

Hinduism

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Hinduism is the predominant and indigenous religious tradition^[3] of the Indian Subcontinent. Hinduism is often referred to as *Sanātana Dharma* (a Sanskrit phrase meaning “the eternal law”) by its adherents.^{[4][5]} Generic “types” of Hinduism that attempt to accommodate a variety of complex views span folk and Vedic Hinduism to bhakti tradition, as in Vaishnavism. Hinduism also includes yogic traditions and a wide spectrum of “daily morality” based on the notion of karma and societal norms such as Hindu marriage customs.

Hinduism is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder.^[6] Among its roots is the historical Vedic religion of Iron Age India, and as such Hinduism is often called the “oldest living religion”^[7] or the “oldest living major religion”.^{[8][9][10][11]}

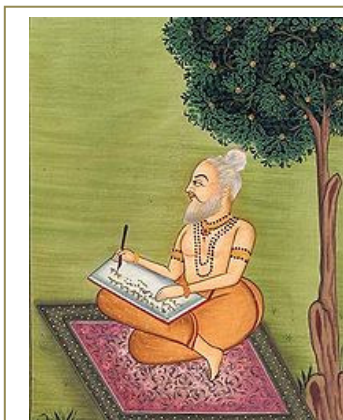
A large body of texts is classified as Hindu, divided into Śruti (“revealed”) and Smṛiti (“remembered”) texts. These texts discuss theology, philosophy and mythology, and provide information on the practice of dharma (religious living). Among these texts, the *Vedas* are the foremost in authority, importance and antiquity. Other major scriptures include the *Upanishads*, *Purāṇas* and the epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, a treatise from the *Mahābhārata*, spoken by Krishna, is of special importance.^[12]

Etymology

The word *Hindu* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent.^[13] and is first mentioned in the Rig Veda^[14]

The word *Hindu* was first used by Arab invaders and then went further west by the Arabic term *al-Hind* referring to the land of the people who live across river Indus.^[15] and the Persian term *Hindū* referring to all Indians. By the 13th century, *Hindustān* emerged as a popular alternative name of India, meaning the “land of *Hindus*”.^[16]

Originally, *Hindu* was a secular term which was used to describe all inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent (or *Hindustan*) irrespective of their religious affiliation. It also occurs sporadically in Sanskrit texts such as the later *Rajataranginis* of Kashmir (*Hinduka*, c. 1450), some 16th–18th century Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnava texts, including *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, usually to contrast Hindus with Yavanas or Mlecchas.^[17] It was only towards the end of the 18th century that the European



Valmiki, a contemporary of Rama composes the Ramayana.

merchants and colonists referred collectively to the followers of Indian religions as *Hindus*. Eventually, it came to define a precisely religious identity that includes any person of Indian origin who neither practiced Abrahamic religions nor non-Vedic Indian religions, such as Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, or tribal (Adivasi) religions, thereby encompassing a wide range of religious beliefs and practices related to Sanātana Dharma.^{[18][19]}

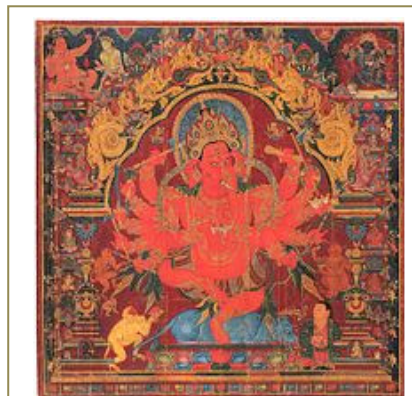
The term *Hinduism* was introduced into the English language in the 19th century to denote the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to India.^[20]

History

The earliest evidence for prehistoric religion in India date back to the late Neolithic in the early Harappan period (5500–2600 BCE).^{[21][22]} The beliefs and practices of the pre-classical era (1500–500 BCE) are called the “historical Vedic religion”. Modern Hinduism grew out of the Vedas, the oldest of which is the Rigveda, dated to 1700–1100 BCE.^[23] The Vedas center on worship of deities such as *Indra*, *Varuna* and *Agni*, and on the *Soma* ritual. Fire-sacrifices, called *yajña* were performed, and Vedic mantras chanted but no temples or icons were built.^[24] The oldest Vedic traditions exhibit strong similarities to Zoroastrianism and other Indo-European religions.^[25]

The major Sanskrit epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, were compiled over a protracted period during the late centuries BCE and the early centuries CE. They contain mythological stories about the rulers and wars of ancient India, and are interspersed with religious and philosophical treatises.

The later Puranas recount tales about devas and devis, their interactions with humans and their battles



"Dancing Ganesha. Central Tibet. Early fifteenth century. Colours on cotton. Height: 68 centimetres".^[1] This form is also known as Maharakta ("The Great Red One").^[2]



Sacred Mount Kailash in Tibet is regard-ed as the spiritual abode of Lord Shiva.

against demons.

Three major movements underpinned the naissance of a new epoch of Hindu thought: the advent and spread of Upanishadic, Jaina, and Buddhist philosophico-religious thought throughout the broader Indian landmass.^[26] Mahavira (24th Tirthankar of Jains) and Buddha (founder of Buddhism) taught that to achieve

moksha or *nirvana*, one did not have to accept the authority of the Vedas or the caste system. Buddha went a step further and claimed that the existence of a Self/soul or God was unnecessary.^[27] Buddhism peaked during the reign of Asoka the Great of the Mauryan Empire, who unified the Indian subcontinent in the 3rd century BCE. After 200

CE several schools of thought were formally codified in Indian philosophy, including Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva-Mimamsa and Vedanta.^[28] Charvaka, the founder of an atheistic materialist school, came to the fore in North India in the sixth century BCE.^[29] Between 400 BCE and 1000 CE Hinduism expanded at the expense of Buddhism.^[30]

Sanskritic culture went into decline after the end of the Gupta period. The early medieval Puranas helped establish a religious mainstream among the pre-literate tribal societies undergoing acculturation. The tenets of Brahmanic Hinduism and of the Dharmashastras underwent a radical transformation at the hands of the Purana composers, resulting in the rise of a mainstream “Hinduism” that overshadowed all earlier traditions.^[31]

Though Islam came to India in the early 7th century with the advent of Arab traders and the conquest of Sindh, it started to become a major religion during the later Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent.^[29] During this period Buddhism declined rapidly and many Hindus converted to Islam. Numerous Muslim rulers such as Aurangzeb destroyed Hindu temples and persecuted non-Muslims; however some, such as Akbar, were more tolerant. Hinduism underwent profound changes, in large part due to the influence of the prominent teachers Ramanuja, Madhva, and Chaitanya.^[29] Followers of the Bhakti movement moved away from the abstract concept of Brahman, which the philosopher Adi Shankara consolidated a few centuries before, with emotional, passionate devotion towards the more accessible Avatars, especially Krishna and Rama.^[32]

Indology as an academic discipline of studying Indian culture from a European perspective was established in the 19th century, led by scholars such as Max Müller and John Woodroffe. They brought Vedic, Puranic and Tantric literature and philosophy to Europe and the United States. At the same time, societies such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Theosophical Society attempted to reconcile and fuse Abrahamic and Dharmic philosophies, endeavouring to



The so-called *Shiva Pashupati* seal

institute societal reform. This period saw the emergence of movements which, while highly innovative, were rooted in indigenous tradition. They were based on the personalities and teachings of individuals, as with Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi. Prominent Hindu philosophers, including Aurobindo and Prabhupada (founder of ISKCON), translated, reformulated and presented Hinduism’s foundational texts for contemporary audiences in new iterations, attracting followers and attention in India and abroad. Others such as Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, B.K.S. Iyengar and Swami Rama have also been instrumental in raising the profiles of Yoga and Vedanta in the West. Today modern movements, such as ISKCON and the Swaminarayan Faith, attract a large amount of followers across the world.^[33]

Typology

Hinduism as we know it can be subdivided into a number of major currents. Of the historical division into six darshanas, only two schools, Vedanta and Yoga survive. The main divisions of Hinduism today are Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Smartism and Shaktism.^[35] Hinduism also recognizes numerous divine beings subordinate to the Supreme Being or regards them as lower manifestations of it.^[36] Other notable characteristics include a belief in reincarnation and karma, as well as in personal duty, or dharma.

McDaniel (2007) distinguishes six generic “types” of Hinduism, in an attempt to accommodate a variety of views on a rather complex subject:^[37]

- Folk Hinduism, as based on local traditions and cults of local deities at a communal level and spanning back to prehistoric times or at least prior to written Vedas.
- Vedic Hinduism as still being practiced by traditionalist brahmins (for example shrautins).
- Vedantic Hinduism, for example Advaita (Smartism), as based on the philosophical approach of the Upanishads.
- Yogic Hinduism, especially that based on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.
- “Dharmic” Hinduism or “daily morality”, based on the notion of Karma, and upon societal norms such as Hindu marriage customs.
- Bhakti or devotionalism, especially as in Vaishnavism.



The Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple in Delhi, according the Guinness World Records is the *World's Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple*^[34]

Definitions

Hinduism does not have a “unified system of belief encoded in declaration of faith or a creed”,^[38] but is rather an umbrella term comprising the plurality of religious phenomena originating and based on the Vedic traditions.^{[39][40][41][42]}

The term *Hindu* in origin is a Persian word in use from the time of the Delhi Sultanate, referring to any tradition that is native to India as opposed to Islam. *Hindu* is mistakenly used in the sense of ‘Indian pagan’ in English from the 17th century, but Hindus are not pagans as their religion is a mixture of pantheism and mysticism^{[43][44]} but the notion of *Hinduism* as an identifiable religious tradition qualifying as one of the world religions emerged only during the 19th century in western countries.

The characteristic of comprehensive tolerance to differences in belief, and Hinduism’s openness, makes it difficult to define as a religion according to traditional Western conceptions.^[45] To its adherents, Hinduism is the traditional way of life,^[46] and because of the wide range of traditions and ideas incorporated within or covered by it, arriving at a comprehensive definition of the term is problematic.^[38]

While sometimes referred to as a religion, Hinduism is more often defined as a religious

tradition.^[3] It is therefore described as both the oldest of the world’s religions, and the most diverse.^{[8][47][48][49]} Most Hindu traditions revere a body of religious or sacred literature, the Vedas, although there are exceptions. Some Hindu religious traditions regard particular rituals as essential for salvation, but a variety of views on this co-exist. Some Hindu philosophies postulate a theistic ontology of creation, of sustenance, and of destruction of the universe, yet some Hindus are atheists. Hinduism is sometimes characterized by the belief in reincarnation (*samsara*), determined by the law of karma, and the idea that salvation is freedom from this cycle of repeated birth and death. However, other religions of the region, such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, also believe in karma, outside the scope of Hinduism.^[38] Hinduism is therefore viewed as the most complex of all of the living, historical world religions.^[50] Despite its complexity, Hinduism is not only one of the numerically largest faiths, but is also the oldest living major tradition on earth, with roots reaching back into prehistory.^[51]

A definition of Hinduism, given by the first Vice President of India, who was also a prominent theologian, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, states that Hinduism is not “just a faith”, but in itself is related to the union of reason and



The Triveni Sangam, or the intersection of Yamuna River, Ganges River and mythical Saraswati river.

intuition. Radhakrishnan explicitly states that Hinduism cannot be defined, but is only to be experienced.^[52] Similarly some academics suggest that Hinduism can be seen as a category with “fuzzy edges”, rather than as a well-defined and rigid entity. Some forms of religious expression are central to Hinduism, while others are not as central but still remain within the category. Based on this, Ferro-Luzzi has developed a ‘Prototype Theory approach’ to the definition of Hinduism.^[53]

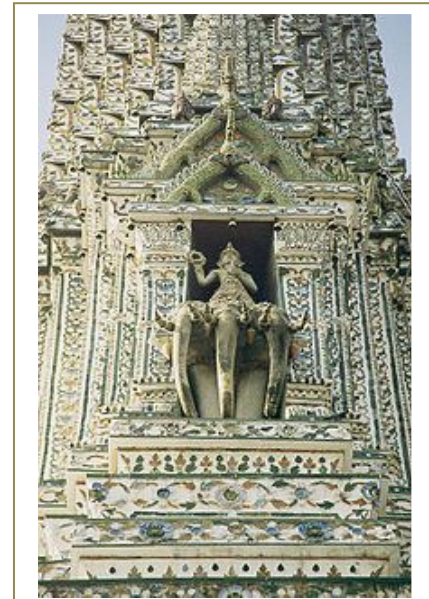
Problems with the single definition of what is actually meant by the term ‘Hinduism’ are often attributed to the fact that Hinduism does not have a single or common historical founder. Hinduism, or as some say ‘Hinduisms,’ does not have a single system of salvation and has different goals according to each sect or denomination. The forms of Vedic religion are seen not as an alternative to Hinduism, but as its earliest form, and there is little justification for the divisions found in much western scholarly writing between Vedism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism.^{[11][54]}

A definition of Hinduism is further complicated by the frequent use of the term “faith” as a synonym for “religion”.^[38] Some academics^[55] and many practitioners refer to Hinduism using a native definition, as *Sanātana Dharma*, a Sanskrit phrase meaning “the eternal law”, or the “eternal way”.^{[4][56]}

Beliefs

Hinduism refers to a religious mainstream which evolved organically and spread over a large territory marked by significant ethnic and cultural diversity. This mainstream evolved both by innovation from within, and by assimilation of external traditions or cults into the Hindu fold. The result is an enormous variety of religious traditions, ranging from innumerable small, unsophisticated cults to major religious movements with millions of adherents spread over the entire subcontinent. The identification of Hinduism as an independent religion separate from Buddhism or Jainism consequently hinges on the affirmation of its adherents that it is such.^[57]

Hinduism grants absolute and complete freedom of belief and worship.^{[58][59][60]} Hinduism conceives the whole world as a single family that deifies the one truth, and therefore it accepts all forms of beliefs and dismisses labels of distinct religions which would imply a division of identity.^{[61][62][63]} Hence, Hinduism is devoid of the concepts of apostasy,



Detail of the Phra Prang, the central tower of the Wat Arun ("Temple of Dawn") in Bangkok, Thailand - showing Indra on his three-headed elephant Erawan (Airavata)

heresy and blasphemy.^{[64][65][66][67]}

Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include (but are not restricted to), *Dharma* (ethics/duties), *Samsāra* (The continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), *Karma* (action and subsequent reaction), *Moksha* (liberation from *samsara*), and the various *Yogas* (paths or practices).^[68]

Concept of God

Hinduism is a diverse system of thought with beliefs spanning monotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism, monism, atheism, agnosticism, gnosticism among others,^{[69][70][71][72]} and its concept of God is complex and depends upon each particular tradition and philosophy. It is



Temple carving at Hoysaleswara temple representing the Trimurti: Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu.

sometimes referred to as henotheistic (i.e., involving devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others), but any such term is an overgeneralization.^[73]

Most Hindus believe that the spirit or soul — the true “self” of every person, called the *ātman* — is eternal.^[74] According to the monistic/pantheistic theologies of Hinduism (such as Advaita Vedanta school), this *Atman* is ultimately indistinct from Brahman, the supreme spirit. Hence, these schools are called non-dualist.^[75] The goal of life, according to the Advaita school, is to realize that one’s *ātman* is identical to Brahman, the supreme soul.^[76] The Upanishads state that whoever becomes fully aware of the *ātman* as the innermost core of one’s own self realizes an identity with Brahman and thereby reaches *moksha* (liberation or freedom).^{[74][77]}

Dualistic schools (see Dvaita and Bhakti) understand Brahman as a Supreme Being who possesses personality, and they worship him or her thus, as Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, or Shakti, depending upon the sect. The *ātman* is dependent on God, while



Krishna, the eighth incarnation (Avatar) of Vishnu or svayam bhagavan, worshiped across a number of traditions

moksha depends on love towards God and on God’s grace.^[78] When God is viewed as the supreme personal being (rather than as the infinite principle), God is called *Ishvara* (“The Lord”),^[79] *Bhagavan* (“The Auspicious One”,^[79]) or *Parameshwara* (“The Supreme Lord”,^[79]).^[75] However interpretations of *Ishvara* vary, ranging from non-belief in *Ishvara* by followers of Mimamsakas, to identifying *Brahman* and *Ishvara* as one, as in Advaita.^[75] In the majority of traditions of Vaishnavism he is Vishnu, God, and the text of Vaishnava scriptures identify this Being as Krishna, sometimes referred to as *svayam bhagavan*. There are also schools like the Samkhya which have atheistic leanings.^[80]

Devas and Avatars

The Hindu scriptures refer to celestial entities called *Devas* (or *devī* in feminine form; *devatā* used synonymously for Deva in Hindi), “the shining ones”, which may be translated into English as “gods” or “heavenly beings”.^[81] The *devas* are an integral part of Hindu culture and are depicted in art, architecture and through icons, and mythological stories about them are related in the scriptures, particularly in Indian epic poetry and the Puranas. They are, however, often distinguished from *Ishvara*, a supreme personal god, with many Hindus worshiping *Ishvara* in one of its particular manifestations (ostensibly separate deities) as their *iṣṭa devatā*, or chosen ideal.^{[82][83]} The choice is a matter of individual preference,^[84] and of regional and family traditions.^[84]

Hindu epics and the Puranas relate several episodes of the descent of God to Earth in corporeal form to restore *dharma* to society and to guide humans to *moksha*. Such an incarnation

is called an *Avatar*. The most prominent avatars are of Vishnu and include Rama (the protagonist in Ramayana) and Krishna (a central figure in the epic Mahabharata).

Karma and Samsara

Karma translates literally as action, work, or deed,^[85] and can be described as the “moral law of cause and effect”.^[86] According to the Upanishads an individual, known as the *jiva-atma*, develops *sanskaras* (impressions) from actions, whether



Krishna displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

physical or mental. The *linga sharira*, a body more subtle than the physical one but less subtle than the soul, retains impressions, carrying them over into the next life, establishing a unique trajectory for the individual.^[87] Thus, the concept of a universal, neutral, and never-failing karma intrinsically relates to reincarnation as well as to one's personality, characteristics, and family. Karma binds together the notions of free will and destiny.

This cycle of *action, reaction, birth, death and rebirth* is a continuum called *samsara*. The notion of reincarnation and karma is a strong premise in Hindu thought. The Bhagavad Gita states that:

“As a person puts on new clothes and discards old and torn clothes, similarly an embodied soul enters new material bodies, leaving the old bodies.” (B.G. 2:22)^[88]

Samsara provides ephemeral pleasures, which lead people to desire rebirth so as to enjoy the pleasures of a perishable body.

However, escaping the world of *samsara* through *moksha* is believed to ensure lasting happiness and peace.^{[89][90]} It is thought that after several reincarnations, an *atman* eventually seeks unity with the cosmic spirit (Brahman/Paramatman).

The ultimate goal of life, referred to as *moksha*, *nirvana* or *samadhi*, is understood in several different ways: as the realization of one's union with God; as the realization of one's eternal relationship with God; realization of the unity of all existence; perfect unselfishness and knowledge of the Self; as the attainment of perfect mental peace; and as detachment from worldly desires. Such realization liberates one from *samsara* and ends the cycle of rebirth.^{[91][92]} Due to belief in the indestructibility of the soul,^[93] death is deemed insignificant with respect to the cosmic self.^[94] Thence, a person who has no desire or ambition left and no responsibilities remaining in life or one affected by a terminal disease may embrace death by *Prayopavesa*.^[95]

The exact conceptualization of *moksha* differs among the various Hindu schools of thought. For example, Advaita Vedanta holds that after attaining *moksha* an *atman* no longer identifies itself with an individual but as identical with Brahman in all respects. The followers of Dvaita (dualistic) schools identify themselves as part of Brahman, and after attaining *moksha* expect to spend eternity in a *loka* (heaven),^[96] in the company of their chosen form of *Ishvara*. Thus, it is said that the followers of *dvaita* wish to “taste sugar”, while the followers of Advaita wish to “become sugar”.^[97]



From Ramayana

Objectives of Human Life

Classical Hindu thought accepts the following objectives of human life, that which is sought as human purpose, aim, or end, is known as the *puruṣārthas*.^{[98][99]}

- Dharma (“righteousness, ethikos”)
- Artha (“livelihood, wealth”)
- Kāma (“sensual pleasure”)
- Mokṣa (“liberation, freedom (from *samsara*)”)

Yoga

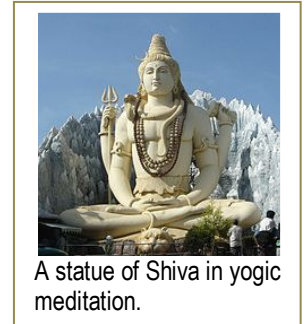
In whatever way a Hindu defines the goal of life, there are several methods (yogas) that sages have taught for reaching that goal. Texts dedicated to Yoga include the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and, as their philosophical and historical basis, the Upanishads. Paths that one can follow to achieve the spiritual goal of life (*moksha*, *samadhi* or *nirvana*) include:

- Bhakti Yoga (the path of love and devotion)
- Karma Yoga (the path of right action)
- Rāja Yoga (the path of meditation)
- Jñāna Yoga (the path of wisdom)^[100]

An individual may prefer one or some yogas over others, according to his or her inclination and understanding. Some devotional schools teach that *bhakti* is the only practical path to achieve spiritual perfection for most people, based on their belief that the world is currently in the *Kali Yuga* (one of four epochs which are part of the Yuga cycle).^[101] Practice of one yoga does not exclude others. Many schools believe that the different yogas naturally blend into and aid other yogas. For example, the practice of *jnana yoga*, is thought to inevitably lead to pure love (the goal of *bhakti yoga*), and vice versa.^[102] Someone practicing deep meditation (such as in *raja yoga*) must embody the core principles of *karma yoga*, *jnana yoga* and *bhakti yoga*, whether directly or indirectly.^{[100][103]}

Practices

Hindu practices generally involve seeking awareness of God and sometimes also seeking blessings from Devas. Therefore, Hinduism has developed numerous practices meant to help one think of divinity in the midst of everyday life. Hindus can engage in *pūjā* (worship or veneration),^[79] either at home or at a temple. At home, Hindus often create a shrine with icons



A statue of Shiva in yogic meditation.



The *visarjan* (*nimarjan*) ceremony of Ganesha during the Chaturthi festival.

dedicated to their chosen form(s) of God. Temples are usually dedicated to a primary deity along with associated subordinate deities though some commemorate multiple deities. Visiting temples is not obligatory,^[104] and many visit temples only during religious festivals. Hindus perform their worship through icons (murtis). The icon serves as a tangible link between the worshiper and God.^[105] The image is often considered a manifestation of God, since God is immanent. The Padma Purana states that the *mūrti* is not to be thought of as mere stone or wood but as a manifest form of the Divinity.^[106] A few Hindu sects, such as the Ārya Samāj, do not believe in worshipping God through icons.



The sacred Tulsi plant in front of the house.

Hinduism has a developed system of symbolism and iconography to represent the sacred in art, architecture, literature and worship. These symbols gain their meaning from the scriptures, mythology, or cultural traditions. The syllable *Om* (which represents the *Parabrahman*) and the Swastika sign (which symbolizes auspiciousness) have grown to represent Hinduism itself, while other markings such as *tilaka* identify a follower of the faith. Hinduism associates many symbols, which include the lotus, *chakra* and *veena*, with particular deities.

Mantras are invocations, praise and prayers that through their meaning, sound, and chanting style help a devotee focus the mind on holy thoughts or express devotion to God/the deities. Many devotees perform morning ablutions at the bank of a sacred river while chanting the *Gayatri Mantra* or *Mahamrityunjaya* mantras.^[107] The epic Mahabharata extols *Japa* (ritualistic chanting) as the greatest duty in the Kali Yuga (what Hindus believe to be the current age).^[108] Many adopt *Japa* as their primary spiritual practice.^[108]

Rituals

The vast majority of Hindus engage in religious rituals on a daily basis.^[109] Most Hindus observe religious rituals at

home.^[110] but observation of rituals greatly vary among regions, villages, and individuals. Devout Hindus perform daily chores such as worshipping at dawn after bathing (usually at a family shrine, and typically includes lighting a lamp and offering foodstuffs



Traditional diyas and other prayer items during a Hindu wedding ceremony.

before the images of deities), recitation from religious scripts, singing devotional hymns, meditation, chanting mantras, reciting scriptures etc.^[110] A notable feature in religious ritual is the division between purity and pollution. Religious acts presuppose some degree of impurity or defilement for the practitioner, which must be overcome or neutralised before or during ritual procedures. Purification, usually with water, is thus a typical feature of most religious action.^[110] Other characteristics include a belief in the efficacy of sacrifice and concept of merit, gained through the performance of charity or good works, that will accumulate over time and reduce sufferings in the next world.^[110] Vedic rites of fire-oblation (*yajna*) are now only occasional practices, although they are highly revered in theory. In Hindu wedding and burial ceremonies, however, the *yajña* and chanting of Vedic mantras are still the norm.^[111] The rituals, upacharas, change with time. For instance, in the past few hundred years some rituals, such as sacred dance and music offerings in the standard Sodasa Upacharas set prescribed by the Agama Shastra, were replaced by the offerings of rice and sweets.

Occasions like birth, marriage, and death involve what are often elaborate sets of religious customs. In Hinduism, life-cycle rituals include *Annaprashan* (a baby's first intake of solid food), *Upanayanam* ("sacred thread ceremony" undergone by upper-caste children at their initiation into formal education) and *Śrāddha* (ritual of treating people to feasts in the name of the deceased).^{[112][113]} For most people in



Pilgrimage to to kedarnath

India, the betrothal of the young couple and the exact date and time of the wedding are matters decided by the parents in consultation with astrologers.^[112] On death, cremation is considered obligatory for all except *sanyasis*, *hijra*, and children under five.^[114] Cremation is typically performed by wrapping the corpse in cloth and burning it on a pyre.

Pilgrimage

Hindus recognise several Indian holy cities, including Allahabad, Haridwar, Varanasi, and Vrindavan. Notable temple cities include Puri, which hosts a major Vaishnava Jagannath temple and Rath Yatra celebration; and Katra, home to the Vaishno Devi temple. The four holy sites Puri, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Badrinath (or alternatively the Himalayan towns of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri) compose the *Char Dham* (four abodes)

pilgrimage circuit. The *Kumbh Mela* (the “pitcher festival”) is one of the holiest of Hindu pilgrimages that is held every four years; the location is rotated among Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. Another important set of pilgrimages are the *Shakti Peethas*, where the Mother Goddess is worshipped, the two principal ones being *Kalighat* and *Kamakhya*. Two comparatively recent temples of fame and huge pilgrimage are Tirumala - Tirupati, home to the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple; Sabarimala, where Swami Ayyapan is worshipped. While there are different yet similar pilgrimage routes in different parts of India all are respected equally well according to the universality of Hinduism.

Pilgrimage is not mandatory in Hinduism, though many adherents undertake them^[115]

Festivals

Hinduism has many festivals throughout the year. The Hindu calendar usually prescribe their dates. The festivals typically celebrate events from Hindu mythology, often coinciding with seasonal changes. There are festivals which are primarily celebrated by specific sects or in certain regions of the Indian subcontinent.

Some widely observed Hindu festivals are

- Maha Shivaratri
- Pongal
- Holi
- Vasant Panchami
- Thaipusam
- Ram Navami
- Krishna Janmastami
- Ganesh Chaturthi
- Shigmo
- Dussera
- Durga Puja
- Diwali
- Gudi Padwa
- Ugadi
- Bihu
- Bonalu
- Rath Yatra
- Guru Purnima
- Raksha Bandhan
- Onam
- Gowri Habba
- Chhath



Durga Puja celebrations in Dhakeshwari National Temple, Dhaka, Bangladesh

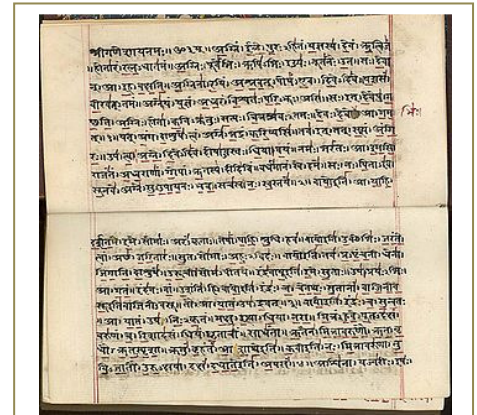
Scriptures

Hinduism is based on “the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times”.^{[116][117]} The scriptures were transmitted orally in verse form to aid memorization, for many centuries before they were written down.^[118] Over many centuries, sages refined the teachings and expanded the canon. In post-Vedic and current Hindu belief, most Hindu scriptures are not typically interpreted literally. More importance is attached to the ethics and metaphorical meanings derived from them.^[21] Most

sacred texts are in Sanskrit. The texts are classified into two classes: *Shruti* and *Smriti*.

Shruti

Shruti (lit: that which is heard)^[119] primarily refers to the *Vedas*, which form the earliest record of the Hindu scriptures. While many Hindus revere the Vedas as eternal truths revealed to ancient sages (*Rsis*),^[117] some devotees do not associate the creation of the Vedas with a



The *Rig Veda* is one of the oldest religious texts. This *Rig Veda* manuscript is in Devanagari

god or person. They are thought of as the laws of the spiritual world, which would still exist even if they were not revealed to the sages.^{[116][120][121]} Hindus believe that because the spiritual truths of the Vedas are eternal, they continue to be expressed in new ways.^[122]

There are four *Vedas* (called *R̥g-*, *Sāma-*, *Yajus-* and *Atharva-*). The *Rigveda* is the first and most important Veda.^[123] Each Veda is divided into four parts: the primary one, the *Veda proper*, being the *Samhitā*, which contains sacred *mantras*. The other three parts form a three-tier ensemble of commentaries, usually in prose and are believed to be slightly later in age than the *Samhitā*. These are: the *Bṛāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and the *Upanishads*. The first two



The *Naradeya Purana* describes the mechanics of the cosmos. Depicted here are Vishnu with his consort Lakshmi resting on Shesha Nag. Narada and Brahma are also pictured.

parts were subsequently called the *Karmakāṇḍa* (ritualistic portion), while the last two form the *Jñānakāṇḍa* (knowledge portion).^[124] While the *Vedas* focus on rituals, the *Upanishads* focus on spiritual insight and philosophical teachings, and discuss Brahman and reincarnation.^{[21][125][126]}

Smritis

Hindu texts other than the *Shrutis* are collectively called the *Smritis* (memory). The most notable of the smritis are the epics, which consist of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is an integral part of the *Mahabharata*

and one of the most popular sacred texts of Hinduism. It contains philosophical teachings from *Krishna*, an incarnation of *Vishnu*, told to the prince Arjuna on the eve of a great war. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, spoken by Krishna, is described as the essence of the *Vedas*.^[127] However Gita, sometimes called *Gitopanishad*, is more often placed in the Shruti, category, being Upanishadic in content.^[128] *Purāṇas*, which illustrate Hindu ideas through vivid narratives come under smritis. Other texts include *Devī Mahātmya*, the *Tantras*, the *Yoga Sutras*, *Tirumantiram*, *Shiva Sutras* and the *Hindu Āgamas*. A more controversial text, the *Manusmriti*, is a prescriptive lawbook which lays the societal codes of social stratification which later evolved into the Indian caste system.^[129]

Demographics

Hinduism has more than a billion adherents, of whom approximately one billion live in India.^{[130][131]} Other significant populations are found in Nepal (23 million), Bangladesh (14 million) and the Indonesian island of Bali (3.3 million). Demographically, Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam.

Society





















Denominations

Hinduism has no central doctrinal authority and many practising Hindus do not claim to belong to any particular denomination.^[142] However, academics categorize contemporary Hinduism into four major denominations: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism. The denominations differ primarily in the god worshipped as the Supreme One and in the traditions that accompany worship of that god.

Vaishnavas worship *Vishnu* as the supreme God; Shaivites worship *Shiva* as the supreme; Shaktas worship *Shakti* (power) personified through a female divinity or Mother Goddess, *Devi*; while Smartas believe in the essential oneness of five (panchadeva) or six (Shanmata, as Tamil Hindus add Skanda)^[143] deities as personifications of the Supreme.

The Western conception of what Hinduism is has been defined by the Smarta view; many Hindus, who may not understand or follow Advaita philosophy, in contemporary Hinduism, invariably follow the Shanmata belief worshipping

Countries with the greatest proportion of Hindus from Hinduism by country (as of 2008):

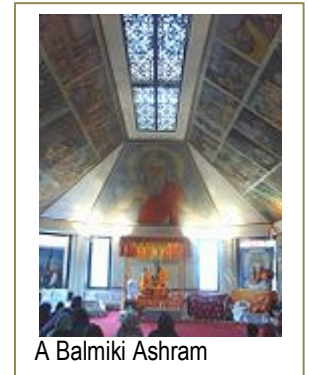
1.  Nepal 86.5%^[132]
2.  India 82%
3.  Mauritius 54%^[133]
4.  Guyana 28%^[134]
5.  Fiji 27.9%^[135]
6.  Bhutan 25%^[136]
7.  Trinidad and Tobago 22.5%
8.  Suriname 20%^[137]
9.  Sri Lanka 15%^[138]
10.  Bangladesh 9%^[139]
11.  Qatar 7.2%
12.  Réunion 6.7%
13.  Malaysia 6.3%^[140]
14.  Bahrain 6.25%
15.  Kuwait 6%
16.  United Arab Emirates 5%
17.  Singapore 4%
18.  Oman 3%
19.  Belize 2.3%
20.  Seychelles 2.1%^[141]

many forms of God. One commentator, noting the influence of the Smarta tradition, remarked that although many Hindus may not strictly identify themselves as Smartas but, by adhering to Advaita Vedanta as a foundation for non-sectarianism, are indirect followers.^[144]

Other denominations like Ganapatya (the cult of *Ganesha*) and Saura (Sun worship) are not so widespread.

There are movements that are not easily placed in any of the above categories, such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati's *Arya Samaj*, which rejects image worship and veneration of multiple deities. It focuses on the *Vedas* and the Vedic fire sacrifices (*yajña*).

The Tantric traditions have various sects, as Banerji observes: "Tantras are... also divided as astika or Vedic and nastika or non-Vedic. In accordance with the predominance of the deity the astika works are again divided as Sakta (Shakta), Saiva (Shaiva), Saura, Ganapatya and Vaisnava (Vaishnava)."^[145]



A Balmiki Ashram

Ashramas

Traditionally the life of a Hindu is divided into four *Āshramas* (phases or stages; unrelated meanings include monastery). The first part of one's life, *Brahmacharya*, the stage as a student, is spent in celibate, controlled, sober and pure contemplation under the guidance of a Guru, building up the mind for spiritual knowledge. *Grihastha* is the householder's stage, in which one marries and satisfies *kāma* and *artha* in one's married and professional life respectively (see the goals of life). The moral obligations of a Hindu householder include supporting one's parents, children, guests and holy figures. *Vānaprastha*, the retirement stage, is gradual detachment from the material world. This may involve giving over duties to one's children, spending more time in religious practices and embarking on holy pilgrimages. Finally, in *Sannyāsa*, the stage of asceticism, one renounces all worldly attachments to secludedly find the Divine through detachment from worldly life and peacefully shed the body for Moksha.^[146]

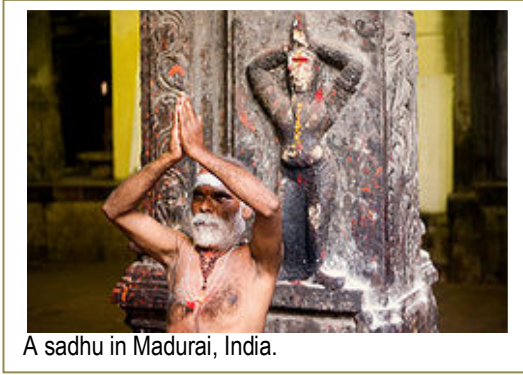


The Vaishnava Tirumala Venkateswara Temple the most visited and richest Hindu temple in the world.

Monasticism

Some Hindus choose to live a monastic life (Sannyāsa) in pursuit of liberation or another form of spiritual perfection. Monastics commit themselves to a life of simplicity, celibacy, detachment from worldly pursuits, and the contemplation of

God.^[147] A Hindu monk is called a *sanyāsī*, *sādhu*, or *swāmi*. A female renunciate is called a *sanyāsini*. Renunciates receive high respect in Hindu society because their outward renunciation of selfishness and worldliness serves as an inspiration to householders who strive for *mental* renunciation. Some monastics live in



A sadhu in Madurai, India.

monasteries, while others wander from place to place, trusting in God alone to provide for their needs.^[148] It is considered a highly meritorious act for a householder to provide sādhus with food or other necessities. Sādhus strive to treat all with respect and compassion, whether a person may be poor or rich, good or wicked, and to be indifferent to praise, blame, pleasure, and pain.^[147]

Varnas

Hindu society has traditionally been categorized into four classes, called *Varnas* (Sanskrit: “colour, form, appearance”).^[179]

- the *Brahmins*: teachers and priests;
- the *Kshatriyas*: warriors, nobles, and kings;
- the *Vaishyas*: farmers, merchants, and businessmen; and
- the *Shudras*: servants and labourers.

Hindus and scholars debate whether the so-called *caste system* is an integral part of Hinduism sanctioned by the scriptures or an outdated social custom.^[149] Among the scriptures, the *Varna* system is mentioned sparingly and descriptively (i.e., not prescriptive); apart from a single mention in the late Rigvedic *Purusha sukta*, the rigid division into *varnas* appears to be post-Vedic, appearing in classical texts from the Maurya period. The *Bhagavad Gītā* (4.13) states that the four *varṇa* divisions are created by God, and the *Manusmṛiti* categorizes the different castes.^[150] However, at the same time, the *Gītā* says that one’s *varṇa* is to be understood from one’s personal qualities and one’s work, not one’s birth.^[151] Some mobility and flexibility within the *varnas* challenge allegations of social discrimination in the caste system, as has been pointed out by several sociologists.^{[152][153]}

Many social reformers, including Mahatma Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar, criticized caste discrimination.^[154] The religious teacher Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) taught that: “Lovers of God do not belong to any caste... A brahmin without love is no longer a brahmin. And a pariah with love of God is no longer a pariah. Through bhakti (devotion to God) an untouchable becomes pure and elevated.”^[155]

Ahimsa, Vegetarianism and Other Food Customs

Hindus advocate the practice of *ahimsā* (non-violence) and respect for all life because divinity is believed to permeate all beings, including plants and non-human animals.^[156] The term *ahimsā* appears in the Upanishads,^[157] the epic Mahabharata^[158] and *Ahimsā* is the first of the five *Yamas* (vows of self-restraint) in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras.^[159]

In accordance with *ahimsā*, many Hindus embrace vegetarianism to respect higher forms of life. Estimates of the number of lacto vegetarians in India (includes adherents of all religions) vary between 20% and 42%.^[160] The food habits vary with the community and region, for example some castes having fewer vegetarians and coastal populations relying on seafood.^{[161][162]} Some avoid meat only on specific holy days. Observant Hindus who do eat meat almost always abstain from beef. The cow in Hindu society is traditionally identified as a caretaker and a maternal figure,^[163] and Hindu society honours the cow as a symbol of unselfish giving.^[164] Cow-slaughter is legally banned in almost all states of India.^[165]

There are many Hindu groups that have continued to abide by a strict vegetarian diet in modern times. One example is the movement known as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), whose followers “not only abstain from meat, fish, and fowl, but also avoid certain vegetables that are thought to have negative properties, such



Rajasthani thali.

as onion and garlic.”^[166] A second example is the Swaminarayan Movement. The followers of this Hindu group also staunchly adhere to a diet that is devoid of meat, eggs, and seafood.^[167]

Vegetarianism is propagated by the Yajur Veda and it is recommended for a *satvic* (purifying) lifestyle.^[168] Thus, another reason that dietary purity is so eminent within Hinduism is because “the idea that food reflects the general qualities of nature: purity, energy, inertia” It follows, then, that a healthy diet should be one that promotes purity within an individual.^[166]

Based on this reasoning, Hindus should avoid or minimize the intake of foods that do not promote purity. These foods include onion and garlic, which are regarded as rajasic (a state which is characterized by “tension and overbearing demeanor”) foods, and meat, which is regarded as tamasic (a state which is characterized by “anger, greed, and jealousy”).^[169]

Some Hindus from certain sects - generally Shakta,^[170] certain Shudra and Kshatriya castes^{[171][172]} and certain Eastern Indian^[173] and East Asian regions;^[174] practise animal sacrifice (*bali*).^[175] Although most Hindus, including the majority of Vaishnava and Shaivite Hindus abhor it.^[176]

Conversion

Concepts of conversion, evangelization, and proselytization are absent from Hindu texts and have never played a significant role in practice. Early in its history, in the absence of other competing religions, Hindus considered everyone they came across as Hindus and expected everyone they met to be Hindus.^{[177][178]}

Hindus today continue to be influenced by historical ideas of acceptability of conversion. Hence, many Hindus continue to believe that Hinduism is an identity that can only be had from birth, while many others continue to believe that anyone who follows Hindu beliefs and practices is a Hindu, and many believe in some form of both theories. However, as a reaction to perceived and actual threat of evangelization, proselytization, and conversion activities of other major religions most modern Hindus are opposed to the idea of conversion from (any) one religion to (any) other per se.^[179]

Hindus in Western countries generally accept and welcome willing converts, whereas in India acceptance of willing converts is becoming more common. With the rise of Hindu revivalist movements, reconversions to Hinduism have also risen.^[180] Reconversions are well accepted since conversion out of Hinduism is not recognized.^[181] Conversion

into Hinduism through marriage is well accepted and often expected to enable the non-Hindu partner to fully participate in their spiritual, religious, and cultural roles within the larger Hindu family and society.

There is no formal process for converting to Hinduism, although in many traditions a ritual called *dīkshā* (“initiation”) marks the beginning of spiritual life. A ritual called *shuddhi* (“purification”) sometimes marks the return to spiritual life after reconversion. Most Hindu sects do not seek converts,^{[182][183][184][185]} as they believe that the goals of spiritual life can be attained through any religion, as long as it is practiced sincerely.^{[182][186]} However, some Hindu sects and affiliates such as Arya Samaj, Saiva Siddhanta Church, BAPS, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness accept those who have a desire to follow Hinduism.

In general, Hindu view of religious freedom is not based on the freedom to proselytize, but the right to retain one’s religion and not be subject to proselytization. Hindu leaders are advocating for changing the existing formulation of the freedom of religion clause in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since it favours religions which proselytize.^[187]

Notes

1. ^ This work and its description are shown in Pal, p. 125.
2. ^ For a representation of this form identified as Maharakta, see Pal, p. 130.
3. ^ ^{a b} Hinduism is variously defined as a “religion”, “set of religious beliefs and practices”, “religious tradition” etc. For a discussion on the topic, see: “Establishing the boundaries” in Gavin Flood (2003), pp. 1-17. René Guénon in his *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (1921 ed.), Sophia Perennis, ISBN 0-900588-74-8, proposes a definition of the term “religion” and a discussion of its relevance (or lack of) to Hindu doctrines (part II, chapter 4, p. 58).
4. ^ ^{a b} The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. Ed. John Bowker. Oxford University Press, 2000;
5. ^ The term “Dharma” connotes much more than simply “law”. It is not only the doctrine of religious and moral rights, but also the set of religious duties, social order, right conduct and virtuous things and deeds. As such Dharma is the Code of Ethics.[1] The modern use of the term can be traced to late 19th century Hindu reform movements (J. Zavos, *Defending Hindu Tradition: Sanatana Dharma as a Symbol of Orthodoxy in Colonial India*, Religion (Academic Press), Volume 31, Number 2, April 2001, pp. 109-123; see also R. D. Baird, “Swami Bhaktivedanta and the Encounter with Religions”, *Modern Indian Responses to Religious Pluralism*, edited by Harold Coward, State University of New York Press, 1987); less literally also rendered “eternal way” (so Harvey, Andrew (2001), *Teachings of the Hindu Mystics*, Boulder: Shambhala, xiii, ISBN 1-57062-449-6). See also René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (1921 ed.), Sophia Perennis, ISBN 0-900588-74-8, part III, chapter 5 “The Law of Manu”, p. 146. On the meaning of the word “Dharma”, see also René Guénon, *Studies in Hinduism*, Sophia Perennis, ISBN 0-900588-69-3, chapter 5, p. 45
6. ^ Osborne 2005, p. 9
7. ^ Morgan, Sarma 1953
8. ^ ^{a b} *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia*, Merriam-Webster, 2000, p. 751
9. ^ Laderman, Gary (2003), *Religion and American Cultures: An Encyclopedia of Traditions, Diversity, and Popular Expressions*, Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, pp. 119, ISBN 1-57607-238-X, “world’s oldest living civilization and religion”
10. ^ Turner, Jeffrey S. (1996), *Encyclopedia of relationships across the lifespan*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, pp. 359, ISBN 0-313-29576-X, “It is also recognized as the oldest major religion in the world”
11. ^ ^{a b} Klostermaier 1994, p. 1
12. ^ The *Gita Dhyānam* is a traditional short poem sometimes found as a prefatory to editions of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Verse 4 refers to all the Upanishads as the cows, and the Gita as the milk drawn from them. (Chidbhavananda 1997, pp. 67–74)
13. ^ “India”, *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 2100a.d. Oxford University Press.
14. ^ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10075.htm>
15. ^ Thapar, R. 1993. *Interpreting Early India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 77
16. ^ Thompson Platts, John, *A dictionary of Urdu, classical Hindī, and English*, W.H. Allen & Co., Oxford University 1884

17. ^ O'Connell, Joseph T. (1973). "The Word 'Hindu' in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Texts". *Journal of the American Oriental Society* **93** (3): pp. 340–344.
18. ^ <http://veda.wikidot.com/sanatana-dharma>
19. ^ <http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/sects.htm>
20. ^ "...that many-sided and all-enfolding culture which we in the West have chosen to call Hinduism" Jan Gonda, *Visnuism and Sivaism*, Munshiram Manoharlal. 1996, ISBN 812150287X p. 1. cited by Welbon, G.R. (Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol. 43, No. 1, 98+100. March, 1975.), *Review: Love of God According to Saiva Siddhanta: A Study in the Mysticism and Theology of Saivism by Mariasusay Dhanamoy*.
21. ^ ^{a b c} Nikhilananda 1990, pp. 3–8
22. ^ "Hindu History" The BBC names a bath and phallic symbols of the Harappan civilization as features of the "Prehistoric religion (3000-1000 BCE)".
23. ^ T. Oberlies (*Die Religion des Rgveda*, Vienna 1998. p. 158) based on 'cumulative evidence' sets wide range of 1700–1100.
24. ^ Falcao, Nelson (2003), *Kristapurāṇa, a Christian-Hindu encounter: a study of inculturation in the Kristapurāṇa of Thomas Stephens, S.J. (1549-1619)*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, p. 99, ISBN 9788187886723, <http://books.google.com/?id=VRo2AAAAMAAJ>
25. ^ The *Rgvedic* deity *Dyaus*, regarded as the father of the other deities, is linguistically cognate with Zeus—the king of the gods in Greek mythology, Iovis (*gen. of Jupiter*)—the king of the gods in Roman mythology, and Tiu/Ziu in Germanic mythology[2], cf. English 'Tues-day'. Other Vedic deities also have cognates with those found in other Indo-European speaking peoples' mythologies; see Proto-Indo-European religion.
26. ^ Olivelle, Patrick, "*The renouncer tradition*", in Flood 2003, pp. 273–274
27. ^ Eliot 2003
28. ^ Radhakrishnan & Moore 1967, p. xviii–xxi.
29. ^ ^{a b c} Basham 1999
30. ^ "The rise of Jainism and Buddhism". *Religion and Ethics—Hinduism: Other religious influences*. BBC. 26 July 2004. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history_2.shtml. Retrieved 2007-04-21.
31. ^ Vijay Nath, *From 'Brahmanism' to 'Hinduism': Negotiating the Myth of the Great Tradition*, Social Scientist 2001, pp. 19-50.
32. ^ J.T.F. Jordens, "Medieval Hindu Devotionalism" in & Basham 1999
33. ^ Raymond Brady Williams (2004), *Williams on South Asian Religions and Immigration: Collected Works*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., ISBN 0754638561, <http://books.google.com/?id=nkVBOfe1KkAC&dq=swaminarayan+hare+krishnap.217>
34. ^ Jha, Preeti (2007-12-26). "Guinness comes to east Delhi: Akshardham world's largest Hindu temple". *ExpressIndia.com*. <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Guinness-comes-to-east-Delhi-Akshardham-worlds-largest-Hindu-temple/254631/>. Retrieved 2008-01-02.
35. ^ Adherents.com, which itself references many sources; *The World Almanac & Book of Facts 1998* being especially relevant.
36. ^ Flood, Gavin. D. 1996. An introduction to Hinduism. 1996. P.14
37. ^ J. McDaniel *Hinduism*, in John Corrigan, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, (2007) Oxford University Press, 544 pages, pp. 52-53 ISBN 0195170210
38. ^ ^{a b c d} Flood 2001, *Defining Hinduism*
39. ^ Smith, W.C. (1962) *The Meaning and End of Religion*. San Francisco, Harper and Row. p. 65
40. ^ Stietenron, *Hinduism: On the Proper Use of A Deceptive Term*, pp.1-22
41. ^ Halbfass, (1991) *Tradition and Reflection*. Albany, SUNY Press. pp. 1-22
42. ^ Smart, (1993) *The Formation Rather than the Origin of a Tradition*, in DISKUS: A Disembodied Journal of Religious Studies, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1
43. ^ <http://www.paganroots.net/history/paganism-in-a-nutshell>
44. ^ OED cites J. Davies, tr. Mandelslo's Trav. 74 (1662) *The King of Cambaya, who was a Hindou, or Indian, that is, a Pagan*. and Sir T. Roe's Voy. E. Ind. in P. della Valle's Trav. E. Ind. 374 (1665) *The Inhabitants in general of Indostan were all anciently Gentiles, called in general Hindoes*.
45. ^ Bryan S. Turner "Essays on the Sociology of Fate - Page 275"
46. ^ Insoll, Timothy (2001), *Archaeology and world religion*, Routledge, ISBN 9780415221559, <http://books.google.com/?id=QNxnYjYRuOMC&pg=P A35>
47. ^ Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions, p. 434
48. ^ Vaz, P. (2001), "Coexistence of Secularism and Fundamentalism in India", *Handbook of Global Social Policy* (CRC Press): 124, ISBN 9780824703578, <http://books.google.com/?id=opHYPSvPpWYC&pg=PA 123&dq=oldest+major+tradition+Hinduism>, retrieved 2008-06-26, "Hinduism is the oldest of all the major world religions."
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50. ^ Joel Beversluis (2000), *Sourcebook of the World's Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality (Sourcebook of the World's Religions, 3rd ed)*, Novato, Calif: New World Library, pp. 50, ISBN 1-57731-121-3
51. ^ Weightman & Klostermaier 1994, p. 1
52. ^ *Bhagavad Gita*, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: "Hinduism is not just a faith. It is the union of reason and intuition that can not be defined but is only to be experienced."
53. ^ Ferro-Luzzi, (1991) *The Polythetic-Prototype Approach to Hinduism* in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (ed.) *Hinduism Reconsidered*. Delhi: Manohar. pp. 187-95

54. ^ “JSTOR: Philosophy East and West, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April, 1984), pp. 234-236”. [www.jstor.org.
http://www.jstor.org/pss/1398925](http://www.jstor.org/pss/1398925).
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56. ^ Harvey, Andrew (2001), *Teachings of the Hindu Mystics*, Boulder: Shambhala, xiii, ISBN 1-57062-449-6
57. ^ Weightman 1998, pp. 262–264 “It is Hindu self-awareness and self-identity that affirm Hinduism to be one single religious universe, no matter how richly varied its contents, and make it a significant and potent force alongside the other religions of the world.”
58. ^ Olson, Carl (2007). *The many colors of Hinduism: a thematic-historical introduction*. Rutgers University Press. p. 9. ISBN 9780813540689. <http://books.google.com/books?id=RVWKCIYq4TUC&pg=PA9>.
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61. ^ (Rigveda 1:164:46) “Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti” - Truth is one; sages call it many names
62. ^ (Maha Upanishad: Chapter 6, Verse 72) “Vasudhaiva kutumbakam” - The entire world is a one big family
63. ^ Badlani, Hiro (2008), *Hinduism: Path of the Ancient Wisdom*, iUniverse, p. 303, ISBN 9780595701834, <http://books.google.com/?id=8NrQhyxH-GgC>
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76. ^ Vivekananda 1987
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79. ^ ^{a b c d e} Monier-Williams 2001
80. ^ Sen Gupta 1986, p. viii
81. ^ For translation of *deva* in singular noun form as “a deity, god”, and in plural form as “the gods” or “the heavenly or shining ones”, see: Monier-Williams 2001, p. 492. In fact, there are different ranks among the devas. The highest are the immortal Mahadevas, such as Shiva, Vishnu, etc. The second-rank devas, such as Ganesha, are described as their offspring: they are “born”, and their “lifespan” is quite limited. In ISKCON the word is translated as “demigods”, although it can also denote such heavenly denizens as gandharvas. See: “Vedic cosmology”. *Vedic Knowledge Online*. VEDA - Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. <http://www.veda.harekrsna.cz/planetarium/index.htm>. Retrieved 2007-06-25.. For translation of *devatā* as “godhead, divinity”, see: Monier-Williams 2001, p. 495.
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102. ^ "One who knows that the position reached by means of analytical study can also be attained by devotional service, and who therefore sees analytical study and devotional service to be on the same level, sees things as they are." (Bhaktivedanta 1997, ch. 5.5)
103. ^ Monier-Williams 1974, p. 116
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