of the god Vishnu. For some sects he is the Supreme Being, the central figure of the ancient epic *Ramayana*.

Distinguishing Features:

Rama shares some similarities with depictions of Vishnu and other *avatars*. Always depicted with two hands, he is often shown holding a *bana* (arrow) in his right hand, a *dhanus* (bow) in his left. He is usually standing in *tribhanga* pose (thrice bent “S” shape) with black, blue, or dark colour skin and may be shown with wife Sita and brother Lakshmana .



Hanuman—Patron of Martial Arts and Meditation, Ardent Devotee of Rama

He is a central character in the epic *Ramayana*, and is admired for his combination of supernatural abilities, strength, heroic initiative, assertive excellence, and devotion to his personal god Rama. He symbolizes the human virtues of inner self-control, faith, and service.

Distinguishing Features:

Hanuman has monkey-like facial features, and is often depicted with other main characters of the *Ramayana*. In group images, he appears bowing or kneeling before Rama with a *namaste* (*anjali hasta*) posture. He often carries weapons such as a big *gada* (mace) and thunderbolt (*vajra*).

Other Popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses

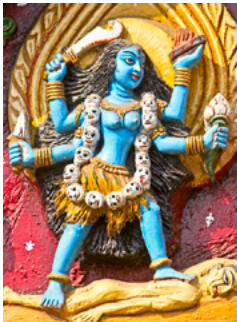


Durga (also known as *Devi* or *Shakti*)—The Warrior Goddess

She is a fierce warrior who battles against evil and demonic forces that threaten peace, prosperity, and the *dharma* of the good. She is the fierce form of the protective mother goddess and a central deity in the *Shaktism* tradition.

Distinguishing Features:

Durga is often depicted with many arms, each carrying a weapon, riding on a lion or a tiger, and attacking the demon Mahisha. She appears as the wife of Shiva, as another Parvati. The weapons she holds are from various Hindu Gods, given to her to fight the evil forces and include *chakra*, conch, bow, arrow, sword, javelin, shield, and noose.



Kali (Kalika)—The Destroyer and Liberator of Souls

Believed to be misunderstood in the West, she is the most compassionate goddess because she provides *moksha* or liberation. She is the counterpart of Shiva the destroyer, both are destroyers of unreality.

Distinguishing Features:

Kali is often depicted half-naked, with a garland of skulls, a belt of severed limbs; and waving scary-looking weapons with two of her 10 hands. She is often dancing on a prostrate Shiva, who looks up at her admiringly. Two of Kali's hands are empty and in the *mudras* (gestures) of protection and fearlessness. Her tongue is stuck out to swallow up evil and negative thoughts.



Surya (also known as *Aditya*, *Arka*, *Bhanu*, *Savitr*, *Pushan*, *Ravi*, *Martanda*, *Mitra*, or *Vivasvan*)—God of the Sun

He is the solar deity in Hinduism and is one of the five deities considered as equivalent aspects and means to realizing *Brahman* in the *Smarta* Tradition.

Distinguishing Features:

Surya is often depicted riding a chariot pulled by seven horses, which represent the seven colour rays of the rainbow. In medieval Hinduism, Surya is also an epithet for the major Hindu gods, Shiva and Vishnu. In some ancient texts and artwork, Surya is presented syncretically with Indra, Ganesha, or others.

Other Popular Hindu Gods and Goddesses



Krishna (also known as Govinda, Mukunda, Vasudeva)—God of Compassion, Love, and Tenderness

He is one of the most revered and popular deities and is worshipped as the eighth incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu. He is the central character in the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Distinguishing Features:

Krishna is depicted in diverse ways by different Hindu sects, but with some common features. He is usually shown with black, dark, or blue skin, like Vishnu, and is often wearing a peacock-feather wreath or crown, and playing the *bansuri* (Indian flute). When standing, he is usually shown in the *tribhanga* pose (graceful and sensuous pose). He may be accompanied by a cow or a calf, symbolizing the divine herdsman Govinda and is often depicted as a loving person, in the company of *gopis* (milkmaids), making music or playing pranks.



Murugan (also known as Kartikeya, Skanda, Kumara, or Vishakha)—God of War; Hunter, Warrior, and Philosopher

He is the son of Parvati and Shiva, and the brother of Ganesha and is a god whose life story has many versions in Hinduism. He is a primary deity in temples of Tamil people worldwide.

Distinguishing Features:

Murugan is typically depicted as a youthful man, riding on or near a peacock and sometimes near a rooster. He is mostly shown with one head, but may have six heads reflecting the legends associated with his birth where six mothers took care of the newly born baby. He is dressed as a warrior, carrying a weapon called *vel/saktii*, a divine spear and is sometimes shown with several weapons: a sword, a javelin, a mace, a discus, and a bow.

In addition to groups organized around devotional/worship practice, it is also possible to categorize Hindu practice by way of philosophical systems and understandings. **Hindu philosophy** refers to a group of *darshanas*, world views, or teachings that emerged in ancient India. Mainstream Hindu philosophy usually includes six systems or *saddarshana*: *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika*, *Mimamsa*, and *Vedanta*. These are also called the *Astika* (orthodox) philosophical traditions and are those that accept the *Vedas* as an authoritative source of knowledge. Each of these philosophical systems also has sub-schools that integrate ideas from two or more of the six orthodox philosophies.

Other philosophies, that are related or share similar concepts, but rejected the *Vedas*, also emerged from ancient and medieval India. These have been called *nastika* (heterodox or non-orthodox) Indian philosophies. *Nastika* Indian philosophies include *Buddhism*, *Jainism*, *Carvaka*, *Ajivika*, and others.

For most purposes, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, and *Vedanta* are of particular importance because of their influence on contemporary Hinduism.

Samkhya, the oldest of the systems, understands existence from a dualistic perspective. Its founder, a sage-philosopher named Kapila, put forth the idea that suffering is the result of misunderstanding two basic levels of existence or reality. One is eternal, unchanging, uncreated, and pure. The other is the material universe which we inhabit and directly experience. Suffering, then, comes about when we identify with the material universe, or misunderstand elements of it as belonging to the eternal. One of the goals of *Samkhya* is to assist the devotee in properly understanding each plane of existence and focusing one's attention on the transcendent realm of eternity.

Yoga is closely linked to many ideas from *Samkhya*. The goal is to have a vibrant life and lead a path to enlightenment. *Yogic* practice aims to enable this type of realization through both mental and physical practices. There are four forms of *yoga* practices (*Gyan yoga*—intellectual discipline, *Bhakti yoga*—devotional discipline, *karma yoga*—daily routine and practice, and *Raja yoga*—meditative and consciousness practice). These include moral and ethical codes of conduct, non-violence, proper breathing and posture, meditation, study, devotion, and mind and body control, amongst many other practices. *Yogic* practices were likely systematized by around 200 BCE.

The third philosophical system, *Vedanta*, is constructed upon the teachings of the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* from the first millennium BCE. It is considered to be the most developed and well-known of the Hindu schools.

The emergence of the *Vedanta* school represented a period when a more knowledge-centered understanding began to emerge within Hinduism. The focus became on *gyan* (knowledge) driven aspects of the *Vedic* religion and the *Upanishads*. This included metaphysical concepts such as *Atman* and *Brahman*, and emphasized meditation, self-discipline, self-knowledge, and abstract spirituality, rather than ritualism. However, the *Upanishads* were interpreted differently by various ancient and medieval era *Vedanta* scholars leading to several distinct branches. These *Vedanta* branches range from theistic dualism to non-theistic monism, each branch interpreting the texts in its own way and producing its own series of understandings.

The *Advaita* branch sub-school of *Vedanta*, asserts spiritual and universal non-dualism. *Advaita* literally means “not two, sole, or unity”. Its belief system is a form of absolute monism in which all ultimate reality is interconnected oneness. The Advaita Vedanta School is the oldest and most widely acknowledged *Vedantic* school.

In addition to changes in the internal diversity of Hinduism, the tradition has also had many contacts with other religions, cultures, and belief systems. Some of these have been peaceful and productive; others involved repression, violence, and fear.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE, portions of India came under Muslim rule. While this rule was at times violent, intolerant, and marked by friction, it was somewhat inclusive of the native Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist populations. The legacy of the Muslim conquest of South Asia has been a widely debated issue that continues today. Many Hindus believe that Muslim rule was marked by widespread violence and destruction, and brutally forced conversions of Hindus to Islam. However, not all Muslims were simply raiders. Later rulers fought not only to win kingdoms, but also stayed to create new ruling dynasties. These new rulers and their subsequent heirs (some of whom were born of Hindu wives of Muslim rulers) varied considerably in their practices and approaches. While some were uniformly hated, others were esteemed and developed popular followings. The Mogul Muslim Empire was eventually replaced by British colonial rule. In 1857, India came under direct rule of Britain. The British, who were at first relatively accepting of the dominant Hindu and other Indian religions, eventually actively worked to convert the Indian population to Christianity. Several Hindu social institutions, notably the caste system, were formally abolished.



Significant Persons/ Founders

Historical Figures

Aksapada Gautama (600 BCE): Aksapada Gautama is believed to be, at the very least, the principal author of *Nyaya Sutrās*, the foundational text of the *Nyaya* school of Hindu philosophy. *Nyaya* comprises both philosophical and religious practices. Its ultimate concern is to bring an end to human suffering, which results from ignorance of reality. Liberation is brought about through right knowledge. *Nyaya* is thus concerned with the means of right knowledge and right action. The date when the text was composed as well as the biography of its author are uncertain. Estimates vary significantly ranging from between 6th-century BCE to 2nd-century BCE. As well, it is believed that the *Nyaya Sutrās* may have been written by more than one author, and perhaps over a long period of time.

A *sutra* is a Sanskrit word that means “string, thread,” and is a condensed manual of knowledge of a specific field or school of thought. Each *sutra* is written in the form of a short rule, like a theorem summarized into few words or syllables, around which the teachings of any field of knowledge can be woven. The *Nyaya Sutrās* text consists of five books of two chapters each, with a cumulative total of 528 *sutras* about rules of reason, logic, knowledge, and metaphysics.

Kanada (6th Century BCE to 2nd Century BCE): Kanada (also known as Kashyapa, Uluka, Kananda, and Kanabhuk) founded the *Vaisheshika* school of Hindu philosophy. The *Vaisheshika* system holds that the smallest, indivisible, indestructible part of the world is an atom (*anu*). Therefore, all physical things are a combination of the atoms of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. While the atoms are inactive and motionless by themselves, they are put into motion by god’s will, through the unseen forces of moral merit and demerit. Kanada wrote about his beliefs in the Sanskrit text *Vaisheshika Sutra* (also known as *Kanada Sutrās* or *Aphorisms of Kanada*).

The school founded by Kanada attempted to explain the creation and existence of the universe by proposing an atomistic theory, applying logic and realism. It is among one of the earliest known systematic realist ontologies in human history. Kanada suggested that everything can be subdivided, but this subdivision cannot go on forever, and there must be small entities (*parmanu*) that cannot be divided, that are eternal, and that aggregate in different ways to

yield complex substances and bodies with a unique identity—a process that involves heat—and this is the basis for all material existence. He used these ideas with the concept of *Atman* (soul, Self) to develop a non-theistic means to *moksha*. Kanada's ideas were influential on other schools of Hinduism and, over its history, became closely associated with the *Nyaya* school of Hindu philosophy.

Adi Shankara consolidated the doctrine of *Advaita Vedanta*. He is given credit for unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism. At a time when Islam and Buddhism were spreading throughout India and threatening the status of Hinduism, Adi Shankara wrote strongly in defense of Hinduism and established the doctrine known as *advaita*. The *advaita* attempted to develop a unifying theme among the more than 200 existing *Upanishads*. He also wrote many commentaries on the *Vedic* scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, in order to support his doctrine.

Shankara travelled across the Indian subcontinent to promote his philosophy through meetings and debates with other thinkers of his time. He is believed to have established four major, and still existing, monasteries in India: the Sringeri Math on the Sringeri Hills in the South, the Sarada Math at Dwaraka in the West, the Jyotirmath at Badarikashrama in the North, and the Govardhana Math at Puri in the East. He established the importance of monastic life, as sanctioned in the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutra*, in a time when the *Mimamsa* School established strict ritualism and ridiculed monasticism. He is also known as Adi Shankaracharya, Shankara Bhagavatpada, sometimes spelled as Sankaracharya.

Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE): Ramanuja was a Hindu theologian and philosopher who had a significant impact on the development of Hinduism. He was a proponent of *Vishishtadvaita* (in other words, he believed Hindus should worship a personal god, Vishnu, and that the world is the lord's body). His *Vishishtadvaita* philosophy, a form of qualified monism or oneness, has competed with the *Dvaita* (theistic dualism) philosophy of Madhvacharya and *Advaita* (monism) philosophy of Adi Shankara. These three *Vedantic* philosophies have been the more influential of the 2nd millennium. His theories assert that there exists a plurality and distinction between *Atman* (soul) and *Brahman* (metaphysical, ultimate reality). He also affirmed that there is unity of all souls and that the individual soul (*atman*) has the potential to realize identity with *The Brahman*.



Figure 14: The *trimurti* (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) with Lord Shiva in the centre, business card circa 1910's

Mirabai (1498–1557): Mirabai (also known as Meerabai, Mira, and Meera) is the most well-known of the women *bhakti* (Hindu devotional) saints of India. She was born to a noble family and married into the royal family of Mewar in Chittor. However, she defied her family and refused to conform to the social requirements and expectations of the time for women of her caste and class. Deeply devoted to Sri Krishna from childhood, she bravely danced and sang for her Lord in the public spaces of the temple and associated with holy men and people from all walks of life and castes. She ignored gender, class, caste, and religious boundaries, and spent time caring for the poor.



Figure 15: Mirabai

Ultimately, Mirabai left her community to become a wandering religious leader, reportedly traveling to holy places associated with Krishna, including Vrindavan (the land of his youthful incarnation) and Dwarka (the capital of the mature Krishna's kingdom). Although she is admired by devotees of many different branches of Hinduism, she is explicitly rejected by the followers of *Vallabhacarya*. Mirabai's songs express her love and devotion to Krishna, almost always as Krishna's wife. The songs speak of both the

joy and the pain of love. Metaphorically, Mirabai points to the longing of the personal self, *atman*, to be one with the universal self, *paramatma*, which is Mirabai's representation of Krishna. She is also well known for the songs she is thought to have composed before she died in 1557, dedicated to Sri Krishna.

Swaminarayan (1781–1830 CE): He is also known as **Lord Swaminarayan** or **Sahajanand Swamiis**, the central figure in a modern branch of Hinduism known as Swaminarayan Hinduism. In 1826, Swaminarayan wrote the *Shikshapatri*, a book of social principles that reflected his philosophy. He is believed by his followers to be a manifestation of god.

Swaminarayan drew followers from various faiths including Muslims and Zoroastrians, as well as Hindus from various regions and schools of thought. He is noted for his efforts to reform Hindu society and improve the life and status of women and the poor within Hinduism. He and his followers provided the poor with food, water, and shelter. As well, widows were offered money to help them pay for the necessities of life for their children after the loss of their husbands.

Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883): Dayanand Saraswati was a very important Hindu religious leader in his time and the founder of the *Arya Samaj*, a Hindu reform movement of the *Vedic* tradition. He was also a renowned scholar of the *Vedic* lore and *Sanskrit* language.

He is thought by many to have had a great influence on Modern India, and, as such, his fame has many facets. He was a strong advocate of independence for India and influenced many Indians of the time. He also advocated for women's rights, and denounced idolatry and ritualistic worship prevalent in Hinduism at the time. As a *sanyasi* (ascetic) from boyhood, and a scholar who believed in the infallible authority of the *Vedas*, he strove to revive *Vedic* ideologies in India. During his lifetime he wrote more than 60 works.

Dayanand Saraswati advocated the doctrine of *Karma* and Reincarnation. He emphasized the *Vedic* ideals of *brahmacharya*, including celibacy and devotion to god. Through *yoga*, *asanas*, teachings, writings, and preaching, he inspired the Hindu nation to aspire to *swarajya* (self-governance), nationalism, and spiritualism.

Swami Vivekananda (1863 to 1902): Vivekananda was an Indian Hindu monk, a chief disciple of the 19th-century Indian mystic Ramakrishna. He had a great impact on the status and visibility of Hinduism in the west. He was a major figure and played an important role in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of *Vedanta* and *Yoga* to the Western world when he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 and through subsequent work. Hence, he is credited with raising interfaith awareness and bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion.

In India, he was a major force in the revival of Hinduism, and contributed to the concept of nationalism in colonial India. Vivekananda founded the *Ramakrishna Math* and the *Ramakrishna Mission*. He went on many missions to teach the message of Ramakrishna.

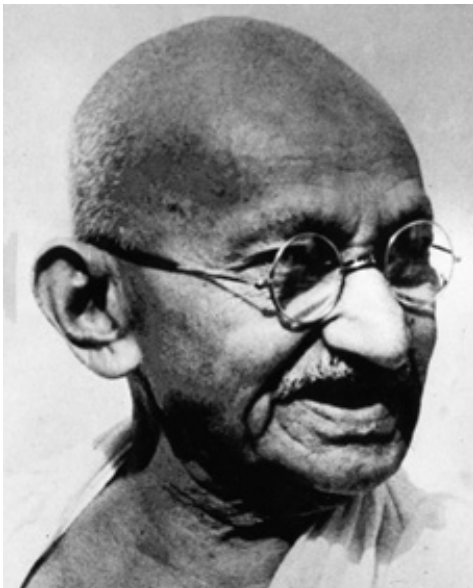


Figure 16: Mohandas K. Gandhi

His dedication to non-violent protest and resistance and interfaith understanding inspired people throughout the world

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948): He is probably one of the most famous Hindu figures of the world, especially in the Western world. Also known as *Mahatma*, honorific *Sanskrit* term meaning “high-souled”, “venerable” that was first applied in reference to him in South Africa in 1914, but is now used worldwide

Born in 1869 to a deeply religious mother, Gandhi is famous for his advocacy to non-violence in response to British colonial repression. Gandhi was trained as a lawyer in Britain and was actively involved in human rights struggles in South Africa and India.

Gandhi first employed non-violent civil disobedience as an expatriate lawyer in South Africa, in the resident Indian community's struggle for civil rights. After his return to India in 1915, he set about organizing peasants, farmers, and urban labourers to protest against excessive land tax and discrimination.

Assuming leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1921, Gandhi led nationwide campaigns for easing poverty, expanding women's rights, building religious and ethnic amity, ending untouchability and, above all, achieving *swaraj* or self-rule.

Gandhi endeavoured to practice nonviolence and truth (*satyagraha*) in all situations, and advocated that others do the same. He lived modestly in a self-sufficient residential community and wore the traditional Indian *dhoti* and shawl, woven with yarn hand-spun on a *charkha*. He ate simple vegetarian food, and also undertook long fasts as a means of both self-purification and social protest.

Gandhi had a vision of and advocated for an independent India based on religious pluralism. This vision was not shared by many and was challenged in the early 1940s by an emerging new Muslim nationalism that demanded that a separate Muslim homeland be carved out of India. In August 1947, Britain granted India independence, with the British Indian Empire partitioned into two dominions, a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan.

This resulted in chaos caused by many displaced Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs trying to make their way to their new lands, which led to interreligious violence, especially in the Punjab and Bengal regions. Gandhi chose to miss the official Independence Day celebrations in Delhi, and instead visited the affected areas, attempting to provide support and solace.

In the months that followed, he undertook several hunger strikes or fasts in an attempt to promote religious harmony and interfaith understanding. The last of his hunger strikes was undertaken on January 12, 1948, when he was 78 years old. Gandhi's efforts were not appreciated by all Hindus, including Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, who eventually assassinated Gandhi on January 30, 1948, by shooting three bullets into Gandhi's chest.

Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, October 2, is commemorated in India as *Gandhi Jayanti*, a national holiday, and worldwide as the International Day of Non-violence.

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950): Sri Aurobindo (born Aurobindo Ghose) was an Indian philosopher, *yogi*, *guru*, poet, and nationalist. He joined the Indian independence movement from British rule and was, for a while, one of its influential leaders. Later, as a spiritual reformer, he promoted his visions for human progress and spiritual evolution.

He was arrested and released from prison for his work with nationalist groups and the emerging nationalist movement. During his imprisonment he had a mystical and spiritual experience that led him to leave politics and focus on spiritual work.

Aurobindo developed an approach to spiritual practice he called Integral Yoga. The central theme of his spiritual vision was the belief that human life could evolve into a divine life. He believed in a spiritual realization that not only liberated the person but transformed human nature, enabling a divine life on Earth. In 1926, with the help of his spiritual collaborator, Mirra Alfassa (referred to as “The Mother”), he founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

His literary spiritual works include *The Life Divine*, the theoretical foundations of *Integral Yoga*; *Synthesis of Yoga*, a practical guide for *Integral Yoga*; and *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, an epic poem. He also authored texts on philosophy and poetry, as well as translations and commentaries on the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. Sri Aurobindo was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1943 and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.

Sri Chinmoy or Chinmoy Kumar Ghose (1931–2007): He was an Indian spiritual leader known for teaching meditation in the West after moving to New York City in 1964. Chinmoy established his first meditation centre in Queens, New York, and eventually had 7,000 students in 60 countries. Sri Chinmoy was an author, artist, poet, musician, and athlete.

He influenced people the world over and Chinmoy centres are currently located throughout the world including several in Canadian cities, among which one in Winnipeg (see <https://ca.srichinmoycentre.org/centres/list>).

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952): He is considered one of the eminent Hindu spiritual figures of modern times. He authored the best-selling book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, that introduced millions of westerners to the teachings of meditation and *Kriya Yoga*. He travelled to America in 1920 and was the first *yoga guru* to live and teach in the West for an extended period (30 years).

He impacted the lives of millions with his comprehensive teachings on the science of *Kriya Yoga* meditation, the underlying unity of all true religions, and the art of balanced health and well-being. He is widely recognized as the Father of *Yoga* in the West. He founded the Self-Realization Fellowship in 1920 and the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India in 1917. Both continue to carry on his spiritual legacy.

Sri Ravi Shankar (1956–): He is an Indian spiritual leader also known as Guruji or Gurudev. He is the leader and founder of the Art of Living Foundation created in 1981. In 1997, he established a Geneva-based charity, the International Association for Human Values. This organization engages in relief work and rural development and aims to foster shared global values. In recognition of his work and service, he has received prestigious awards from several countries including India, Peru, Colombia, and Paraguay. In January 2016, he was awarded the *Padma Vibhushan* (the second-highest civilian award) by the Government of India.

Role of Women

Traditional Roles

Many Hindus believe that the role and status of women in Hinduism is often misunderstood and incorrectly portrayed in the West and by non-Hindus. While they acknowledge that women in Hindu communities in India and in other places may at times be poorly treated and face some of the same concerns as women elsewhere in the world, they would argue this is not a result of Hinduism. From a Hindu perspective, maltreatment of women is a violation of the *Sanatan Dharma*. As well, the roles of women in Hindu society and India are changing, as they are throughout the world. Increasingly, the life, roles, status, and privileges of Hindu women are becoming similar to those of males.

“In Hinduism, as in most religions, women play a very important role as transmitters and preservers of sacred stories and domestic rituals. While women had been legally deprived in the public arena since medieval times, they continued to command a major role in worship and character formation.”
(Klostermmaier, 2007)

The position and role of women in Hinduism is complex, sometimes contradictory, and diverse. Hindu texts on women range from those that describe feminine gods and leadership as the highest form of spirituality and power, to limiting women’s roles to those of an obedient and subservient daughter, housewife, and mother. Examples of the Hindu reverence for the feminine are

- The *Devi Sukta* hymn of *Rig-Veda*, a scripture of Hinduism, states that the feminine energy is the essence of the universe. It is the one who creates all matter and consciousness, the eternal and infinite, the metaphysical and empirical reality (*Brahman*), the soul (supreme self) of everything.
- In some Hindu *Upanishads*, *Sastras*, and *Puranas*, particularly the *Devi Upanishad*, *Devi Mahatmya*, and *Devi-Bhagavata Purana*, women are celebrated as being the most powerful and empowering force.

Most Hindu scholars would agree that women in ancient India held an elevated position. They had similar education as men and participated with men in philosophical debates. Some were *brahmavadinis*, Hindu religious

leaders who devoted their lives to studying the scriptures, teaching the *Vedas*, and writing some of the *Vedic* hymns. During this time, women of the *kshatriya* (warrior) caste were trained in the martial arts and the use of weapons.

Hindu scriptures such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and others provide examples of women philosophers, politicians, teachers, administrators, and saints. The *Rig-Veda* says

“The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore, both should join and take equal parts in all works, religious and secular.”

The *Upanishads* state that individual souls are neither male nor female. Hinduism teaches that each person is reincarnated and passes through many lives, both male and female. As well, many would point out that the law of *karma* dictates that what one does to others will in turn be done to the individual and that *ahimsa*, doing no harm to others, must be the guiding principle of all humans. Thus, Hinduism at its core does not promote or justify the maltreatment of others, whether on the basis of gender or for any other characteristic. However, as with any other religion, the actual acts and practice of adherents may or may not be in keeping with the values and principles of the religion.

A different and seemingly contradictory view of women is presented in the *Smritis*, such as the *Manusmriti*. The *Manu Samhita*, which was written long after the *Vedic* period, is one of the *Dharma Shastras* that discusses a woman’s place and role. Within it, derogatory statements about women are made and, while for some *Manu Samhita* is a minor *smriti*, many other sections have formed the basis for much of Indian law. However, some Hindus would point out that the sections on women have not been enshrined in Indian law.

The *Manu Smriti* lays out what came to be understood as the traditional view of women within Hinduism and one that was common until recently. In the *Vedic* world, women were important and their presence was necessary for the Hindu rituals to work, even though they had no official role to play in them. The Laws of *Manu* state

“Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased. Where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.”

However, *Manu* also speaks to their need to be controlled and have limitations placed on their independence. (Many Hindus believe that *Manu* was affected by the context and conditions during Muslim rule of India and the dangers it presented for Hindu women.)

“Day and night, women must be kept dependent to the males of their families. If they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one’s control. Her father protects her in childhood. Her husband protects her in youth. Her sons protect her in old age. A woman is never fit for independence.”

The *Manu Smriti* talks of the three following life stages for a woman:

- **As a child** she is protected by her father. Traditionally, girls did not receive a formal academic education. Their preparation for their role as women, although considered essential in preserving social and cultural values, was to be learned in the home.
- **As a married woman** she is protected by her husband. Women's roles were centred on the home and they were not expected to contribute towards the family income. Women were expected to dedicate themselves to fulfilling their responsibility to be a loving and available parent. As Hinduism placed great value on pre-marital chastity, and this significantly influenced practices, girls were often engaged and married at a very young age.
- **As a widow** she is protected by the eldest son if the husband died or took *sannyasa* (renounced worldly life and devoted himself to religious study). Elder Hindu women were to always be treated with great respect.

Differences in roles extended to religious duties. Religious ceremonies were often performed by men for men. Women were not allowed to officiate in any *Vedic* ceremony, but they could perform rituals such as *puja* or fasting.

A diverse image of the duties and rights of women in Hinduism is presented in ancient and medieval era Hindu texts. For example, texts recognize eight kinds of marriage, ranging from a father finding a marriage partner for his daughter and seeking her consent (*Brahma* marriage), to the bride and groom finding each other without parental participation (*Gandharva* marriage). As well, scholars point out that *Vedic* era Hindu texts, and records left by travelers to ancient and medieval India, indicate that those societies did not practice *dowry* or *sati*. There is evidence that the *Brahmins* originally condemned the practice of *sati* and there has been some level of opposition throughout the centuries. It is likely that these practices became common sometime in the second millennium CE from socio-political developments in the Indian subcontinent.

Hinduism has the strongest presence of the divine feminine among major world religions, from ancient times to the present. In Hinduism, girls are revered as forms of the goddess Lakshmi, whereas boys are not correspondingly revered as forms of Rama or Krishna. Many Hindu gods, including the Supreme Being, are portrayed as goddesses. The importance of the female goddesses is demonstrated by the fact that the second largest pilgrimage site in India is Vaishno Devi (also known as Mata Rani, Trikuta, and Vaishnavi who is a manifestation of the Hindu mother goddess Mahalakshmi). For *Shakta* Hindus, the mother goddess is considered to be the Supreme Creator. While *Vaishnavites* and *Saivites*, who worship Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva respectively as the Supreme Deity, believe that god cannot be approached except through his *shakti* (female form/mother goddess).



Figure 17: Priti Patel at IIM, Ahmedabad, India

The Priti Patel MP and the British High Commissioner to India, Sir James Bevan visited the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad, Thursday, January 8, 2015.

It is nevertheless important to recognize that, like many other world religions, Hinduism has been a mostly male-dominated religion. To a large degree, traditional respect for women in Hindu society was limited to their roles as daughters, mothers, and wives. The traditional role of women was to be reliant upon and subservient to their husbands and fathers. Such beliefs and practices with respect to women's place, role, and status in Hindu societies can lead to oppression and abuse.

However, there were movements that sought to address and ameliorate the conditions, place, and status of women. The *bhakti* traditions, which also opposed casteism, featured many women saints who broke away from stereotypical roles. Others remained faithful to their *dharma* and simultaneously developed their spirituality. Many Hindus acknowledge the need to reassess the practical role of women in society today, but strive to maintain the spiritual principles underpinning traditional practice.

Contemporary Roles of Women

In a 20th- and 21st-century historical context, the position of women in Hinduism, and in India in general, continues to be a complex and contradictory one. There are regions that are matriarchal societies (for example, south India and northeast India), where women are the head of the household and inherit the family's wealth. In contrast, in other regions, there are patriarchal Hindu traditions. The concepts of god as a woman and mother goddess are revered in Hinduism, yet there are rituals that place females in subordinate roles.

From the perspective of religious study, practice, and rituals, Hindu women are deeply engaged and invested in sustaining and maintaining religious practice. While it is true that rituals that take place in *Sanskritic, Brahminical Hindu* environments continue to be led and directed largely by *Brahmin* males, women largely control many other types of ritual practice. These include many household, seasonal, and local devotional practices. Even in those environments where *Sanskritic* traditions dominate, women often are active and engaged participants in rituals. As well, in some parts of India and other Hindu communities, women are taking leadership roles in *Sanskritic* ritual performance.

The women's rights movement in India has drawn on two foundational Hindu concepts—*lokasangraha* and *satyagraha*. *Lokasangraha* is defined as “acting for the welfare of the world” and *satyagraha* “insisting on the truth”. These ideals were seen to encourage women to advocate for women's rights and social change through political and legal processes. Women's access to political power has also had a positive effect on the general treatment of women. With role models such as **Indira Gandhi**, females have had images of successful women working in what has traditionally been a man's realm of responsibility. Interestingly, powerful women in politics are common throughout the Indian subcontinent. The countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have all had women Prime Ministers.

As well, there are ongoing movements throughout India seeking to improve the situations of all areas of women's lives. Indian laws and legislation stress the equality of women and men. Today, many women are well educated and well represented in the post-secondary educational system.

Western Views on Women in Hinduism

Many Hindus believe that there is a deeply held bias in Western societies according to which, in Hinduism, women are universally subjugated and that, furthermore, feminism is solely a Western movement. Contemporary Hindu women and scholars question the acceptance of what they see as a colonial stereotype and long-standing assumption. This is especially true of those who draw on the emerging understanding of Hindu *Shakti* tradition-related texts, and empirical studies of women in rural India who have had no exposure to Western thought or education but whose feminism is inspired by their Hindu (or Buddhist) goddesses.

Many Hindus believe that Hindu and Indian attitudes and customs concerning women were negatively impacted by the centuries of invasions and foreign occupation that the people endured. They argue that the careful protection of Hindu women became essential as a result of these influences. They point out that all aspects of Indian society suffered from the British-imposed Christian educational system, the tearing apart of families as a result of aggressive conversion efforts, and the additional disruptions caused by a relatively quick transformation from a historically stable, largely agrarian society to one intensely focused on manufacturing and technology.

For many Hindus, the influence of the male-centric Western religions and contemporary capitalist society has diminished, devalued, and disparaged the role of women as wives, mothers, and their children's first *gurus*: the *Shaktis* of Hindu homes.

Ancient and medieval era Hindu texts and *epics* discuss a woman's position and role in society over a spectrum; from one who is a self-sufficient, marriage-eschewing powerful goddess to one who is subordinate and whose identity is defined by men rather than herself, and to one who sees herself as a human being and spiritual person while being neither feminine nor masculine.

Women and Equality

The reality today is that, regardless of the Hindu foundational beliefs and views of the role of women, the women of India often still have to endure very difficult living conditions. In 2011, a TrustLaw poll of 213 gender experts from across five continents ranked India among the five worst countries with respect to women's conditions (Anderson 2011). The experts were asked to rank countries by overall perceptions of danger as well as by six risks. The risks were health threats, sexual violence, non-sexual violence, cultural or religious factors, lack of access to resources, and trafficking. India was ranked as the fourth most dangerous country for a woman to live in, preceded only by Afghanistan, DR Congo, and Pakistan. Harassment and violence against Indian women occurs both in the public and private sphere. Domestic violence and violence by partners are considered to be widespread.

Modern-day Hindu women face many challenges in achieving equal status with men. Many of these issues are not specific to Hinduism but are related to societal, political, cultural, and regional practices which impact on Hindus and Hinduism. Some of the challenges include

1. Dowry problems, which are especially acute for certain castes and communities
2. Parental interference in marriages and careers
3. Domestic violence and abuse
4. Violence against women being unreported or not being investigated
5. Gender-based abortions
6. Dwindling male-female sex ratio
7. Gender inequality in the treatment of children
8. Kidnapping and trafficking of women
9. Sale of women

India's National Commission for Women was created to protect and defend women's rights in the country. National laws and legislation are in place to safeguard women's rights; however, in spite of these legal protections to ensure women have the same rights politically and economically, gender equality in India, as in most nations throughout the world, is not yet a reality.

The role of women in contemporary society varies greatly, depending on the region and the woman's ethnicity and socio-economic status. To a significant extent, women in India suffer from discrimination and different forms of denial of their human rights. At the same time, there are more prominent and influential women in India than what you may find in many other countries.

Although this may indicate that the roles of men and women are changing, perhaps more today than even before in India's history, social change in India is slow. Patterns of behaviour are deeply embedded in the soul of Hindu India. As a result, implementing change is not as simple as passing legislation. The vast majority of Hindus live in villages and the laws made in the city of New Delhi are often hard to enforce in these villages. Changes in the lives of women and men, therefore, must be encouraged at the local level.

Women as Religious Leaders and *Purohita* (Priests)

A *pundit* (also *pandit*) is a scholar or a teacher of any field of knowledge in Hinduism, particularly the *Vedic* scriptures, *dharma*, Hindu philosophy, or secular subjects such as music. They may be a *guru* in a *gurukul* (a religious school). In colonial era literature, the term generally refers to *Brahmins* specialized in Hindu law. A *pujari* or *archaka* is the term for a Hindu temple priest. The word comes from the *Sanskrit*/Hindi word *puja* meaning worship. They are responsible for performing temple rituals and taking care of *murtis*.

As indicated earlier, for centuries, many Hindu rituals were traditionally performed by males and there were limitations on which rituals women could lead or perform. Many Hindus were not aware of the significant role women played in the religion in earlier times and they do not realize the ancient tradition of female-led rituals that dates back over 5,000 years. Thus, despite historical evidence that there were 30 women *Vedic* scholars to whom the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* were revealed, that there were many *rishikas* (great sages), and *sadhvis* (holy person or female monk), women largely remain absent in important roles in most Hindu temples today.

Hinduism does not directly ban women from becoming *pundits* or *pujaris* and there is no scripture that prevents such developments. In ancient *Vedic* times, women had the same freedom to pursue knowledge as men did and they studied the *Vedas*.

However, there was and often still is strong objection from some Hindus to women serving as *pundits* or other religious leaders. These have to do with beliefs and practices with respect to menstruation and concerns about intimacy between males and females. For example, the tying of the sacred thread or *kankanam*, which is a prelude to most rituals should not be done by a man to a woman or vice-versa unless they are married.

A second factor is that while women and men seemed to have enjoyed equal status in the distant past in religious ceremonies, patriarchal norms became more entrenched with time, economic progress, and other developments. Along with control over the economy, men also gained religious power.

Finally, the studying required to become a *pundit* takes several years and, as women were expected to get married early and start a family, this was seen as a major obstacle to their duties.

Today, perceptions and attitudes are changing. In the last few decades, some Hindu institutions have begun offering courses for female priests. An example is Dyanprabodhini in the city of Pune, India, which was started by a social reformer. In 2010, twenty women were enrolled in the one-year priesthood course. They come from all Hindu castes. Many were homemakers between 40 and 65 years of age. They are trained in religious rituals and each of the 16 sacraments of Hinduism, as well as the *Sanskrit* language.

Women Hindu priests largely perform religious ceremonies at private homes and not at temples. As well, they usually do perform funerals or death rites. Generally, they are more widely accepted in larger cities than in more traditional, rural India.

In 2014, a centuries-old tradition of male-only *Brahmin* priests leading ceremonies came to an end when a female priest was appointed at a 900-year-old temple in Maharashtra's pilgrimage city of Pandharpur. The state government had set up a managing committee for the temple, which interviewed 129 candidates from all castes before appointing a woman. It is now estimated that there are several thousand female *purohits* or *pandits* in India alone.



Practices, Rituals, Symbols, and Special Days/Celebrations

Within Hindu devotion there are many practices and rituals. There are both everyday rites as well as rites to mark particularly important life events and passages, such as births, deaths, weddings, and so forth. Hindu practice aims towards the fulfillment of four central goals: *kama* (sensual pleasure, whether physical, psychological, or emotional), *artha* (virtuous material power and wealth), *dharma* (properly aligned conduct), and *moksha* (escape from the cycle of rebirth).

Social Organization and Roles

Hinduism, like many other faith groups, has social and cultural traditions, norms, and practices that have significant influence on the life of practitioners and the society in which they live. Many of these are not unique to Hinduism and some were the cause of social reform. The following are a few of these social practices and traditions.



Figure 18: Seventy-Two Specimens of Castes in India 1837

Full book available from

archive.org/details/seventytwospecimens1837

Caste System

Historically, Indian and Hindu populations have been grouped along vocational lines into a *caste* system. The *caste* system divides Hindus into four main categories: *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras*. Many believe that these four *castes* originated from Brahma, the Hindu god of creation. The main *castes* were further divided into about 3,000 *castes* and 25,000 *sub-castes*, each based on their specific occupation. Outside of this Hindu *caste* system were the *achhoots*—the *Dalits* or the untouchables.

Although *castes* were not initially hereditary, they eventually became so. When *castes* became hereditary, marriage across group lines was discouraged. While not entirely absent, the *caste* system does not play as central a role today as it once did. The five *castes*, or *varnas*, are

1. *Brahmin*—the spiritual leaders of the community: Hindu priests and teachers typically came from the *Brahmin caste*.
2. *Kshatriyas*—kings, nobility, warriors, and rulers: Their role was to protect and preserve society.
3. *Vaishyas*—the so-called economic specialists: These included farmers and merchants.
4. *Shudra*—the manual labourers and artisans
5. *Dalit*—the untouchables. Typically, the lot of the *dalit* was the worst—they were responsible for work others were unwilling to do, such as the collection and disposal of waste, the cleaning, and the handling of dead animals. The *dalit* were often segregated from the rest of the population. Mohandas Gandhi was a strong advocate for the *dalit*, calling them *harijan* (children of god).

Each level of the *caste* system was thought to be important and interdependent, though the *Brahmin* was certainly the most respected and the *dalit* were often treated very poorly. The *castes* were a form of professional divisions but people were locked firmly into their *castes* by birth and a rigid structure of social rules that governed interaction between and within them.

Gurus were also important religious figures and leaders within Hindu society. The term *guru* means ‘remover of ignorance’ and generally refers to an enlightened leader who is committed to helping others realize *moksha*. They taught with words, but also by touch and even with a glance. Historically, there has been debate within Hindu communities as to whether *gurus* are essential for reaching enlightenment.

Poverty

Western and contemporary views often perceive the living of a simple, rural life as being one of abject poverty and a sign of a lack of social development. Within Hinduism, traditionally, such lives were considered to be virtuous and it promoted the voluntary acceptance of an uncomplicated life for spiritual purposes. With such different views on wealth, poverty, and success, the Western world tends to dismiss India’s socio-religious practices as being backward and irrelevant.

On the other hand, poverty remains a real problem in much of India and many Hindus struggle for the basic necessities of life. People fleeing rural environments for the cities are often faced with incredible challenges and hardships in the cities.

The difference in life and opportunities available for the rural and urban poor compared to the middle and upper classes are enormous.

Child Marriage

Traditionally Hindu texts recommend marriage at an early age, especially for females in order to protect their chastity. In Hinduism, violation of laws or ethical and moral codes, are considered to be particularly detrimental to spiritual life and many child marriages were actually a form of betrothal and the marriage was not consummated until the wife was of age. Nevertheless, child marriages continue to be an issue and young females are often forced into such marriages and abused.

Practice of *Sati*

The practice of *sati* or *suttee* is an obsolete Hindu funeral custom where a widow offers herself as a sacrifice on her husband's *pyre* or commits suicide in another fashion shortly after her husband's death.

Sati was voluntarily performed on the basis of overwhelming affection for the partner and a desire to follow him into the next life. Hindu texts forbid its performance in *Kali-yuga*, the present age.

The practice can be dated back to the 4th century BCE, although evidence of the practice by widows of kings only appears beginning between the 5th and 9th centuries CE. The practice of *sati* is believed to have originated within the warrior aristocracy on the Indian subcontinent, and gradually grew in popularity from the 10th century CE onwards. It spread to other groups from the 12th century through the 18th century CE. The practice was particularly prevalent among some Hindu communities, was observed in aristocratic Sikh families, and has been reported to be practiced outside South Asia, and in a number of places in Southeast Asia, such as in Indonesia and Champa.

Under British colonial rule, the practice was initially tolerated in the province of Bengal. Under sustained campaigning against the practice of *sati* by Christians and Hindus such as *Brahmin* Ram Mohan Roy, the provincial government banned the practice of *sati* in 1829. This was followed by similar developments in states in India in the proceeding decades, with a general ban for the whole of India issued by Queen Victoria in 1861. In Nepal, *sati* was banned in 1920. The Indian Sati Prevention Act from 1988 further criminalized any type of aiding, abetting, and glorifying of *sati*.

Polygamy

Historically, polygamy was considered essential for a limited number of responsible and qualified men to redress the gender imbalance in the Hindu society. Hindu society was one in which practically all women were expected to get married and one where significant numbers of men chose to be celibate. Polygamy was made illegal in 1952.

Dowry System

The dowry system is believed to have originally been a way of showing a parent's affection for their daughter(s). In Hindu and Indian tradition, the dowry was to remain the wife's personal property, not that of her husband or his family. However, in reality, the dowry system was often abused by unscrupulous in-laws who terrorized and, in some cases, even murdered brides who in their view failed to provide an adequate dowry.

Symbols

Symbolism is an important aspect of Hinduism. Some believe that no other religion utilizes the art of symbolism as effectively as Hindus. Most popular Hindu symbols have a spiritual meaning based on Hindu philosophies, teachings, gods and goddesses, or related cultural traditions. Generally, Hindu symbols are divided into two categories: *mudras* or hand gestures and the positioning of the body; and *murti* or icons, statues, and drawings. Some of these symbols such as the lotus and the conch are similar to the symbols used in Buddhism, and the trident in Sikhism. *Murtis* (icons) of the various deities are also used during worship.

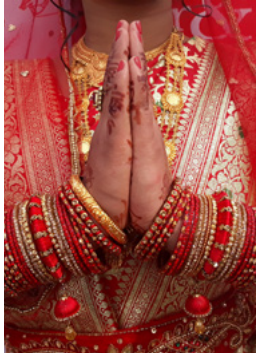
The exact significance associated with the symbols and icons varies with the region, period, and sect/tradition of the followers. Some of the symbols, for example, the *swastika*, have come to be associated with other religions or cultures. Others such as *aum/om* are considered to be unique to Hinduism.

Some of the more popular Hindu symbols are the *aum/om* (letters), the *swastika* (ancient religious symbol), the *trishula* (trident), the *Shiva Linga* (an abstract representation of Shiva), and the *Nataraja* (dancing Shiva). Most Hindu rituals are performed in the presence of many of these symbols.

Hawan (fire offerings) is an integral component of all Hindu worship. During worship, devotees must be dressed appropriately, and the body is usually adorned with sacred religious symbols such as *chandan* (red vermilion, sandal paste, or ashes, applied to the forehead as a dot or any other symbolic shape).

A table listing and describing some of the more common and significant symbols follows.

Common Hindu Symbols



Namaste Hand Pose

Hand poses, or *mudras*, are an important aspect of Hindu religious practice and symbolism. Hand poses are used in rituals, meditation, *yoga*, art work, and everyday communication. Statues or paintings of the gods and goddesses will often depict them with specific hand poses.

The hand pose to the left is called *namaste* (*Namaskar/ Namaskaram*). It is a common greeting or salutation in the Indian subcontinent. Usually the hands are held in this pose while saying the word *namaste*.

It is a customary greeting when individuals meet, and a salutation upon their parting.

The literal meaning of the *Sanskrit* term (pronounced “na-ma-stay”) is ‘I bow to you.’ In Hinduism it means “I bow to the divine in you.” It is used while in prayer, with eyes closed, and a slight bow.



Aum (or Om)

Is a symbol made up of three *Sanskrit* letters, A, U, and M. It is the most important symbol in Hinduism as it represents *Brahman* or god and is believed to be the sound heard at the time of the creation of the universe. All of the major *mantras* start with *aum/om*.



Yantra

A *yantra* is a mystical diagram, mainly from the Hindu and Buddhist religions of the Indian Subcontinent. A *yantra* is a geometric figure that may be complex or simple in design. They are used for many purposes such as

- the worship of deities in temples or home
- an aid in meditation, contemplation, and concentration
- spiritual and other benefits
- adornment of temple floors

Some *yantras* are traditionally associated with specific deities. A *yantra* has spiritual significance as there is a specific meaning that pertains to higher levels of consciousness.



Dharmachakra/Dharma Wheel

A *dharmachakra* or *dharma wheel* is a key concept with multiple meanings in several religions with Indian origins, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism.

In Hinduism, *dharma* refers to behaviours that are considered to be in accord with *rta*, the order that makes life and universe possible. Therefore, it represents Hindu *dharma* or law.

A version of the *dharmachakra*, the *ashoka chakra*, appears on the flag of India.

Common Hindu Symbols



The Swastika (or Manji)

It is a common, historical symbol (estimated to be more than 6,000 years old) that has appeared in many cultures and religions throughout the world. It was used in ancient Greece, and by the Phoenicians, and appears in many places including the Christian Catacombs in Rome. It also appears in various synagogues, including the Capernaum synagogue wall in Israel, one of the oldest synagogues in the world, as it was once a common motif.

In North America, the *swastika* was once widely used by many Indigenous peoples. It was popular in many southwestern tribes, including the Navajo, although it had different meanings for each. For the Hopi, it represented the wandering Hopi clans. For the Navajo, it represented a whirling log (*tsil no'oli*), which is a sacred image representing a legend that was used in Navajo healing rituals.

In *Sanskrit*, *swastika* means “well-being”. The *swastika* has been used by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains for thousands of years and is commonly assumed to be an Indian symbol.

In Hinduism, the *swastika* is the second most important symbol and represents good fortune and prosperity. They are commonly drawn or found on many objects and even on devotee’s bodies. *Swastikas* are drawn on *kalashes* (ceremonial metal pots) during rituals, used in pendants, drawn on walls of temples, and used in many other ways.

In the early 1900s, in the West, inspired by the *swastika*’s positive and ancient associations, it became popular to use it as a good luck symbol. It was used as an architectural motif in advertising and product design. The use of the *swastika* in the west ranged from commercial enterprises such as Coca-Cola, to cultural and community groups, to the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and to American military units. In Canada, a small community in Northern Ontario, named Swastika, was founded in 1908. It derived its name from the mining company that operated a nearby mine and still exists today.

This ended with the rise of the Nazis in Germany. In the 1800s, German scholars translating old Indian texts noticed similarities between German and *Sanskrit*. Some concluded that Indians and Germans must have had a shared ancestry and envisioned that a race of white god-like warriors they named Aryans lived on the Indian sub-continent.



Chilocco Indian School Basketball Team (1909)



Fernie Women’s Swastikas Hockey Team (Canada)

Common Hindu Symbols

Aryan or *Arya* is a *Sanskrit* term that means noble. It was used by Indo-Iranian people to identify themselves. The word was used by the Indic people of the *Vedic* period in India as an ethnic label for themselves, and to refer to the noble class as well as the geographic region known as *Aryavarta*, where Indo-Aryan culture was based. The Iranian people, who are closely related, also used the term as an ethnic label for themselves in the *Avesta* scriptures. Furthermore, the word is the source of the name of the modern country Iran.

The Nazi party appropriated the symbol and related it to the myth that an Aryan race had once existed and dominated the Indian sub-continent. This Aryan race was supposed to have been a light-skinned 'super' human people that possessed many wonderful and powerful attributes. The concept of an ideal Aryan race that was pure, strong, and white became part of the Nazi ideology and identity.

From 1920 onward, the symbol was used extensively on the party's flag, badges, arm bands, and more. The black straight-armed *hakenkreuz* (hooked cross) on the distinctive white circle and red background of the Nazi flag would eventually become the most vilified symbol of the 20th Century.

The *Tilak*



The *tilak* (*Sanskrit tilaka*, "mark") is a mark made on a person, usually on the forehead but sometimes on other parts of the body such as the neck, hand, or chest. *Tilaka* may be worn on a daily basis or for special occasions such as rites of passage or special religious occasions only, depending on regional customs.

It may also refer to the Hindu ritual of marking someone's forehead with a fragrant paste, such as sandalwood or vermilion paste, as a sign of welcome and an expression of honour upon their arrival. A *tilak* is also applied by a priest during a visit to the temple as a sign of the deity's blessing, for both men and women.

On a man, the *tilak* takes the form of a line or lines and usually indicates his sectarian affiliation. On women, a *tilak* usually takes the form of a *bindi* dot, which has its own symbolism

Tilak marks are applied by hand or with a metal stamp.



Bindi

A *bindi* is a small rounded sign, made with a *kumkum*, between the eyebrows on the forehead of a Hindu woman. In Hindu tradition, unmarried girls will wear a black *bindi* and married women will wear a red/maroon *bindi*.

The *bindi* is believed to retain energy and strengthen concentration. It is also believed to protect against demons or bad luck. It also represents the third eye.

Common Hindu Symbols



Lingam

Lingam is a representation of Lord Shiva. It may also be called a *shivling* or *ling*. The meaning of the symbol is disputed with some believing it to symbolize the union of Lord Shiva and Yoni of Shakti, and others believing it to represent the infinite nature of Shiva.



Trishula (Trident)

Trishula is a trident or spear with three points. It is the favourite weapon of Lord Shiva who is usually depicted holding a *trishula*. It is a highly revered symbol in Hinduism.

The *trishula* represents the triple aspects of god: creation, protection, and destruction (the three *gunas*). The three *gunas* are three attributes that have been and continue to be present in all things and beings in the world, from a Hindu perspective. These three *gunas* are: *sattva* (good, constructivity, harmony), *rajas* (passion, activity, confusion), and *tamas* (darkness, destruction, chaos). While these three *gunas* are present in everyone and everything, their proportions vary. The proportions and their interplay within an individual is what defines the character of someone or something and determines the progress of life.

The image to the left is of a statue of Lord Shiva holding a *trishula* (trident).

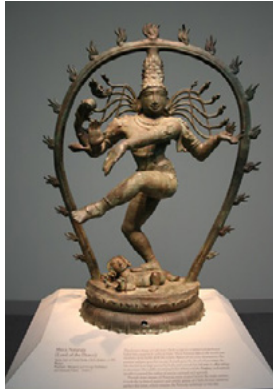


Kalashas (Vase)

Hindus believe that, in the beginning, the universe was all water. The Earth emerged from this primeval water. Brahma, the creator-god, carries this primeval water in his *kalasha* (vase)

As a result, ceremonial *kalashas* or vases with water are an important aspect of many Hindu rituals.

Common Hindu Symbols



Nataraja (Dancing Shiva)

Nataraja is a wonderful Hindu symbol. It combines, in a single image, Shiva's diverse roles as creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe and conveys the Indian concept of the never-ending cycle of time.

Shiva's dance is set within a flaming halo. The god holds in his upper right hand the *damaru* (hand drum that made the first sounds of creation). His upper left hand holds *agni* (the fire that will destroy the universe). With his lower right hand, he makes *abhayamudra* (the gesture of fearlessness). The small human figure being trampled by his right foot represents *apasmara purusha* (illusion, which leads mankind astray). Shiva's front left hand, pointing to his raised left foot, signifies refuge for the troubled soul. The energy of his dance makes his hair fly to the sides. The symbols imply that, through belief in Shiva, his devotees can achieve salvation.

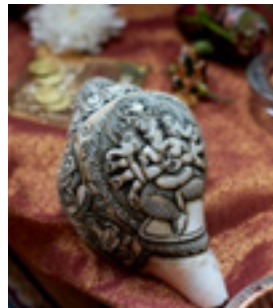


Lotus Blossom

The lotus flower, *padma*, is an important symbol in Hinduism. It symbolizes water and creation. Lotuses often appear in the hands of Hindu deities such as Lord Ganesha and many goddesses.

The *padma* also appears as a pedestal on which gods and goddesses sit or stand. In such instances it is a symbol of divinity.

The lotus also symbolizes detachment, a quality that is needed on the path to *moksha*. Grown in muddy waters, the lotus rises above the water to blossom and share its fragrance while allowing any droplets to roll off its leaves and petals.



Shankha (Conch Shell)

A *shankha* (conch shell) is the special symbol of Vishnu. The sound of the *shankha* symbolizes the sacred *om* sound. Vishnu holding the conch represents him as the god of sound. To this day, it is still used as a trumpet in Hindu rituals and, in the past, it was also used as a war trumpet.

Shankha may be used as both a symbol or a musical instrument in some Hindu rituals. *Shankha* sea shells are kept inside Hindu alters.

They also represent longevity and prosperity.

Common Hindu Symbols

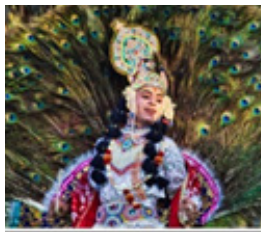


Fire (*Agni*)

Fire (*agni*) is used as a weapon for war and for making offerings. Shiva frequently is depicted holding a lamp or a fire in one hand.

Lamps are commonly found near a Hindu altar or in temples. Lamps should always be lit near Hindu deities. Many cultural and social functions begin in India with the lighting of a lamp. The lamp symbolizes the light and is therefore sacred.

An *arti* is where a small lamp is lit in honour of a particular god.

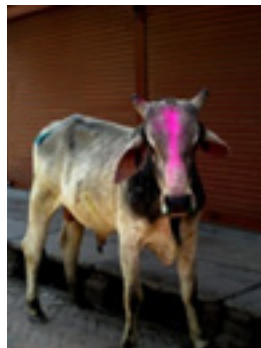


Peacock

Peacocks and their feathers are important elements and symbols in Hinduism. Peacock feathers are believed to bring good luck and prosperity. It is also the national bird of India.

Hindus believe that the *mayura* (peacock) was created from one of the feathers of Garuda (a mythical bird and the mount or carrier of Lord Vishnu).

Peacocks and their feathers are associated with other gods and goddesses. Lord Krishna wears a peacock feather in his crown. A flute with a peacock feather may also be used as a symbol of Lord Krishna. Lord Vishnu and Karthikeya ride on a peacock. The peacock is also associated with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.



Cow

The cow is the most sacred of animals for most Hindus. It symbolizes good nature, purity, motherhood, and prosperity. The cow is a symbol of the divine bounty of Earth.

Lord Krishna is often depicted playing his flute amongst cows and dancing *gopis* (milkmaids). He grew up as a cow herder. Krishna also goes by the names Govinda and Gopala, which literally mean "friend and protector of cows." For many Hindus, to feed a cow before eating one's breakfast is a sign of reverence and piety.

The cow to the left has been coloured by Holi celebrants.



Shri or *Sri*

Shri or *Sri* is another important symbol. It is one of the names of Ganesha, the Hindu god of prosperity.

Shri is also used as a title for some Hindu deities such as Rama, Krishna, Saraswati, Radha, and sometimes Durga.

It may be added before the names of Hindu males as a polite form of address.

Common Hindu Symbols



Banyan Tree

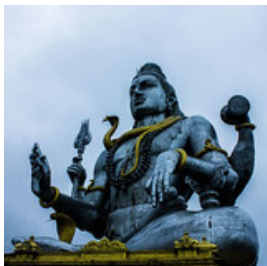
The *banyan* (*vat* or *bargad*) tree is one of the venerated trees in India and is also the national tree of India. It is able to survive and grow for centuries. It is a Hindu symbol of longevity and it is often compared to the shelter given by god to his devotees. In Hindu mythology, it is called *Kalpavriksha*, the tree that fulfills wishes and other material gains.



Sun

The sun is considered to be a deity by Hindus and is also a symbol of light and truth. Hindus will often offer the sun water in the morning.

The image to the left is of a fresco at Juna Mahal in Dungapur, India. The Mewar dynasty of Rajasthan believe that they are descendents of the Hindu sun god, Surya.



Snakes

A snake is a symbol of rebirth as it sheds its skin after a time. Lord Shiva wears a cobra around his neck (image on the left) and Lord Vishnu rests on a snake named Sheshnaga.

Prayer and Worship

Pujas

Puja (or *Pooja*) is an act of demonstrating reverence to a god, a spirit, or another aspect of the divine through invocations, prayers, songs, and rituals. For the Hindu devotee, an essential aspect of *puja* is making a spiritual connection with the divine. Usually, such contact is facilitated through an object, an element of nature, a sculpture, a vessel, a painting, or a print.



Figure 19: Aarti (*arati*) Ceremony, Hindu Puja, India

During *puja*, an image or other symbolic representation of the god serves as a means of gaining access to the divine. This icon is not thought to be the deity itself; rather, it is believed to be filled with the deity's cosmic energy. It serves as a focal point for honouring and communicating with the deity.

For the devout Hindu, the icon's artistic merit is important, but is secondary to its spiritual content. The objects are created as receptacles for spiritual energy that allow the devotee to experience direct communication with his or her gods.

Sacrifices/Offerings

One of the most fundamental of all rituals in Hinduism is sacrifices or offerings. During the *Vedic* period, sacrifice was the primary religious activity. Since then, the concept of sacrifice has undergone dramatic transformation as Hinduism has developed over the past few thousand years. Nonetheless, it remains a

foundation of the tradition and *Vedic* sacrifices continue to be performed throughout the Hindu world.

Vedic sacrifice is a highly structured affair. Strict rules govern the purifying preparations for the *Brahmin* priests, the construction of the altar, the preparation of the offering—in the contemporary world, various vegetable and grain offerings, particularly *ghee* (clarified butter)—and the performance of the ritual itself. All of this is to satisfy the gods and thereby maintain order, or *dharma*.



Figure 20: Kumbh Mela Haridwar

Kumbh Mela or *Kumbha Mela* is a mass Hindu pilgrimage in which devotees gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river. Traditionally, four fairs are widely recognized as the *Kumbh Melas*: the Haridwar Kumbh Mela, the Allahabad Kumbh Mela, the Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Simhastha, and the Ujjain Simhastha. The main festival site is located on the banks of a river. Bathing in these rivers is thought to cleanse a person of all sins.

Hawan (fire offerings) is an integral component of most Hindu worship. During worship, devotees should be dressed appropriately, and the body is usually adorned with sacred religious symbols such as *chandan* (red vermillion, sandal paste, or ashes applied to the forehead as a dot or any other symbolic shape).

Daily prayer and devotions are an important daily practice for many Hindus. These may take place in temples, but more often occur in shrines within family homes. Devout Hindu students pay homage to Saraswati Devi (Deity of Knowledge and Learning) prior to starting their day.

This is usually done in the early morning before classes. The space used for worship is considered sacred and should be conducive to spiritual growth and development.

Mantras or sacred chants are an important part of ritual practice. They consist of words, phrases, or sounds repeated aloud or internally as an aid to focus the mind and meditate. *Mantras* are sometimes thought to echo the underlying rhythms and evocations of *Brahman*.

Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the practice of avoiding violent conduct, physical and psychological, in dealing with self and other living entities. For some Hindus this naturally implies vegetarianism or veganism.

Asanas (*Sanskrit* word for seat) are often used in conjunction with other ritual practices. An *asana* is a sustained physical pose or posture intended to develop discipline and focus.

There are various forms or schools of *yoga* which incorporate active physical practice. *Yoga* is a discipline or practice used to unite with the divine. *Yoga* comes from the *Sanskrit* word *yuj* which means union or to join. *Yoga* can be understood, in part, as being methods for achieving or following a properly ordered life. The four paths or forms are *Jnana/Gyan Yoga* (The Path of Knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (The Path of Loving Devotion), *Karma Yoga* (The Path of Selfless and Righteous Action), and *Ashtanga/Raja Yoga* (The Path of Physical Exercise and Meditation).

Pilgrimages, often to sacred places which may be difficult to travel to (like mountain ridges or caves) or celebrated locales (like the holy River Ma Ganga), may be important events in the life of a Hindu man or woman.

Samskaras: Rites of Passage

Samskaras are Hindu rites of passage intended to purify the soul/spirit at critical points in one's life journey. The rites of passage were considered essential for preserving the purity of the individual and of the social system.

The number and nature of the rites vary by tradition. Some identify ten rites of passage and others up to sixteen, or even more. However, only four are currently popular and practiced widely. These are

- *Jatakarma*—birth ceremonies (plus others in childhood)
- *Upanayana*—initiation (the sacred-thread ceremony)
- *Vivaha*—marriage
- *Antyeshti*—funeral rites (cremation)

Almost all rites of passage involve a specific ceremony and rituals

Jatakarma—Birth Ceremonies

The birth ceremony begins before a baby is born, as rituals and prayers recited to protect the fetus from illness or harm. In some traditions, the father performs a ceremony immediately after the birth. He writes the sacred *Sanskrit* symbol, *om*, onto the infant's tongue using honey. The symbol is written in hope that the child will be honest and speak only the truth.

One week or so after the birth, the baby's name is formally given in the *Naamkaran Sanskar*. It is usually the name of a favourite god or goddess and it is whispered into the child's ear.

In the first few years of her life, a Hindu girl will have an ear-piercing ceremony. As well, both boys and girls will have their first haircut in the *Mundan Sanskar*, symbolizing renewal and the shedding of wrongdoings that may have been committed in past lives.

Upanayana—Initiation (The Sacred-Thread Ceremony)

The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread is an ancient rite of passage into adolescence usually reserved for male members of the three upper *castes*, the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, and *Vaishyas*. Similar to the Jewish bar mitzvah, it symbolizes the rebirth or initiation of the individual into the religious community.

Traditionally, this rite of passage was intended to introduce the devotee into religious life. In the presence of a *guru*, or holy teacher, the young person shaves their head and puts on a saffron robe. Then, taking up a simple walking stick, the person renounces all material possessions and receives the sacred thread. The unadorned sacred thread symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things. It has seven strands, each representing a different virtue or quality, as follows:

- Power of speech
- Memory
- Intelligence
- Forgiveness
- Steadfastness
- Prosperity
- Good reputation

The person being initiated promises to endeavour to reflect these qualities throughout their life and wears the sacred thread as a symbol of this commitment and initiation.

Typically, the ceremony concludes with a fire sacrifice (*havan/yagna*), the most common form of ritual in Hinduism. In the past, the initiate would then dedicate their life for a period of time to the study of scriptures and to leading a life of spiritual practice and austerity with their *guru*/teacher in an isolated dwelling or school. Later, the initiate would re-enter society, marry, and raise a family. Today, only young persons wishing to become priests or ascetics live with a *guru*.

Vivaha—Marriage

Traditionally, most Hindu marriages are arranged by the parents, although the children must also consent to the chosen partner. As well, in the past, Hindus largely married within the same *caste*. Today intercaste marriages are much more common and frequent.

A Hindu wedding is one of the most important ceremonies in all of Hinduism. Though customs vary significantly by region and culture, marriages are always joyous, momentous occasions featuring lush decorations and an abundance of food. In some communities, weddings last as long as three days.

The wedding ceremony is centered around a sacred fire, which is considered a manifestation of the god, Agni. Family and friends surround the couple as a *pundit* (Hindu priest) chants *Sanskrit* verses. The couple is then led four times around the sacred fire. During this part of the ceremony, bells are played, and many offerings are made to the fire, including clarified butter, grains, and flowers.

Finally, the couple takes seven steps around the flames. These seven steps are the most critical action in a Hindu wedding as they signify that they are bonded for life and their union sanctified.

Antyeshti—Cremation and Rites for the Dead

Historically, Hindus have cremated their dead. As with the marriage ceremony, this rite of passage also centers around a sacred fire.

The funeral begins with the wrapping of the body in cloth. The body is then transported to the place of cremation. In India, this would be the outdoor cremation grounds. The family would gather at the cremation and recite prayers to the chosen deity of the deceased. Traditionally, the eldest son is given the responsibility of lighting the wood of the funeral *pyre* with a flame lit in a nearby temple. While the body is being cremated, prayers and offerings are made in keeping with the belief that the deceased is experiencing a process of rebirth/reincarnation. The fire cleanses the soul in preparation for a new life. The fire ritual is also intended to protect relatives from evil spirits.

The cremation ceremony concludes with the ashes being dispersed in a river. Many Hindus wish their ashes to be left in the River Ganga, believing that its holy waters will help purify their souls.

In the diaspora, Hindu funeral ceremonies have been adapted to fit Canadian conditions and legal requirements. In India, temple priests do not perform funerals, nor the subsequent *sraddha* ceremonies nine days and one year later. Usually, separate *caste* of priests perform these functions. In the West, many temples have all their priests learn the rites and perform cremation.

The cremation of the deceased may present a challenge. The family must find a crematorium that will allow Hindu rites. The ceremonial lighting of the fire is replaced by the eldest son, a relative, or a *pundit* pressing the button that ignites the gas for the cremation. Similarly, the ashes will be deposited in a locally designated area of a lake or river.

Symbols, Art, and Aesthetics

Hindu art and aesthetics mirror the diversity found within Hindu beliefs and practices. Epic poems, stories, and songs, such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana*, demonstrate a strong literary culture. Statues and sculptures are found throughout Hindu temples and institutions. *Yantras* are linear drawings intended to enable meditative practice.

Indian music, while not always strictly religious in nature, is characterized by both complicated, shifting rhythms and distinctive instruments such as the *sitar* and *tabla*. Dance is often incorporated into musical performances and is common at Hindu festivals.

Hindu Dress

Saris are the traditional dress for Hindu women in India. These are popular throughout the Indian subcontinent and are not just worn by Hindus. There are various styles, patterns, and ways of draping *saris* representing the different regions and states of India. More than 80 different ways to wear a *sari* have been recorded. The *Nivi* style, which originated in the south east and west of India, is a popular newer style. A *sari* is a piece of brightly coloured material that is wound and pleated around the waist to cover the legs. An underskirt is worn beneath it. A short blouse (*choli*) is also worn, and the end of the *sari* is draped over the shoulder on top of this. This leaves the midriff bare.



Figure 21: Indian Dancers

Ladies also wear the *kurta* pajama which is a long dress or tunic top over loose or tight fitting pants with a long shawl or scarf called a *dupatta*, a *chuni*, or an *orhnee* over the shoulders. *Lengas* are also popular for weddings and formal events. They consist of a long, colourful skirt with a short, tight-fitting blouse (*choli*) and a half *sari* which drapes over either shoulder. When made with simple material—mainly cotton—this skirt, *choli*, and half *sari* are called a *gopi* dress.

Many younger Hindu women today, especially in urban areas, will wear western style clothing. Some will wear traditional long trousers and tunic tops which were commonly used by Hindu women long before pants became common among western women as a compromise between the *sari* and western style clothing.

For Hindu men, the traditional attire is a jacket with buttons down the front worn over a tunic top with a *nehru* collar, and trousers which are generally quite loose. Today, most young Hindu men generally wear western style clothing, but some may compromise by wearing trousers and a long tunic top over them. The men, in the south mostly, continue to wear *lungi* which is a piece of material draped around their waist. Priests, and some men, may wear a *dhoti* and *kurta* at religious functions. The *dhoti* is six yards of cotton material tied in different styles to look like pants.

Some Hindus cover their heads: males with a *pagree* (turban) and females with an *ornhnee* (scarf). These may be permanently worn head covers or they may be worn only during special days of significance.

Hindus generally do not wear footwear inside temples or homes.

Makeup/Body Art

Hindu women wear a coloured spot on their forehead. It is often, but not always, worn as a sign of their marital status. It may also be a sacred dot of spirituality or the third eye *chakra*; however, a red *sindoor* or mark in the part of the hair of a woman is always a sign of marriage.

The mark is called a *bindi* (also called a *kumkum* after the name of the red powder that is used to make it). Widows and some unmarried women may wear a black *bindi*. Young and unmarried women usually wear a *bindi* that matches the colour of their outfit.

Men sometimes use sectarian marks (known as *tilaka*) on their forehead in a similar way to a *bindi*, as a symbol of their *caste* (*jati*), class (*varna*), or religious sect.



Figure 22: Mehndi

Hindus also practice *mehndi* (*mehendi*, *henna*) body art for special occasions. Although the origins of *mehndi* or *henna* are ancient, it remains a popular form of body art among women of various faiths of the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Middle East. The intricate designs are traced onto their hands, arms, and feet using a *mehndi* paste and fine brushes or feathers. Once the *henna* is

washed off, the design remains as a tracery of fine ochre lines on the skin and is there to ward off evil spirits and bad luck, and attract good fortune. *Mehndi* also serves to calm the nerves and reduce stress

Nose rings, earrings, toe rings, *mangal sutra*, and *bangals* also all have meanings in Hindu tradition. Furthermore, men traditionally wore earrings.

Food

Hinduism places great emphasis on the role of food in religious and everyday life. Hindu religious or public functions often include the distribution of food, and rituals will often include the offering of food to god.

Within Hinduism there are many rules regarding the consumption and preparation of food.

Hindu Diet



Figure 23: Indian Food

It is a fact that there are more vegetarians in India than in the rest of the world combined. It is commonly believed by many that such a high level of vegetarianism is likely due to the impact of Hinduism on India. However, although many Hindus are vegetarians, it would be wrong to believe that this is because Hinduism forbids the eating of meat or fish.

From a Hindu perspective, all living things contain an aspect of the divine spirit and, as such, all life is considered sacred. Consequently, if you take the

life of any living creature, it is as if you were harming part of *Brahman*. As a result, most devoted Hindus, especially *Brahmins*, aspire to be lacto-vegetarians; the only animal food that they will eat is dairy. They will not eat eggs as they are the beginning of life.

Since vegetarianism is considered the most desired diet, Hindu non-vegetarians will eat vegetarian meals on special or religious occasions. Avoiding meats and fish is thought to contribute to inner self-improvement and physical well-being. For some Hindus, even certain vegetables are to be avoided. These individuals abstain from eating vegetables such as onions, garlic, turnips, and mushrooms.



Figure 24: Offerings

As well, Hindus that do eat meat or fish will eat them in small amounts, accompanied by starches such as rice or bread. Traditionally, the main meats consumed by Hindu non-vegetarians are goat or lamb. Chicken and pork are sometimes avoided since some believe that they are unclean as they are scavengers. Hindus in certain areas will eat fish.

Sacred Cow

Generally, all Hindus avoid eating beef since cows are considered sacred in Hinduism. While all animals are considered sacred, the cow has a special status in Hinduism because it

- Gives years of faithful service and helps humans till the soil and pull carts
- Provides humans with dairy products
- Provides humans with fuel (in the form of cow dung) which may be used to heat homes and cook food
- Was, according to Hindu mythology, created by *Brahman* on the same day as the *Brahmins* thus it is an animal venerated above all others
- Symbolizes motherhood

Food, Health, and Well-Being

Hindus believe that there is a connection between the foods we eat and our temperament, longevity, and mental and physical well-being. Within Hinduism, foods are grouped into one of three major categories based on beliefs about how each affects the body.

Sattvic foods are easily digestible and believed to contribute to making a person serene, enlightened, and healthy; and to enhancing longevity. *Sattvic* foods include rice, wheat, and *ghee*, most legumes, some other vegetables, milk, and milk products (except cheeses made from rennet, which is derived from the stomach of animals).

Rajasic foods are believed to contribute to, as well as stimulate and activate, the various functions of the body, energizing almost all the systems, especially the nervous system. It denotes activity, decision-making, and energy that is required for tasks and mental robustness. When taken in excess, *rajasic* foods can make a person become aggressive, greedy, passionate, and power-driven. *Rajasic* foods are some meats, eggs, and foods that are very bitter, sour, salty, rich, or spicy.

Tamasic foods, especially when eaten for pleasure or in excess, are believed to cause lust, malice, confusion, laziness, and dullness. Such foods include garlic; pickled, preserved, stale, or rotten foods; as well as alcohol and drugs.

Prasad (Food Offerings)

Food plays an important role in Hindu worship and rituals. The offering of food to the deities (*prasad*) is thought to give the person offering the food religious and personal benefits such as purifying body, mind, and spirit. Temple cooks are usually *brahmanas* and follow strict standards of personal cleanliness. There is widespread belief that the consciousness of the cook enters the food and influences the mind of the eater. Taking *prasada* that has been cooked and offered with devotion inclines the mind towards spirituality.

The *prasad* that has been on the altar is especially sacred and it is distributed to worshippers, either by the priest at the shrine or as worshippers leave the *mandir* (temple). *Prasad* is also served in the form of a full meal, especially on festival days. Many Hindus have an altar at home and offer their food before eating.

Fasting

Fasting is an important and integral part of Hinduism. However, the rules and beliefs that guide fasting vary based on personal beliefs and local customs. For example,

- Some Hindus fast on certain days of the month (full moon or *Ekadashi*, the 11th day of each lunar cycle—the bright and dark side of the moon)
- Certain days of the week are also set aside for fasting depending on personal belief and favourite deity. For example, devotees of Shiva tend to fast on Mondays, while devotees of Vishnu tend to fast on Thursdays, and devotees of Ayyappa tend to fast on Saturdays.

Fasting during religious festivals is also very common. Some examples are

- Maha Shivaratri (February/March)
- The nine days of Navratri, which occur during the spring and autumn (observant Hindus will not eat or drink during the day)
- Vijayadashami, the day after Navratri (usually around September/October as per the Hindu calendar)
- Divali (October/November)

Notes



Significant Times and Dates

Festivals

Festivals and events in Hinduism are often marked by a great variety of activities, including: temple visits, prayer, meditation, fasting, feasts, charity work and donations, and processions.

There are many holy days which are celebrated or recognized. The dates for each of the most commonly recognized holy days will vary from year to year because dates are calculated on the lunar and solar astronomical alignments. *Yugas* are cosmic cycles which last 4,320,000,000 years. There are four *yugas*, each of which moves from order to progressively worse disorder. Hindus believe we are in the most disordered of the *yugas*, the *Kali Yuga*. The *Kali Yuga* is thought to have begun in 3102 BCE.

Specific dates of many Hindu festivals and events vary, given that they follow the lunar calendar. There are an enormous number of significant times, dates, and events within Hinduism. Some of these special dates and events follow.

Diwali/Divali (Deepawali) is a four-day celebration, called the Festival of Lights, which occurs in October or November each year. *Diwali* celebrations include

music, dancing, prayer, and food. Stories from the *Ramayana* are recounted at *Diwali*. It is one of the most widely celebrated Hindu festivals. *Diwali* has many meanings, the most important being the celebration of the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and happiness over suffering.



Figure 25: Diwali Decor

Sharad Navratri is a nine-night period of fasting and worship. *Vaishnavites* honour Lord Ram, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. *Shaktas* worship nine forms of the Divine Feminine *Shakti*.

Dussehra (Vijay Dashami) occurs in September or October each year and celebrates the stories of Rama, as found in the *Ramayana*, and the victory of good over evil. For the *Shakti* worshippers, it is the victory of Ma Durga over the demon Mahishasura.

Gudi Padwa is considered by some Hindus to mark the beginning of the year, in remembrance of Brahma's world creation. It typically occurs in March. It is also the beginning of the *Chaitra* or Spring *Navaratri*.

Holi (Spring Festival) marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring, celebrating the god Vishnu.



Figure 26: Sea of Colour (Festival of Colour, Utah 2012)



Figure 27: Celebrating *Holi*, India

Janamashanti (Birth of Lord Krishna) is an annual festival that celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. It usually falls in August or September of each year.

Kumbh Mela is thought to be the largest festival in the world. Millions of Hindus participate in *Kumbh Mela*. Occurring every 12 years, it is a mass pilgrimage involving ritual purifications in the River Ganga. The *Kumbh Mela* festival is held once every 12 years and rotates locations amongst Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain.

Koovagam Festival is a festival that takes place at the Koothandavar Temple dedicated to Aravan (Koothandavar, the Tamil area of India that is popular among the Hindu transgender community). It usually falls in the April/May period.

Maha Shivaratri is celebrated annually and honours the god Shiva. It is a major festival that marks the remembrance of "overcoming darkness and ignorance" in life and the world. Typically, it falls in February or March of each year.

Chaitra Navaratri involves nine days of fasting and worship of *Rama Navami/Ram Navan-Li* (Birth of Lord Rama) to commemorate the birth of Rama. It occurs in March.

Thai Pongal (Day of Thanksgiving) is a 4-day Tamil harvest festival usually celebrated in January.

The Hindu Calendar

Hindu calendars were developed in India to measure time since the early days of the religion. Over the years, the calendar has been revised and changed as India has changed. Today, there are several variations of the Hindu calendar in use. Each calendar is specific to the diverse regions of the country. Though each regional version of the Hindu calendar has characteristics that make them unique, they all share many similarities including the same names for the twelve months of the calendars. As well, Hindu calendars are both solar and lunisolar calendars, and include aspects related to astronomy and religion.



Figure 28: Hindu Perpetual Calendar

| Calendar of Hindu Holy Days | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Holiday | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Navaratri | September 21–29 | October 9–18 | September 29–October 7 | October 17–24 | October 7–14 |
| Dusshera | September 30 | October 19 | October 8 | October 25 | October 14 |
| <i>Diwali</i> | October 19 | November 7 | October 27 | November 14 | November 4 |

Notes



Places

Gathering Places/Places of Practice

Mandirs/Temples

Not only is a Hindu temple considered a sacred space where humans and god commune, it is also the home of *Brahman* and the other Hindu deities. Within the sacred space of the temple, Hindu *pandits*, *pundits*, or *pujaris* conduct *puja* rites wherein offerings of flowers, water, incense, lights, food, and other gifts are given to honour the gods and invoke their presence and blessings.

Hindu temples can be found throughout India and in many cities across the world.

The enormous Swaminarayan Temple, located in Delhi, is considered the single largest Hindu temple in the world.

Shrines

In Hinduism, a shrine is usually a place where a god or goddess is worshipped. Shrines are traditionally located inside a temple known as a *mandir*. However, many families will have small devotional shrines within their houses.

Ashrams

Traditionally, in various Indian religions, an *ashram* (or *ashramam*) was a spiritual hermitage or a monastery. Today, the term *ashram* often denotes a centre of Indian cultural/religious activity such as *yoga*, music study, or religious instruction, similar to a *yeshiva*, an *ī'tikāf*, or a *dojo*. *Ashrams*, or religious communities/congregations, often develop around the figure of a *guru*.

World

Sapta Puri are seven of the most ancient sacred cities in Hinduism: Ayodhya, Dwarka, Haridwar, Kanchipuram, Mathura, Ujjain, and Varanasi.

- **Ayodhya** is one of the most ancient cities of India, also known as Saket and the birthplace of Lord Rama. The city is located on the bank of the Sarayu river in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Dwarka** is located in the Jamnagar of Gujarat. The Holy City of Dwarka is part of the Char Dham Yatra along with Badrinath, Puri, and Rameswaram.
- **Haridwar** is one of four sites that hosts *Kumbha Mela*, and is situated on the bank of the holy river Ganga. Haridwar is an important pilgrimage city, famous for its temples: Mansa Devi Mandir, Chandi Devi Mandir, Maya Devi Mandir, and Bharat Mata Mandir.
- **Kanchi, or Kanchipuram**, is located on the banks of the Vegavathy river in Tamil Nadu. Kanchipuram is famous among the *Shaivites* and *Vaishnavites* for its temples such as Ekambareswarar, Kamakshi Amman, Kailasanathar, and Vaikunta Perumal.
- **Mathura** is located near the towns of Vrindavan and Govardhan in Uttar Pradesh. The city of Mathura is the birthplace of Lord Krishna and there are many historic and religious sites in Mathura and its neighbouring towns.
- **Ujjain**, also known as Ujjayini or Avantika, is situated on the bank of the Kshipra river and is one of the four sites that host the *Kumbh Mela*. The Holy City of Ujjain is home to the *Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga*, one of the 12 *Jyotirlinga* of the god Lord Shiva.



Figure 29: Ayodhya



Figure 30: Temple Steeple Dwarka

- **Varanasi**, or Kashi, is one of India's oldest living cities situated on the banks of the Ganga river. Varanasi is the spiritual capital of India, famous for its *ghats*, temples, and music. *Chota Char Dham* is a circuit that consists of four sites of pilgrimage covering each of the directions: *Badrinath* (north), *Dwarka* (west), *Puri* (east), and *Rameswaram* (south).



Figure 31: Varanasi

The *Chota Char Dham* is an important Hindu pilgrimage circuit in the Indian Himalayas. The pilgrimage sites are Yamnotri Temple (dedicated to the goddess Yamuna), Gangotri Temple (dedicated to goddess Ganga), Kedarnath Temple (dedicated to Shiva), and Badrinath Temple (dedicated to Vishnu).

For *Shakti* worshippers, there are 52 (for some 108) special *Shakti Peetha* (major and minor shrines and pilgrimage sites) across the Indian subcontinent. Most are in India, but a few are in Nepal and Bangladesh. There is also one in each of the following countries: Tibet (Mansarovar), Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

For *Shaivaites* there are 12 *barah jyotirling temples (lingam)* across India that are important in pilgrimages honouring Lord Shiva.

The **Ganga (Ganges) River** holds special symbolic and historical importance for Hindus. As a regular source of water and protection, it is usually referred to as Ma Ganga.

Gathering Places in Manitoba

There are several temples and resource centres for Manitoba Hindus:

- **Hindu Society of Manitoba** operates two temples in Winnipeg.
www.hindusocietyofmanitoba.org
 - Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre
Location: 999 St. Anne's Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba
 - Ellice Avenue Temple
Location: 854 Ellice Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Tamil Hindu Group also operates out of the temple on St. Anne's Road. The group sponsors *Karthik* and *Tamil* festival activities of the temple and seeks to preserve traditional values of *Karthik* devotion and *Tamil* Hindu festivals, and to promote mutual respect and understanding of different values, traditions, and beliefs of the diversified *Tamil* community.
www.winnipegmurugan.com/



Figure 32: Hindu Wedding at Hindu Temple and Raj Pandey Cultural Centre

- **Durga Devi Mandir:** This temple honours Durga, also known as *Devi Shakti*, and by numerous other names. It is a principal and popular form of the Hindu goddess. She is a central deity in the *Shaktism* tradition of Hinduism.
Location: 499 Jamison Ave, Winnipeg, MB
www.durgadevimandir.com/



Figure 33: Hindu Temple

- **Hindu Prarthana Samaj**
Location: Thompson, Manitoba
<https://www.facebook.com/HPSthompson/>

- ISKCON Winnipeg Temple:** The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is the spiritual home of Sri Baladeva Subhadra (Deities Jagannath or Lord Krishna, his elder brother Baladeva/Balarama, and younger sister Subhadra). ISKCON was established in New York by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. ISKCON temples are found in at least 9 cities from coast to coast. ISKCON Manitoba provides devotees and seekers a place to find each other and to perform spiritual activities. It also offers a program of educational activities to systematically train aspiring devotees. The temple is dedicated to fostering consciousness of Krishna as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.



Figure 34: Making an Offering: Hindu Temple, Winnipeg

Location: 108 Chestnut Street, MB

Phone: 204-633-1487

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IskconManitoba/>
www.krishnakrishna.ca/

- Manitoba Arya Samaj:** Arya Samaj was founded in the pre-independence era of India. The purpose was to move the Hindu *Dharma* back to the teachings of *Vedas*. This temple was founded primarily by Guyanese Manitobans.

Location: 485 Maryland Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 1M4
- Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha, Temple and Cultural Centre Inc.:** This temple is also one with a strong Guyanese presence.

Location: 240 Manitoba Avenue, Winnipeg, MB

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Manitoba-Hindu-Dharmik-Sabha-Temple-and-Cultural-Centre-Inc-149037805165451/?ref=page_internal
- Ramakrishna Mandir and Cultural Centre:** A *mandir* that is dedicated to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna who believed in the harmony of religions. To Sri Ramakrishna, all religions are in their own way revelations of god whose diverse aspects satisfy the many demands of human minds.

Location: 903 Winnipeg Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3E 0S1

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Rama-Krishna-Mandir-Cultural-Centre-705019699617449/>

Notes



Modern Hinduism: Issues and Challenges

Hinduism, like many other religions, religious perspectives, and traditions, is ever evolving, and responds and reacts to social, political, legal, and other developments, incidents, and trends. Many of the challenges faced by Hinduism at this time are unique to Hinduism, but are very relevant and there are specific historical and contextual aspects that are important to understand and consider.



Figure 35: 2.5 Million Dalit Women to File Land Claims

Caste

The *caste* system still has a significant impact on modern India and Hinduism.

Educational reforms and equity-based initiatives that provide more equitable opportunities for members of “lower” *castes* have had some impact on present-day India. As a result, children of cooks and gardeners are earning their engineering and business degrees, and sweeping their families into the middle class.



Figure 36: Woman—India

As well, during the last several decades, India has experienced significant economic growth which has changed the country, creating jobs and income while nurturing aspirations where earlier there were little. New money and an increasingly powerful middle class are thought to be displacing the old social hierarchies.

As *caste*-based discrimination has been illegal in India for more than six decades (especially in today's urban India, which is very different from rural India separated by cultural and economic differences), the *caste* system seems irrelevant. However, as India transforms, *caste* is still making its presence felt in ways similar to race in the modern United States. Although it is less important now with regard to jobs and education, it is very much alive when it comes to two important societal markers—marriage and politics.

Inter-*caste* marriages in India are on the rise but still tend to be for the more liberal few. For much of the country, with people's preference for arranged marriages and close family ties, *caste* is still a primary determinant in choosing a spouse.

It is also especially relevant in politics. After economics and education, democracy has been the third most powerful force transforming Indian society. Nonetheless, for the Indian populace, *caste* is a key consideration in party choices and voting. For example, nearly 50% of the electors of even a highly educated city like Bangalore consider *caste* to be the most important reason to vote for a candidate.

Within the Indian diaspora, whether in Canada or elsewhere, *caste* is still an important factor in Hindu and Indian communities. Many Hindus still have a strong sense of *caste* identity. And, like in India, the strong urge to marry their children within their *caste* exemplifies the power of *caste* identity present among the Indian diaspora. Even the upward mobility in the employment and socio-economic ladder does not guarantee a change of attitude towards other *caste* members when it comes to marriage.

The following are some questions for discussion concerning *caste* and contemporary Hinduism.

1. How has the *caste* system reflected an understanding of human rights? What challenges does the continuing, although unofficial, existence of the *caste* system pose to a universal understanding of human rights?
2. Hindu society is often organized around marks of class, gender, and age. In what ways does this relate to ideas of human rights? What challenges does such an underlying system pose?

Being Hindu in the Diaspora: Adaptation, Identity, and Intergenerational Challenges

As many Canadian Hindus are of immigrant origins and born outside of Canada (often moving from Hindu dominant societies to Hindu minority societies), they face similar challenges to those individuals who immigrate from other lands with different languages and cultures, some which are unique to Hinduism and other non-Western/non-Christian peoples. While there are Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other religious groups in India, these are vastly outnumbered by Hindus.

As a result, throughout the Hindu diaspora, Hindus experience strong pressures to change practices and traditions, and adapt to fit the new environment and social contexts. As well, many of their children are born in Canada or other parts of the Indian and Hindu diaspora and have acculturated at a much faster and significant level than their parents or the generation before. There may, therefore, be deep intergenerational rifts between the different generations represented in the community.

Language is also an important issue, *Sanskrit* is an important language of the religion as many scriptures and prayers are written and recited in that language. Knowledge of Hindi and *Sanskrit* is required for various rituals and other religious observances. Younger generations, or those born in the diaspora, often have limited, if any, knowledge of *Sanskrit* and may have limited Hindi language skills. This is also true of family members that are not of Hindu or Indian origins that result from intermarriage and other relationships. As a result, some temples and Hindu congregations have provided transliterated and translated versions of prayers and readings to allow them to participate in the rituals and ceremonies at home and in the temples.

One of the changes is that, for many coming from Hindu dominant settings, the temple or *mandir* takes on a more important religious and social role. Attendance at a temple in Hindu dominant countries is something that is not required on a daily or weekly basis, as most observations may be done at home. In the diaspora, the temple becomes an important religious and social centre where Hindus can meet, worship, and socialize with other Hindus. The social aspect of the temple now being a place for cultural and linguistic maintenance becomes much more important.

Impact on Manitoba and Canada

Hindu Canadians and Hinduism have contributed to the shaping of contemporary Canadian society and communities. Like many other groups, they have added to the diversity of perspectives and our cultural and social mosaic.

The following are questions for exploration and discussion with respect to Hinduism and Hindus in Manitoba and Canada.

1. In what ways has Hinduism positively contributed to the development of Manitoba and Canadian society? Provide some examples.
2. Do Canadians in general have a good understanding of Hinduism and Hindu cultures, or do they hold stereotypical and mal-informed views and understandings about Hinduism?
3. How have you benefited from the opportunity to explore Hinduism?



Figure 37: Canada World Religion Day



Teaching/Learning Resources

Books and Articles

- Hawker, Frances; Campbell, Bruce; Resi, Putu. *Hinduism in Bali*. St. Catharine's, ON: Crabtree Pub., c2010.
- Mitchell, Stephen. *Mahabharata. Bhagavad-Gita. The Bhagavad Gita (A new English translation)*. New York: Three Rivers Press, c2000Plum.
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- Resource Database to accompany "Exploring World Religions: The Canadian Perspective, Hinduism." www.arts.mun.ca/worldreligions/resources/hinduism/#.
- Rosinsky, Natalie M. *Hinduism*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, c2010.
- Ucci, Carol. *Celebrate Diwali*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, c2008.
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Profiles

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- Harvard University Religious Literacy Project. "Hinduism." *Pluralism Project at Harvard University*, 26 Mar. 2015. Web. 28 Feb. 2017. <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/publications/hinduism-0>.
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Glossaries

A Note on Language and Terminology

Throughout this document we have used transliterated versions of Hindu and *Sanskrit* terms as suggested by the experts and resource people that assisted in the development of this resource. Transliteration is not an exact science and there will be variations in the transliteration of the original terms used. As well, there are regional, sect, cultural, and other variants in the spelling and pronunciation of the original Hindu and *Sanskrit* terms. Lastly, as with any language, there will be variations in the names and terms used for specific persons, items, concepts, gods and goddesses, and other elements of Hindu beliefs, rituals, icons, and practices.

Therefore, rather than provide phonetic spellings, we have chosen to provide information on audio glossaries.

Audio Glossaries

- Annenberg Learner Audio Glossary
https://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/audio_glossary_all.html
- Hindu Academy, Hinduism for Schools, Glossary and Pronunciation Guide
www.hinduacademy.org/schools/glossary.htm
- The Online Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide provides an accurate pronunciation, transliteration, and definition of Sanskrit terms used in *yoga*, texts and teachings.
www.tilakpyle.com/sanskrit.htm
- The Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education Audio Glossary
www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/glossary/a.html

Text Glossaries

- ISKCON Educational Services—The Heart of Hinduism: Glossary,
<https://iskconeducationalservices.org/HoH/extras/02glossary.htm>
- Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism, by W. J. Johnson, published in print and online 2009. www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198610250.001.0001/acref-9780198610250
- Wikipedia: Glossary of Hindu Terms, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_Hinduism_terms

Local Resource People

- Manju Lodha is an artist, educator, and community member that has long been active in promoting interfaith education.
- Manitoba Multifaith Council,
www.manitobamultifaithcouncil.ca/
- Tara Maniar is a Spiritual Life Coach and Hindu practitioner who specializes in *chakra* dance. For contact information, see www.taramaniar.com/about-me/.
- Dr. Robert Menzies, Contract Instructor, University of Winnipeg: Teaching Areas: Asian Religions; Religions of India; Buddhist Traditions; Women in Asian Religions; Hindu Religious Textual Traditions; South Asians in the Diaspora. Email: r.menzies@uwinnipeg.ca



Figure 39: Ray Dirks, Isam Aboud, and Manju Lodha (In the Spirit of Humanity Project)

Videos

Online

- Explanation of Hindu Beliefs (11 minutes): A Hindu priest explains the four key principles of Hinduism. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THhslqtioqg>
- Hindu Temples (5 minutes): A description and illustration of various Hindu temples. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yiupwfu_h0k
- Hinduism Today Videos (<https://www.youtube.com/user/HinduismTodayVideos/videos>): The YouTube channel of Hinduism Today offers a variety of videos on diverse aspects of Hinduism in English, French, and other languages. The collection includes two-part videos on the History of Hindu India.
- Introduction to Hinduism (9 ½ minutes): Provides a brief synopsis of Hindu beliefs and practices by the Chicago police service. www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoFO8N5bv3s
- My Life, My Religion: Hinduism (28 minutes): A BBC documentary about life as a Hindu from a teenage perspective. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXTNKcXrEXI>
- PBS offers a number of resources on Hinduism including an 8-minute video on Hinduism and present-day India. www.pbs.org/video/2204103677/
- Resource Database to accompany “Exploring World Religions: The Canadian Perspective, Hinduism,” www.arts.mun.ca/worldreligions/resources/hinduism/#
- Watch Know Learn: Provides videos and links to videos on philosophy, religion and ethics, including a number on various themes related to Hinduism. www.watchknowlearn.org/Category.aspx?CategoryID=1778
- What is Yoga? (4 minutes): A brief explanation of the various forms of yoga. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNcx8H7pcMg>

DVDs

- Kingsley, Ben. Greenstar Television; Liberty International Entertainment Inc; Schlessinger Media, Hinduism. Toronto, ON: Liberty International Entertainment, Inc.; CVS Midwest Tape [distributor], 2003, c2000.
- Steward, Colleen Needles; Zuerlein, John-Michael. Schlessinger Media; Tremendous! Entertainment Inc; CVS Midwest Tape (Firm) What is Hinduism? Wynnewood, Penn.: Toronto: Schlessinger Media; CVS Midwest Tape [distributor], c2006, c2003.

Websites

- BBC has a number of resources on Religion on two sites. One is the archived web pages on Religions (www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism) and the second is the new Religions and Ethics web-based resources (Religion and Ethics—Hinduism/The first set of resources comprises more traditional world religions information and backgrounders on Hinduism. The second set of resources is more issue and topics based.
- Exploring World Religions: The Canadian Perspective (www.arts.mun.ca/worldreligions/resources/hinduism/#) is a resource database created to support a text by the same title that is listed in the Books and Articles section of this profile.
- Devi: The Great Goddess (www.asia.si.edu/devi/index.htm) is an online Smithsonian exhibit on the Hindu goddess, Devi, including text and images.
- Hindu Blog (www.hindu-blog.com/p/about-hindu-blog.html) is an online blog/magazine dedicated to the subject and exploration of *Sanatan Dharma*/Hinduism (e.g., festivals, astrology, temples, sacred places, fasting, rituals, beliefs), as well as current developments in Hindu society and religion.
- Hindu Gallery (www.hindugallery.com/) is a portal that provides a collection of vintage and contemporary images of various Hindu deities, temples, artifacts, and other resources. As well, it provides lyrics for a number of slokhas (devotional verses) in English and other regional Indian languages, audio links to hymns and devotional songs, and so on. Lastly, the site provides information on the requirements and procedures for various *pujas* performed for diverse deities.
- Hindu Kids (www.hindukids.org/index.html) is a child-focused interactive and fun website on Hinduism. It provides videos and other resources for young learners.
- Hinduism Today (www.hinduismtoday.com/) is an online magazine by Himalayan Academy that features articles and other resources. It offers an educational section with articles, videos, and other resources on Hinduism and India.
- The Hindu Universe (www.hindunet.org/) is an international Hindu news site that offers simple and accessible explanations of the basics of Hinduism. It includes articles on contemporary issues; for example, the site features several articles on Hindu women, including one on female infanticide.
- Hindu Website (www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduindex.asp) provides information on Hinduism and related religions.
- Hinduism Today is an online magazine that features additional resources about the Hindu religion. The website provides access to past issues of the magazine as well as videos, and provides the latest news on Hinduism (www.hinduismtoday.com/).

- ISKCON Educational Services is a British Hindu service provider whose site offers a number of educational resources online including the Heart of Hinduism Teacher Resources Pack, fact sheets on Twelve Main Hindu Deities, and Twenty-Five Interesting Facts about Hinduism, Stories and Teaching Ideas. <http://iskconeducationalservices.org/our-services/educational-resources/>
- Kumbh Mela (www.kumbhmela.com/#) is a site about the Hindu pilgrimage Kumbh Mela. It features articles and an image gallery. Mahavidya (www.mahavidya.ca/) is a site intended as a resource for the scholarly study of the Hindu tradition. It features the work of second-year university students at the University of Lethbridge who were in their first semester-long course on Hinduism. Some entries are from students in upper level classes.
- Patheos is a web-based resource dedicated to global dialogue about religion and spirituality. The site Patheos seeks to provide credible and balanced information about religion. The site features channels on specific faiths, articles about topics related to religious diversity, and a religion library. For resources specific to Hinduism, see www.patheos.com/Hindu# & <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism>.
- Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance is a Canadian multifaith website that offers information on Hinduism and other religions. See www.religioustolerance.org/hinduism.htm.
- Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (www.ochs.org.uk/) is the website of Oxford University dedicated to the study of Hinduism.
- Religion Facts, Hinduism is a website that offers facts on specific religions. See www.religionfacts.com/hinduism.
- Sacred Hindu Texts: The website Sacred Texts offers sacred texts from a diversity of religions. See www.sacred-texts.com/hin/ for Hindu sacred texts in English.
- Sanatan Society: The website of an international association of students of the *guru* Harish Johari provides information on a variety of themes related to Hinduism and yoga. See www.sanatansociety.org/.
- The Canadian Encyclopedia, Hinduism is available at www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hinduism/.
- ThoughtCo, Lifelong Learning is a website that features articles on science, history, math, and religion. It provides multiple articles and resources on Hinduism and other faiths (<https://www.thoughtco.com/hinduism-4133173>).
- Understanding Hinduism (www.hinduism.co.za/index.html) is a guide to all things Hindu, which offers a variety of perspectives on various themes. The site also offers the text of Hinduism—A Brief Sketch by Swami Vivekananda, which was read at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 19, 1893 (www.hinduism.co.za/hinduism_brief_sketch.htm).

Infographics and Images

- Behance is an Adobe Creative platform/website dedicated to showcasing and discovering Creative Work. See <https://www.behance.net/>.
- Student Show is similar to Behance and is dedicated to showcasing design student projects. See www.studentshow.com/.
- Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/>) is an online photo management and sharing website, and an application that may be of great use for teachers and students. Many of the users of the site have uploaded photos and images to Flickr and have provided Creative Commons licenses for their photos and images. In this document we have used images that have been provided by Flickr users.

You may search for photos, persons, or groups. In the persons category, several Hindu temples throughout the world have accounts and uploaded images of their temples and rituals (e.g., London Hindu Temple).

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/133174028@N05>). In the groups category, various users pool their images by posting images related to specific themes or common interest areas (e.g., Hindu gods and goddesses). <https://www.flickr.com/groups/64997469@N00/pool/with/35566510716/>.

- Another potentially useful photo management and sharing site is Photobucket.
- Paul Murray's blog Infographical includes a posting related to world religions. Paul is a Canadian educator whose website is dedicated to the use of Web 2.0 in the classroom. See <http://paul-murray.org/infografical/infographic-digest-world-religions-edition/>.
- Pinterest features many infographics and images on Hinduism and other faiths. Search using the terms, Hindu, Hinduism, Indian Religions, India, Mandir, *Sanatan Dharma*, and so on. See [https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=Hinduism&rs=typed&term_meta\[\]=Hinduism%7Ctyped](https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=Hinduism&rs=typed&term_meta[]=Hinduism%7Ctyped).
- The Infographics website has infographics developed by other users and allows registered users to create their own. See <https://infogram.com/hinduism-11092765> for an example.
- WordZz is a WordPress magazine theme. It features a variety of images and resources related to Indian culture and travel, as well as to Hinduism. See www.wordzz.com/.

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Notes



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Cover Page: iStock. *Ubergloss Icons – Religious Symbols – Illustration. “Aum”*. File 15185765. www.istock.com.

Composition by Tony Tavares using iStock files 11600338, 15344749, and 19752799 (www.istock.com), as well as © Happy Human black.svg. November 6, 2008. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Happy_Human_black.svg; © Faravahar-BW.svg. November 11, 2008. Wikimedia Commons. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Faravahar-BW.svg>; and © Pagan Religious Symbols.png. January 13, 2011. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pagan_religious_symbols.pnf.

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