[Template:Sprotected2](/wiki/Template:Sprotected2" \o "Template:Sprotected2) [Template:Use Indian English](/wiki/Template:Use_Indian_English) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Hinduism small](/wiki/Template:Hinduism_small) **Hinduism** is a religion, or a way of life,[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) found most notably in [India](/wiki/India) and [Nepal](/wiki/Nepal). With over one billion followers,<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> Hinduism is the [world's third largest religion](/wiki/Major_religious_groups) by population, and the majority religion in [India](/wiki/India), [Nepal](/wiki/Nepal), [Mauritius](/wiki/Mauritius) and [Bali](/wiki/Bali) (Indonesia). Hinduism has been called the "[oldest religion](/wiki/Oldest_religion)" in the world,[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) with some practitioners and scholars refer to it as [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST), "the eternal [law](/wiki/Dharma)" or the "eternal way"[[1]](#cite_note-1) beyond human origins.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) or synthesis[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) of various Indian cultures and traditions,[[2]](#cite_note-2)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) with diverse roots[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) and no founder.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This "Hindu synthesis" started to develop between 500 BCE and 300 CE,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) after the Vedic times.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Although Hinduism contains a broad range of philosophies, it is linked by shared concepts, recognisable rituals, [cosmology](/wiki/Hindu_cosmology), [shared textual resources](/wiki/Hindu_texts), [pilgrimage to sacred sites](/wiki/Hindu_pilgrimage_sites) and the [questioning of authority](/wiki/Hinduism#Questioning_authority).<ref name=frazierintrop2>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> [Hindu texts](/wiki/Hindu_texts) are classified into [Shruti](/wiki/Shruti) ("heard") and [Smriti](/wiki/Smriti) ("remembered"). These texts discuss [theology](/wiki/Hindu_theology), [philosophy](/wiki/Hindu_philosophy), [mythology](/wiki/Hindu_mythology), [Vedic](/wiki/Vedic) [yajna](/wiki/Yajna), [Yoga](/wiki/Yoga) and [agamic](/wiki/Āgama_(Hinduism)) [rituals](/wiki/Rituals) and [temple building](/wiki/Hindu_temple), among other topics.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Major scriptures include the [Vedas](/wiki/Vedas) and [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishads), the [Bhagavad Gita](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita), and the [Agamas](/wiki/Āgama_(Hinduism)).[[3]](#cite_note-3)[[4]](#cite_note-4) Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include the four [*Puruṣārthas*](/wiki/Puruṣārtha), the proper goals or aims of human life, namely [Dharma](/wiki/Dharma) (ethics/duties), [Artha](/wiki/Artha) (prosperity/work), [Kama](/wiki/Kama) (emotions/sexuality) and [Moksha](/wiki/Moksha) (liberation/freedom);[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6) [*karma*](/wiki/Karma) (action, intent and consequences), [*samsara*](/wiki/Samsara) (cycle of rebirth), and the various [Yogas](/wiki/Yoga) (paths or practices to attain moksha).[[7]](#cite_note-7)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Hindu practices include rituals such as [puja](/wiki/Puja_(Hinduism)) (worship) and recitations, meditation, family-oriented [rites of passage](/wiki/Sanskara_(rite_of_passage)), annual festivals, and occasional pilgrimages. Some Hindus leave their social world and material possessions, then engage in lifelong [Sannyasa](/wiki/Sannyasa) (monastic practices) to achieve [moksha](/wiki/Moksha).[[8]](#cite_note-8)<ref name=ellinger70>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> Hinduism prescribes the eternal duties, such as honesty, refraining from injuring living beings ([ahimsa](/wiki/Ahimsa)), patience, forbearance, self-restraint, and compassion, among others.[[web 1]](#cite_note-9)[[9]](#cite_note-10) [Template:TOC limit](/wiki/Template:TOC_limit)

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## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) The word *Hindu* is derived from the [Indo-Aryan](/wiki/Indo-Aryan_languages)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)/[Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) word *Sindhu*, the Indo-Aryan name for the [Indus River](/wiki/Indus_River) in the northwestern part of the [Indian subcontinent](/wiki/Indian_subcontinent) (modern day Pakistan and [Northern India](/wiki/Northern_India)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) According to [Gavin Flood](/wiki/Gavin_Flood), "The actual term 'Hindu' first occurs as a [Persian](/wiki/Persian_language) geographical term for the people who lived beyond the river Indus (Sanskrit: *Sindhu*)",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) more specifically in the 6th-century BCE inscription of [Darius I](/wiki/Darius_I) (550–486 BCE).<ref name=arvindsharmahhhh>Arvind Sharma (2002), [On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3270470) Numen, Vol. 49, Fasc. 1, pages 2-3</ref> The term 'Hindu' in these ancient records is a geographical term and did not refer to a religion.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Among the earliest known records of 'Hindu' with connotations of religion may be in the 7th-century CE Chinese text *Record of the Western Regions* by [Xuanzang](/wiki/Xuanzang),<ref name=arvindsharmahhhh/> and 14th-century Persian text *Futuhu's-salatin* by 'Abd al-Malik Isami.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

Thapar states that the word *Hindu* is found as *heptahindu* in [Avesta](/wiki/Avesta) – equivalent to Rigvedic *sapta sindhu*, while *hndstn* (pronounced *Hindustan*) is found in a [Sasanian](/wiki/Sasanian_Empire) inscription from the 3rd century CE, both of which refer to parts of northwestern South Asia.[[10]](#cite_note-11) The Arabic term *al-Hind* referred to the people who live across the River Indus.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This Arabic term was itself taken from the pre-Islamic Persian term *Hindū*, which refers to all Indians. By the 13th century, [*Hindustan*](/wiki/Hindustan) emerged as a popular alternative [name of India](/wiki/Names_of_India), meaning the "land of *Hindus*".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

The term *Hindu* was later used occasionally in some Sanskrit texts such as the later [Rajataranginis](/wiki/Rajatarangini) of Kashmir (Hinduka, c. 1450) and some 16th- to 18th-century [Bengali](/wiki/Bengali_language) [Gaudiya Vaishnava](/wiki/Gaudiya_Vaishnavism) texts including [*Chaitanya Charitamrita*](/wiki/Chaitanya_Charitamrita) and [*Chaitanya Bhagavata*](/wiki/Chaitanya_Bhagavata). These texts used it to contrast Hindus from Muslims who are called [Yavanas](/wiki/Yona#Later_meanings) (foreigners) or [Mlecchas](/wiki/Mlecchas) (barbarians), with the 16th-century *Chaitanya Charitamrita* text and the 17th century *Bhakta Mala* text using the phrase "Hindu [dharma](/wiki/Dharma)".[[11]](#cite_note-12) It was only towards the end of the 18th century that European merchants and colonists began to refer to the followers of Indian religions collectively as *Hindus*. The term *Hinduism*, then spelled *Hindooism*, was introduced into the English language in the 18th-century to denote the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to India.[[12]](#cite_note-13)

## Definitions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

Hinduism includes a diversity of ideas on [spirituality](/wiki/Spirituality#Hinduism) and traditions, but has no ecclesiastical order, no unquestionable religious authorities, no governing body, no prophet(s) nor any binding holy book; Hindus can choose to be polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic, monistic, agnostic, atheistic or humanist.[[13]](#cite_note-14)[[14]](#cite_note-15)[[15]](#cite_note-16) Because of the wide range of traditions and ideas covered by the term Hinduism, arriving at a comprehensive definition is difficult.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The religion "defies our desire to define and categorize it".[[16]](#cite_note-17) Hinduism has been variously defined as a religion, a religious tradition, a set of religious beliefs, and "a way of life."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) From a Western lexical standpoint, Hinduism like other faiths is appropriately referred to as a religion. In India the term [dharma](/wiki/Dharma) is preferred, which is broader than the western term "religion". Hindu traditionalists prefer to call it *Sanatana Dharma* (the eternal or ancient [dharma](/wiki/Dharma)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

The study of India and its cultures and religions, and the definition of "Hinduism", has been shaped by the interests of colonialism and by Western notions of religion.[[17]](#cite_note-18) Since the 1990s, those influences and its outcomes have been the topic of debate among scholars of Hinduism,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) and have also been taken over by critics of the Western view on India.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

### Typology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Hinduism as it is commonly known can be subdivided into a number of major currents. Of the historical division into six [darsanas](/wiki/Darsanas) (philosophies), two schools, [Vedanta](/wiki/Vedanta) and [Yoga](/wiki/Yoga_(philosophy)), are currently the most prominent.[[18]](#cite_note-19) Classified by primary deity or deities, four major Hinduism modern currents are [Vaishnavism](/wiki/Vaishnavism) (Vishnu), [Shaivism](/wiki/Shaivism) (Shiva), [Shaktism](/wiki/Shaktism) (Devi) and [Smartism](/wiki/Smarta_Tradition) (five deities treated as same).[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Hinduism also accepts numerous divine beings, with many Hindus considering the deities to be aspects or manifestations of a single impersonal absolute or ultimate reality or God, while some Hindus maintain that a specific deity represents the supreme and various deities are lower manifestations of this supreme.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Other notable characteristics include a belief in existence of [ātman](/wiki/Ātman_(Hinduism)) (soul, self), [reincarnation](/wiki/Reincarnation) of one's ātman, and [karma](/wiki/Karma) as well as a belief in [dharma](/wiki/Dharma) (duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and right way of living).

McDaniel (2007) classifies Hinduism into six major kinds and numerous minor kinds, in order to understand expression of emotions among the Hindus.<ref name=junemcdaniel6>June McDaniel *Hinduism*, in John Corrigan, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, (2007) Oxford University Press, 544 pages, pp. 52-53 ISBN 0-19-517021-0</ref> The major kinds, according to McDaniel are, [Folk Hinduism](/wiki/Folk_Hinduism), based on local traditions and cults of local [deities](/wiki/Deities) and is the oldest, non-literate system; [Vedic Hinduism](/wiki/Historical_Vedic_religion) based on the earliest layers of the [Vedas](/wiki/Vedas) traceable to 2nd millennium BCE; [Vedantic](/wiki/Vedanta) Hinduism based on the philosophy of the [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishad), including [Advaita Vedanta](/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta), emphasizing knowledge and wisdom; [Yogic](/wiki/Yoga) Hinduism, following the text of [Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](/wiki/Yoga_Sutras_of_Patanjali) emphasizing introspective awareness; [Dharmic](/wiki/Dharma) Hinduism or "daily morality", which McDaniel states is stereotyped in some books as the "only form of Hindu religion with a belief in karma, cows and caste"; and [Bhakti](/wiki/Bhakti) or devotional Hinduism, where intense emotions are elaborately incorporated in the pursuit of the spiritual.<ref name=junemcdaniel6/>

Michaels distinguishes three Hindu religions and four forms of Hindu religiosity.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The three Hindu religions are "Brahmanic-Sanskritic Hinduism,", "folk religions and tribal religions," and "founded religions.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The four forms of Hindu religiosity are the classical "karma-marga",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) [jnana-marga](/wiki/Jnana_yoga),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) [bhakti-marga](/wiki/Bhakti_yoga),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and "heroism," which is rooted in [militaristic traditions](/wiki/Sannyasa#Warrior_ascetics), such as Ramaism and parts of political Hinduism.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This is also called [virya-marga](/wiki/Vīrya_(Hinduism)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) According to Michaels, one out of nine Hindu belongs by birth to one or both of the Brahmanic-Sanskritic Hinduism and Folk religion typology, whether practicing or non-practicing. He classifies most Hindus as belonging by choice to one of the "founded religions" such as Vaishnavism and Shaivism that are salvation-focussed and often de-emphasize Brahman priestly authority yet incorporate ritual grammar of Brahmanic-Sanskritic Hinduism.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) He includes among "founded religions" Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism that are now distinct religions, syncretic movements such as [Brahmo Samaj](/wiki/Brahmo_Samaj) and the [Theosophical Society](/wiki/Theosophical_Society), as well as various [*Guru*](/wiki/Guru)*-ism* and new religious movements such as [Maharishi Mahesh Yogi](/wiki/Maharishi_Mahesh_Yogi) and [ISKCON](/wiki/ISKCON).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Inden states that the attempt to classify Hinduism by typology started in the imperial times, when proselytizing missionaries and colonial officials sought to understand and portray Hinduism from their interests.<ref name=ronaldinden127/> Hinduism was construed as emanating not from a reason of spirit but fantasy and creative imagination, not conceptual but symbolical, not ethical but emotive, not rational or spiritual but of cognitive mysticism. This stereotype followed and fit, states Inden, with the imperial imperatives of the era, providing the moral justification for the colonial project.<ref name=ronaldinden127/> From tribal Animism to Buddhism, everything was subsumed as part of Hinduism. The early reports set the tradition and scholarly premises for typology of Hinduism, as well as the major assumptions and flawed presuppositions that has been at the foundation of Indology. Hinduism, according to Inden, has been neither what imperial religionists stereotyped it to be, nor is it appropriate to equate Hinduism to be merely monist pantheism and philosophical idealism of Advaita Vedanta.<ref name=ronaldinden127>Ronald Inden (2001), Imagining India, Indiana University Press, ISBN 978-0253213587, pages 117-122, 127-130</ref>

### Indigenous understanding[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

#### {{IAST|Sanātana Dharma}}[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

To its adherents, Hinduism is a traditional way of life.[[19]](#cite_note-20) Many practitioners refer to Hinduism as [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST), "the eternal [law](/wiki/Dharma)" or the "eternal way".[[20]](#cite_note-21) The [Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit) word dharma has a much deeper meaning than [religion](/wiki/Religion) and is not its equivalent. All aspects of a Hindu life, namely acquiring wealth ([Artha](/wiki/Artha)), fulfillment of desires ([kama](/wiki/Kama)), and attaining liberation ([moksha](/wiki/Moksha)) are part of dharma which encapsulates the "right way of living" and eternal harmonious principles in their fulfillment.[[21]](#cite_note-22)[[22]](#cite_note-23) [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) refers to the "eternal" duties all Hindus have to follow, regardless of class, caste, or sect, such as honesty, refraining from injuring living beings, purity, goodwill, mercy, patience, forbearance, self-restraint, generosity, and asceticism. This is contrasted with [svadharma](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita#Svadharma_and_svabhava), one's "own duty", the duties to be followed by members of a specific caste and stage of life.[[web 1]](#cite_note-9) According to Knott, this also [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

According to the Encyclopædia Britannica, [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

#### Hindu modernism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Swami_Vivekananda-1893-09-signed.jpg)[Swami Vivekananda](/wiki/Swami_Vivekananda) was a key figure in introducing [Vedanta](/wiki/Vedanta) and [Yoga](/wiki/Yoga) in Europe and USA,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) raising interfaith awareness and making Hinduism a world religion.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Beginning in the 19th century, Indian modernists re-asserted Hinduism as a major asset of Indian civilisation,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) meanwhile "purifying" Hinduism from its Tantric elements[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and elevating the Vedic elements. Western stereotypes were reversed, emphasizing the universal aspects, and introducing modern approaches of social problems.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This approach had a great appeal, not only in India, but also in the west.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Major representatives of ["Hindu modernism"](/wiki/Neo-Vedanta)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) are [Raja Rammohan Roy](/wiki/Raja_Rammohan_Roy), [Vivekananda](/wiki/Vivekananda), [Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan](/wiki/Sarvepalli_Radhakrishnan) and [Mahatma Gandhi](/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

[Raja Rammohan Roy](/wiki/Raja_Rammohan_Roy) is known as the father of the [Hindu Renaissance](/wiki/Hindu_Renaissance).<ref name=hindu1>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> He was a major influence on Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who, according to Flood, was "a figure of great importance in the development of a modern Hindu self-understanding and in formulating the West's view of Hinduism."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Central to his philosophy is the idea that the divine exists in all beings, that all human beings can achieve union with this "innate divinity",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and that seeing this divine as the essence of others will further love and social harmony.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) According to Vivekananda, there is an essential unity to Hinduism, which underlies the diversity of its many forms.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) According to Flood, Vivekananda's vision of Hinduism "is one generally accepted by most English-speaking middle-class Hindus today."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan sought to reconcile western rationalism with Hinduism, "presenting Hinduism as an essentially rationalistic and humanistic religious experience."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

This "Global Hinduism"[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) has a worldwide appeal, transcending national boundaries[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and, according to Flood, "becoming a world religion alongside Christianity, Islam and Buddhism",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) both for the Hindu diaspora communities and for westerners who are attracted to non-western cultures and religions.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) It emphasizes universal spiritual values such as social justice, peace and "the spiritual transformation of humanity."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) It has developed partly due to "re-enculturation",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) or the [Pizza effect](/wiki/Pizza_effect),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) in which elements of Hindu culture have been exported to the West, gaining popularity there, and as a consequence also gained greater popularity in India.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This globalization of Hindu culture brought "to the West teachings which have become an important cultural force in western societies, and which in turn have become an important cultural force in India, their place of origin."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

### Western understanding[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

Western scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) or synthesis[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) of various Indian cultures and traditions.[[2]](#cite_note-2)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) which emerged after the Vedic period, between 500[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)-200[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) BCE and c. 300 CE,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) the beginning of the "Epic and Puranic" c.q. "Preclassical" period.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Hinduism's tolerance to variations in belief and its broad range of traditions make it difficult to define as a religion according to traditional Western conceptions.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

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 and others, while not as central, still remain within the category. Based on this idea Ferro-Luzzi has developed a 'Prototype Theory approach' to the definition of Hinduism.[[23]](#cite_note-24)

## Diversity and unity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

### Diversity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Hinduism has been described as a tradition having a "complex, organic, multileveled and sometimes internally inconsistent nature."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Hinduism does not have a "unified system of belief encoded in a declaration of faith or a [creed](/wiki/Creed)",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) but is rather an umbrella term comprising the plurality of religious phenomena of India.[[24]](#cite_note-25) According to the Supreme Court of India, [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Part of the problem with a single definition of the term "Hinduism" is the fact that Hinduism does not have a founder.[[25]](#cite_note-26) It is a synthesis of various traditions,[[26]](#cite_note-27) the "Brahmanical orthopraxy, the renouncer traditions and popular or local traditions."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Some [Hindu philosophies](/wiki/Hindu_philosophies) postulate a [theistic](/wiki/Theism) [ontology](/wiki/Ontology) of creation, of sustenance, and of the destruction of the universe, yet [some Hindus are atheists](/wiki/Atheism_in_Hinduism), as they view Hinduism more as philosophy than religion.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Sense of unity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

Despite the differences, there is also a sense of unity.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Most Hindu traditions revere a body of religious or [sacred literature](/wiki/Sastra), the [Vedas](/wiki/Veda),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) although there are exceptions.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) These texts are a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus,<ref name=andreapinkney/>[[27]](#cite_note-28) with [Louis Renou](/wiki/Louis_Renou) stating that "even in the most orthodox domains, the reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple raising of the hat".<ref name=andreapinkney>Andrea Pinkney (2014), Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia (Editors: Bryan Turner and Oscar Salemink), Routledge, ISBN 978-0415635035, pages 31-32</ref>[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Halbfass states that, although Shaivism and Vaishaism may be regarded as "self-contained religious constellations",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) there is a degree of interaction and reference between the "theoreticians and literary representatives"[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) of each tradition which indicates the presence of "a wider sense of identity, a sense of coherence in a shared context and of inclusion in a common framework and horizon".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

#### Indigenous developments[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

The notion of common denominators for several religions and traditions of India was already noted from the 12th century CE on.[[28]](#cite_note-29) Lorenzen traces the emergence of a "family resemblance", and what he calls as "beginnings of medieval and modern Hinduism" taking shape, at c. 300-600 CE, with the development of the early Puranas, and continuities with the earlier Vedic religion.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Lorenzen states that the establishment of a Hindu self-identity took place "through a process of mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim Other."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) According to Lorenzen, this "presence of the Other"[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) is necessary to recognise the "loose family resemblance" among the various traditions and schools,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

According to Nicholson, already between the 12th and the 16th centuries "certain thinkers began to treat as a single whole the diverse philosophical teachings of the Upanishads, epics, Puranas, and the schools known retrospectively as the "six systems" (*saddarsana*) of mainstream Hindu philosophy."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The tendency of "a blurring of philosophical distinctions" has also been noted by Burley.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Hacker called this "inclusivism"[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and Michaels speaks of "the identificatory habit".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Lorenzen locates the origins of a distinct Hindu identity in the interaction between Muslims and Hindus,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and a process of "mutual self-definition with a contrasting Muslim other",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) which started well before 1800.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Michaels notes: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

This inclusivism[[29]](#cite_note-30) was further developed in the 19th and 20th centuries by [Hindu reform movements](/wiki/Hindu_reform_movements) and [Neo-Vedanta](/wiki/Neo-Vedanta),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and has become characteristic of modern Hinduism.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

#### Colonial influences[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

The notion and reports on "Hinduism" as a "single world religious tradition"[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) was popularised by 19th-century proselytizing missionaries and European Indologists, roles sometimes served by the same person, who relied on texts preserved by Brahmins (priests) for their information of Indian religions, and animist observations which the missionary Orientalists presumed was Hinduism.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)<ref name=ronaldinden127/>[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) These reports influenced perceptions about Hinduism. Some scholars state that the colonial polemical reports led to fabricated stereotypes where Hinduism was mere mystic paganism devoted to the service of devils,[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) while other scholars state that the colonial constructions influenced the belief that the *Vedas*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Manusmriti* and such texts were the essence of Hindu religiosity, and in the modern association of 'Hindu doctrine' with the schools of Vedanta (in particular Advaita Vedanta) as paradigmatic example of Hinduism's mystical nature".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) Pennington, while concurring that the study of Hinduism as a world religion began in the colonial era, disagrees that Hinduism is a colonial European era invention.<ref name=brianpennington5>Brian K. Pennington (2005), Was Hinduism Invented?: Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0195166552, pages 4-5 and Chapter 6</ref> He states that the shared theology, common ritual grammar and way of life of those who identify themselves as Hindus is traceable to ancient times.<ref name=brianpennington5/>[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

## Beliefs[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[thumb|right|200px| Temple wall panel relief sculpture at the](/wiki/File:Halebid3.JPG) [Hoysaleswara temple](/wiki/Hoysaleswara_temple) in [Halebidu](/wiki/Halebidu), representing the [Trimurti](/wiki/Trimurti): [Brahma](/wiki/Brahma), [Shiva](/wiki/Shiva) and [Vishnu](/wiki/Vishnu).

Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include (but are not restricted to) [*Dharma*](/wiki/Dharma) (ethics/duties), [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) (the continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), [*Karma*](/wiki/Karma) (action, intent and consequences), [*Moksha*](/wiki/Moksha) (liberation from *samsara* or liberation in this life), and the various [Yogas](/wiki/Yoga) (paths or practices).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

### Purusharthas (objectives of human life)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Classical Hindu thought accepts four proper goals or aims of human life: Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. These are known as the [*Puruṣārthas*](/wiki/Puruṣārtha):[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6)

#### Dharma (righteousness, ethics)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Dharma](/wiki/Dharma) is considered the foremost goal of a human being in Hinduism.[[30]](#cite_note-31) The concept Dharma includes behaviors that are considered to be in accord with [*rta*](/wiki/Rta), the order that makes life and universe possible,[[31]](#cite_note-32) and includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and "right way of living".<ref name=tce>Dharma, The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th Ed. (2013), Columbia University Press, Gale, ISBN 978-0787650155</ref> Hindu dharma includes the religious duties, moral rights and duties of each individual, as well as behaviors that enable social order, right conduct, and those that are virtuous.<ref name=tce/> Dharma, according to [Van Buitenen](/wiki/J._A._B._van_Buitenen),<ref name=vanbuitenen>J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Dharma and Moksa, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 7, No. 1/2 (Apr. - Jul., 1957), pp 33-40</ref> is that which all existing beings must accept and respect to sustain harmony and order in the world. It is, states Van Buitenen, the pursuit and execution of one's nature and true calling, thus playing one's role in cosmic concert.<ref name=vanbuitenen/> The [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad](/wiki/Brihadaranyaka) states it as: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote) In the [Mahabharata](/wiki/Mahabharata), [Krishna](/wiki/Krishna) defines dharma as upholding both this-worldly and other-worldly affairs. (Mbh 12.110.11). The word *Sanātana* means 'eternal', 'perennial', or 'forever'; thus, 'Sanātana Dharma' signifies that it is the dharma that has neither beginning nor end.[[32]](#cite_note-33)

#### Artha (livelihood, wealth)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Artha](/wiki/Artha) is objective and virtuous pursuit of wealth for livelihood, obligations and economic prosperity. It is inclusive of political life, diplomacy and material well-being. The Artha concept includes all "means of life", activities and resources that enables one to be in a state one wants to be in, wealth, career and financial security.<ref name=johnk>John Koller, Puruṣārtha as Human Aims, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1968), pp. 315-319</ref> The proper pursuit of artha is considered an important aim of human life in Hinduism.[[33]](#cite_note-34)<ref name=bruces>Bruce Sullivan (1997), Historical Dictionary of Hinduism, ISBN 978-0810833272, pp 29-30</ref>

#### Kāma (sensual pleasure)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Kāma ([Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit), [Pali](/wiki/Pali); [Devanagari](/wiki/Devanagari): काम) means desire, wish, passion, longing, pleasure of the [senses](/wiki/Senses), the aesthetic enjoyment of life, affection, or love, with or without sexual connotations.[[34]](#cite_note-35)<ref name=mmwse>Monier Williams, [काम, kāma](http://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/ebooks/mw/0300/mw__0304.html) Monier-Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary, pp 271, see 3rd column</ref> In Hinduism, Kama is considered an essential and healthy goal of human life when pursued without sacrificing Dharma, Artha and Moksha.[[35]](#cite_note-36)

#### Mokṣa (liberation, freedom from samsara)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Moksha ([Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit): [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang) [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST)) or **mukti** ([Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit): [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) is the ultimate, most important goal in Hinduism. In one sense, *Moksha* is a concept associated with liberation from sorrow, suffering and *saṃsāra* (birth-rebirth cycle). A release from this eschatological cycle, in after life, particularly in theistic schools of Hinduism is called *moksha*.[[36]](#cite_note-37)[[37]](#cite_note-38) In other schools of Hinduism, such as monistic, *moksha* is a goal achievable in current life, as a state of bliss through self-realization, of comprehending the nature of one's soul, of freedom and of "realizing the whole universe as the Self".[[38]](#cite_note-39)[[39]](#cite_note-40)

### Karma and samsara[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) *Karma* translates literally as action, work, or deed,[[40]](#cite_note-41) and also refers to a Vedic theory of "moral law of cause and effect".[[41]](#cite_note-42)[[42]](#cite_note-43) The theory is a combination of (1) causality that may be ethical or non-ethical; (2) ethicization, that is good or bad actions have consequences; and (3) rebirth.<ref name=wdointro>Wendy D. O'Flaherty (1980), Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions, University of California Press, ISBN 978-0520039230, pp xi-xxv (Introduction) and 3-37</ref> Karma theory is interpreted as explaining the present circumstances of an individual with reference to his or her actions in past. These actions may be those in a person's current life, or, in some schools of Hinduism, possibly actions in their past lives; furthermore, the consequences may result in current life, or a person's future lives.<ref name=wdointro/>[[43]](#cite_note-44) This cycle of *birth, life, death and rebirth* is called [*samsara*](/wiki/Samsara). Libration from *samsara* through *moksha* is believed to ensure lasting happiness and peace.[[44]](#cite_note-45)[[45]](#cite_note-46) Hindu scriptures teach that the future is both a function of current human effort derived from free will and past human actions that set the circumstances.[[46]](#cite_note-47)

### Moksha[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

The ultimate goal of life, referred to as *moksha*, [*nirvana*](/wiki/Nirvana) or [*samadhi*](/wiki/Samādhi), 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*, thereby ending the cycle of rebirth, sorrow and suffering.[[47]](#cite_note-48)[[48]](#cite_note-49) Due to belief in the indestructibility of the soul,[[49]](#cite_note-50) death is deemed insignificant with respect to the cosmic self.[[50]](#cite_note-51) The meaning of *moksha* differs among the various Hindu schools of thought. For example, Advaita Vedanta holds that after attaining *moksha* a person knows their "soul, self" and identifies it as one with Brahman and everyone in all respects.<ref name=karlpotter/><ref name=klausklost/> The followers of [Dvaita](/wiki/Dvaita) (dualistic) schools, in moksha state, identify individual "soul, self" as distinct from Brahman but infinitesimally close, and after attaining *moksha* expect to spend eternity in a [*loka*](/wiki/Loka) (heaven). To theistic schools of Hinduism, moksha is liberation from samsara, while for other schools such as the monistic school, moksha is possible in current life and is a psychological concept. According to Deutsche, *moksha* is transcendental consciousness to the latter, the perfect state of being, of self-realization, of freedom and of "realizing the whole universe as the Self".[[38]](#cite_note-39)<ref name=karlpotter>see:

* Karl Potter, Dharma and Mokṣa from a Conversational Point of View, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 8, No. 1/2 (Apr. - Jul., 1958), pp. 49-63
* Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Dharma and Moksha, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 7, No. 1/2 (Apr. - Jul., 1957), pp. 41-48</ref> *Moksha* in these schools of Hinduism, suggests [Klaus Klostermaier](/wiki/Klaus_Klostermaier),<ref name=klausklost>Klaus Klostermaier, Mokṣa and Critical Theory, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 61-71</ref> implies a setting free of hitherto fettered faculties, a removing of obstacles to an unrestricted life, permitting a person to be more truly a person in the full sense; the concept presumes an unused human potential of creativity, compassion and understanding which had been blocked and shut out. *Moksha* is more than liberation from life-rebirth cycle of suffering (*samsara*); Vedantic school separates this into two: *jivanmukti* (liberation in this life) and *videhamukti* (liberation after death).[[51]](#cite_note-52)[[52]](#cite_note-53)

### Concept of God[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Hinduism is a diverse system of thought with beliefs spanning [monotheism](/wiki/Monotheism), [polytheism](/wiki/Polytheism), [panentheism](/wiki/Panentheism), [pantheism](/wiki/Hindu_views_on_Pantheism), [pandeism](/wiki/Pandeism), [monism](/wiki/Monism), and [atheism](/wiki/Atheism_in_Hinduism) among others;[[53]](#cite_note-54)[[54]](#cite_note-55)[[web 2]](#cite_note-56) and its concept of God is complex and depends upon each individual and the tradition and philosophy followed. It is sometimes referred to as [henotheistic](/wiki/Henotheistic) (i.e., involving devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others), but any such term is an overgeneralization.<ref name=heno>See [Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb) and [Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

The [*Nasadiya Sukta*](/wiki/Nasadiya_Sukta) (*Creation Hymn*) of the [*Rig Veda*](/wiki/Rig_Veda) is one of the earliest texts[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) which "demonstrates a sense of metaphysical speculation" about what created the universe, the concept of god(s) and The One, and whether even The One knows how the universe came into being.[[55]](#cite_note-57)<ref name=3translations>

* Original Sanskrit: [Rigveda 10.129](https://sa.wikisource.org/wiki/ऋग्वेद:_सूक्तं_१०.१२९) Wikisource;
* **Translation 1**: [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* **Translation 2**: [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* **Translation 3**: [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> The *Rig Veda* praises various deities, none superior nor inferior, in a henotheistic manner.[[56]](#cite_note-58) The hymns repeatedly refer to One Truth and Reality. The "One Truth" of Vedic literature, in modern era scholarship, has been interpreted as monotheism, monism, as well as a deified Hidden Principles behind the great happenings and processes of nature.[[57]](#cite_note-59)

[Template:Infobox](/wiki/Template:Infobox) Hindus believe that all living creatures have a soul. This soul – the spirit or true "self" of every person, is called the [*ātman*](/wiki/Atman_(Hinduism)). The soul is believed to be eternal.[[58]](#cite_note-60) According to the monistic/pantheistic ([non-dualist](/wiki/Nondualism)) theologies of Hinduism (such as [Advaita Vedanta](/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta) school), this *Atman* is indistinct from [Brahman](/wiki/Brahman), the supreme spirit.<ref name=bhaskaranandaessential>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> The goal of life, according to the Advaita school, is to realise that one's soul is identical to supreme soul, that the supreme soul is present in everything and everyone, all life is interconnected and there is oneness in all life.[[59]](#cite_note-61)[[60]](#cite_note-62)[[61]](#cite_note-63) [Dualistic](/wiki/Dualistic) schools (see [Dvaita](/wiki/Dvaita) and [Bhakti](/wiki/Bhakti)) understand Brahman as a Supreme Being separate from individual souls.[[62]](#cite_note-64) They worship the Supreme Being variously as [Vishnu](/wiki/Vishnu), [Brahma](/wiki/Brahma), [Shiva](/wiki/Shiva), or [Shakti](/wiki/Shakti), depending upon the sect. God is called [*Ishvara*](/wiki/Ishvara), [*Bhagavan*](/wiki/Bhagavan), [*Parameshwara*](/wiki/Parameshwara_(God)), [*Deva*](/wiki/Deva_(Hinduism)) or [*Devi*](/wiki/Devi), and these terms have different meanings in different schools of Hinduism.[[63]](#cite_note-65)[[64]](#cite_note-66)[[65]](#cite_note-67) The Hindu scriptures refer to celestial entities called [*Devas*](/wiki/Deva_(Hinduism)) (or [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) in feminine form; [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) used synonymously for Deva in Hindi), which may be translated into English as "gods" or "heavenly beings".[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) The *devas* are an integral part of Hindu culture and are depicted in art, architecture and through [icons](/wiki/Icon), and stories about them are related in the scriptures, particularly in [Indian epic poetry](/wiki/Indian_epic_poetry) and the [Puranas](/wiki/Purana). They are, however, often distinguished from [Ishvara](/wiki/Ishvara), a personal god, with many Hindus worshipping Ishvara in one of its particular manifestations as their [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST), or chosen ideal.<ref name=werner80>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref>[[66]](#cite_note-68) The choice is a matter of individual preference,<ref name=harman1>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> and of regional and family traditions.<ref name=harman1/> The multitude of *deva*s are considered as manifestations of Brahman.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

While ancient Vedic literature including [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishads) make no mention of reincarnation of God, the [Puranas](/wiki/Puranas) and the Epics relate several episodes of the descent of God to Earth in corporeal form to restore *dharma* to society. Such an incarnation is called an [avatar](/wiki/Avatar). The [most prominent avatars](/wiki/Dashavatara) are of [Vishnu](/wiki/Vishnu) and include [Rama](/wiki/Rama) (the protagonist of the [*Ramayana*](/wiki/Ramayana)) and [Krishna](/wiki/Krishna) (a central figure in the epic [*Mahabharata*](/wiki/Mahabharata)).

Both theistic and atheistic ideas, for epistemological and metaphysical reasons, are profuse in different schools of Hinduism. The early [Nyaya](/wiki/Nyaya) school of Hinduism, for example, was non-theist/atheist,[[67]](#cite_note-69) but later Nyaya school scholars argued that God exists and offered proofs using its theory of logic.[[68]](#cite_note-70)[[69]](#cite_note-71) Other schools disagreed with Nyaya scholars. [Samkhya](/wiki/Samkhya),[[70]](#cite_note-72) [Mimamsa](/wiki/Mimamsa)[[71]](#cite_note-73) and [Carvaka](/wiki/Carvaka) schools of Hinduism, were non-theist/atheist, arguing that "God was an unnecessary metaphysical assumption".<ref name=samkhyaatheism>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref><ref group=web>[Sāṁkhyapravacana Sūtra](https://archive.org/stream/thesamkhyaphilos00sinhuoft/thesamkhyaphilos00sinhuoft_djvu.txt) I.92.</ref>[[72]](#cite_note-74) Its [Vaisheshika](/wiki/Vaisheshika) school started as another non-theistic tradition relying on naturalism and that all matter is eternal, but it later introduced the concept of a non-creator God.[[73]](#cite_note-75)<ref name=klausk>Klaus Klostermaier (2007), A Survey of Hinduism, Third Edition, State University of New York, ISBN 978-0791470824, pages 337-338</ref> The [Yoga](/wiki/Raja_yoga) school of Hinduism accepted the concept of a "personal god" and left it to the Hindu to define his or her god.[[74]](#cite_note-76) Advaita Vedanta taught a monistic, abstract Self and Oneness in everything, with no room for gods or deity, a perspective that Mohanty calls, "spiritual, not religious".[[75]](#cite_note-77) Bhakti sub-schools of Vedanta taught a creator God that is distinct from each human being.[[62]](#cite_note-64) Hinduism has the strongest presence of the divine feminine in world religion from ancient times to the present.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The goddess is viewed as the heart of the most esoteric Saiva traditions.[[76]](#cite_note-78)

### Questioning authority[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

A central theme of Hinduism is the questioning of authority.<ref name=frazier1415>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> Narratives in the [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishads) present characters questioning persons of authority.<ref name=frazier1415/> The [Kena Upanishad](/wiki/Kena_Upanishad) repeatedly asks *kena*, 'by what' power something is the case.<ref name=frazier1415/> The [Katha Upanishad](/wiki/Katha_Upanishad) and [Bhagavad Gita](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) present narratives where the student criticizes the teacher's inferior answers.<ref name=frazier1415/> In the [Shiva Purana](/wiki/Shiva_Purana), Shiva questions Vishnu and Brahma.<ref name=frazier1415/> Doubt plays a repeated role in the [Mahabharata](/wiki/Mahabharata).<ref name=frazier1415/> [Jayadeva's](/wiki/Jayadeva) [Gita Govinda](/wiki/Gita_Govinda) presents criticism via the character of [Radha](/wiki/Radha).<ref name=frazier1415/>

## Main traditions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|A Ganesha-centric](/wiki/File:Ganesha_pachayatana.jpg) [Panchayatana](/wiki/Panchayatana_puja) ("five deities", from the Smarta tradition): [Ganesha](/wiki/Ganesha) (centre) with [Shiva](/wiki/Shiva) (top left), [Devi](/wiki/Devi) (top right), [Vishnu](/wiki/Vishnu) (bottom left) and Surya (bottom right). All these deities also have separate sects dedicated to them.

Hinduism has no central doctrinal authority and many practising Hindus do not claim to belong to any particular denomination or tradition.[[77]](#cite_note-79) Four major denominations are, however, used in scholarly studies: *Vaishnavism*, *Shaivism*, *Shaktism* and *Smartism*.<ref name=lancenelson>Lance Nelson (2007), An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies (Editors: Orlando O. Espín, James B. Nickoloff), Liturgical Press, ISBN 978-0814658567, pages 562-563</ref>[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) These denominations differ primarily in the central deity worshipped, the traditions and the [soteriological](/wiki/Soteriology) outlook.<ref name=sskumar>SS Kumar (2010), Bhakti - the Yoga of Love, LIT Verlag Münster, ISBN 978-3643501301, pages 35-36</ref> The denominations of Hinduism, states Lipner, are unlike those found in major religions of the world, because Hindu denominations are fuzzy with individuals practicing more than one, and he suggests the term "Hindu polycentrism".[[78]](#cite_note-80) [Vaishnavism](/wiki/Vaishnavism) is the devotional religious tradition that worships [Vishnu](/wiki/Vishnu)[[79]](#cite_note-81) and his avatars, particularly [Krishna](/wiki/Krishna) and [Rama](/wiki/Rama).[[80]](#cite_note-82) The adherents of this sect are generally non-ascetic, monastic, oriented towards community events and devotionalism practices inspired by "intimate loving, joyous, playful" *Krishna* and other Vishnu avatars.<ref name=sskumar/> These practices sometimes include community dancing, singing of [Kirtans](/wiki/Kirtan) and [Bhajans](/wiki/Bhajan), with sound and music believed by some to have meditative and spiritual powers.<ref name=edwinb>Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (2004), The Hare Krishna Movement, Columbia University Press, ISBN 978-0231122566, pages 38-43</ref> Temple worship and festivals are typically elaborate in Vaishnavism.[[81]](#cite_note-83) The Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana, along with Vishnu-oriented [Puranas](/wiki/Purana) provide its theistic foundations.[[82]](#cite_note-84) Philosophically, their beliefs are rooted in the dualism sub-schools of [Vedanta](/wiki/Vedanta) Hinduism.[[83]](#cite_note-85)[[84]](#cite_note-86) [Shaivism](/wiki/Shaivism) is the tradition that focuses on [Shiva](/wiki/Shiva). Shaivas are more attracted to ascetic individualism, and it has several sub-schools.<ref name=sskumar/> Their practices include Bhakti-style devotionalism, yet their beliefs lean towards nondual, monistic schools of Hinduism such as Advaita and [Yoga](/wiki/Raja_yoga).<ref name=lancenelson/><ref name=edwinb/> Some Shaivas worship in temples, while others emphasize yoga, striving to be one with Shiva within.[[85]](#cite_note-87) Avatars are uncommon, and some Shaivas visualize god as half male, half female, as a fusion of the male and female principles ([Ardhanarishvara](/wiki/Ardhanarishvara)). Shaivism is related to Shaktism, wherein Shakti is seen as spouse of Shiva.<ref name=lancenelson/> Community celebrations include festivals, and participation, with Vaishnavas, in pilgrimages such as the [Kumbh Mela](/wiki/Kumbh_Mela).[[86]](#cite_note-88) Shaivism has been more commonly practiced in the Himalayan north from Kashmir to Nepal, and in south India.[[87]](#cite_note-89) [Shaktism](/wiki/Shaktism) focuses on goddess worship of [Shakti](/wiki/Shakti) or Devi as cosmic mother,<ref name=sskumar/> and it is particularly common in northeastern and eastern states of India such as Assam and [Bengal](/wiki/West_Bengal). Devi is depicted as in gentler forms like [Parvati](/wiki/Parvati), the consort of Shiva; or, as fierce warrior goddesses like [Kali](/wiki/Kali) and [Durga](/wiki/Durga). Followers of Shaktism recognize [Shakti](/wiki/Shakti) as the power that underlies the male principle. Shaktism is also associated with [Tantra](/wiki/Tantra) practices.[[88]](#cite_note-90) Community celebrations include festivals, some of which include processions and idol immersion into sea or other water bodies.[[89]](#cite_note-91) [Smartism](/wiki/Smartism) centers its worship simultaneously on all the major Hindu deities: Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, [Ganesha](/wiki/Ganesha), [Surya](/wiki/Surya) and [Skanda](/wiki/Kartikeya).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The Smarta tradition developed during the (early) Classical Period of Hinduism around the beginning of the Common Era, when Hinduism emerged from the interaction between Brahmanism and local traditions.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The Smarta tradition is aligned with [Advaita Vedanta](/wiki/Advaita_Vedanta), and regards [Adi Shankara](/wiki/Adi_Shankara) as its founder or reformer, who considered worship of God-with-attributes (saguna Brahman) as a journey towards ultimately realizing God-without-attributes (nirguna Brahman, Atman, Self-knowledge).<ref name=williamw>William Wainwright (2012), [Concepts of God](http://stanford.library.usyd.edu.au/entries/concepts-god/), Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, (Accessed on: June 17, 2015)</ref>[[90]](#cite_note-92) The term *Smartism* is derived from [Smriti](/wiki/Smriti) texts of Hinduism, meaning those who remember the traditions in the texts.<ref name=lancenelson/><ref name=williamsonp89>L Williamson (2010), Transcendent in America: Hindu-inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion, New York University Press, ISBN 978-0814794500, page 89</ref> This Hindu sect practices a philosophical [Jnana yoga](/wiki/Jnana_yoga), scriptural studies, reflection, meditative path seeking an understanding of Self's oneness with God.<ref name=lancenelson/>[[91]](#cite_note-93)

## Scriptures[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[thumb|The](/wiki/File:Rigveda_MS2097.jpg) [*Rigveda*](/wiki/Rigveda) is the first and most important Veda[[92]](#cite_note-94) and is one of the oldest [religious texts](/wiki/Religious_texts). This Rigveda [manuscript](/wiki/Manuscript) is in [Devanagari](/wiki/Devanagari). [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The ancient scriptures of Hinduism are in Sanskrit. These texts are classified into two: Shruti and Smriti. Hindu scriptures were composed, memorized and transmitted verbally, across generations, for many centuries before they were written down.[[93]](#cite_note-95)[[94]](#cite_note-96) Over many centuries, sages refined the teachings and expanded the Shruti and Smriti, as well as developed Shastras with epistemological and metaphysical theories of six classical schools of Hinduism.

*Shruti* (lit. that which is heard)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) primarily refers to the [*Veda*](/wiki/Veda)s, which form the earliest record of the Hindu scriptures', and are regarded as eternal truths revealed to the ancient sages ([*rishis*](/wiki/Rishi)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) There are four *Vedas* - [*Rigveda*](/wiki/Rigveda), [*Samaveda*](/wiki/Samaveda), [*Yajurveda*](/wiki/Yajurveda) and [*Atharvaveda*](/wiki/Atharvaveda). Each Veda has been subclassified into four major text types – the [Samhitas](/wiki/Samhita) (mantras and benedictions), the [Aranyakas](/wiki/Aranyakas) (text on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices and symbolic-sacrifices), the [Brahmanas](/wiki/Brahmanas) (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices), and the [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishads) (text discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).<ref name=gflood>Gavin Flood (1996), An Introduction to Hinduism, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0521438780, pages 35-39</ref>[[95]](#cite_note-97)[[96]](#cite_note-98) The first two parts of the Vedas were subsequently called the [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) (ritualistic portion), while the last two form the [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) (knowledge portion, discussing spiritual insight and philosophical teachings).[[97]](#cite_note-99)[[web 3]](#cite_note-100)[[98]](#cite_note-101)[[99]](#cite_note-102)[[100]](#cite_note-103) The Upanishads are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought, and have profoundly influenced diverse traditions.<ref name=wendydoniger/>[[101]](#cite_note-104) Of the shrutis (Vedic corpus), they alone are widely influential among Hindus, considered scriptures par excellence of Hinduism, and their central ideas have continued to influence its thoughts and traditions.<ref name=wendydoniger>Wendy Doniger (1990), Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism, 1st Edition, University of Chicago Press, ISBN 978-0226618470, pages 2-3; **Quote:** "The Upanishads supply the **basis of later Hindu philosophy**; they alone of the Vedic corpus are widely known and quoted by most well-educated Hindus, and their central ideas have also become a part of the spiritual arsenal of rank-and-file Hindus."</ref>[[102]](#cite_note-105) [Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan](/wiki/Sarvepalli_Radhakrishnan) states that the Upanishads have played a dominating role ever since their appearance.[[103]](#cite_note-106) There are 108 [Muktikā](/wiki/Muktikā) Upanishads in Hinduism, of which between 10 and 13 are variously counted by scholars as [Principal Upanishads](/wiki/Mukhya_Upanishads).[[104]](#cite_note-107)[[105]](#cite_note-108) The most notable of the *smriti*s ("memory") are the [epics](/wiki/Hindu_epic) and the [*Puranas*](/wiki/Puranas). The epics consist of the [*Mahabharata*](/wiki/Mahabharata) and the [*Ramayana*](/wiki/Ramayana). The [*Bhagavad Gita*](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) is an integral part of the *Mahabharata* and one of the most popular sacred texts of Hinduism.[[106]](#cite_note-109) It is sometimes called *Gitopanishad*, then placed in the [Shruti](/wiki/Shruti) category, being Upanishadic in content.[[107]](#cite_note-110) The [*Puranas*](/wiki/Purana), which started to be composed from c. 300 CE onward,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) contain extensive mythologies, and are central in the distribution of common themes of Hinduism through vivid narratives. The [*Yoga Sutras*](/wiki/Yoga_Sutras) is a classical text for the Hindu Yoga tradition, which gained a renewed popularity in the 20th century.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Since the 19th century Indian modernists have re-asserted the 'Aryan origins' of Hinduism, "purifying" Hinduism from its Tantric elements[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and elevating the Vedic elements. Hindu-modernists like Vivekananda see the Vedas as the laws of 'the spiritual world, which would still exist even if they were not revealed to the sages.[[108]](#cite_note-111)[[109]](#cite_note-112) In Tantric-tradition, the [*Agamas*](/wiki/Āgama_(Hinduism)) refer to authoritative scriptures or the teachings of Shiva to Shakti,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) while *Nigamas* refers to the Vedas and the teachings of Shakti to Shiva.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In Agamic schools of Hinduism, the Vedic literature and the Agamas are equally authoritative.[[110]](#cite_note-113)[[111]](#cite_note-114)

## Practices[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

### Rituals[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [right|thumb|200px|A wedding is the most extensive personal ritual an adult Hindu undertakes in his or her life. A typical](/wiki/File:(A)_Hindu_wedding,_Saptapadi_ritual_before_Agni_Yajna.jpg) [Hindu wedding](/wiki/Hindu_wedding) is solemnized before Vedic [fire](/wiki/Yajna) ritual (shown).[[112]](#cite_note-115) Most Hindus observe religious rituals at home.[[113]](#cite_note-116) The rituals vary greatly among regions, villages, and individuals. They are not mandatory in Hinduism. The nature and place of rituals is an individual's choice. Devout Hindus perform daily rituals such as worshiping at dawn after bathing (usually at a family shrine, and typically includes lighting a lamp and offering foodstuffs before the images of deities), recitation from religious scripts, singing [devotional hymns](/wiki/Bhajan), [yoga](/wiki/Yoga), [meditation](/wiki/Meditation), chanting mantras and others.<ref name=locceremonies>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

Vedic rituals of fire-oblation ([*yajna*](/wiki/Yajna)) and chanting of Vedic hymns are observed on special occasions, such as a Hindu wedding.[[114]](#cite_note-117) Other major life-stage events, such as rituals after death, include the *yajña* and chanting of Vedic [mantras](/wiki/Mantra).<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

### Life-cycle rites of passage[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Major life stage milestones are celebrated as *sanskara* (*saṃskāra*, [rites of passage](/wiki/Rites_of_passage)) in Hinduism.<ref name=pandey>R Pandey (1969), Hindu Saṁskāras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments (2nd Ed.), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 81-208-0434-1</ref><ref name=knipe>David Knipe (2015), Vedic Voices: Intimate Narratives of a Living Andhra Tradition, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0199397693, page 52</ref> The rites of passage are not mandatory, and vary in details by gender, community and regionally.<ref name=pvkanesamsk/> Gautama [Dharmasutras](/wiki/Dharmasutra) composed in about the middle of 1st millennium BCE lists 48 sanskaras,<ref name=patrick/> while [Gryhasutra](/wiki/Kalpa_(Vedanga)) and other texts composed centuries later list between 12 and 16 sanskaras.<ref name=pandey/><ref name=carlolson>Carl Olson (2007), The Many Colors of Hinduism: A Thematic-historical Introduction, Rutgers University Press, ISBN 978-0813540689, pages 93-94</ref> The list of sanskaras in Hinduism include both external rituals such as those marking a baby's birth and a baby's name giving ceremony, as well as inner rites of resolutions and ethics such as [compassion](/wiki/Compassion#Hinduism) towards all living beings and positive attitude.<ref name=patrick>Patrick Olivelle (2009), Dharmasutras - The Law Codes of Ancient India, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0199555376, pages 90-91</ref>

The major traditional rites of passage in Hinduism include<ref name=pvkanesamsk>PV Kane, [Samskara, Chapter VI](https://archive.org/stream/historyofdharmas029210mbp#page/n279/mode/2up), History of Dharmasastras, Vol II, Part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, pages 190-417</ref> [Garbhadhana](/wiki/Garbhadhana) (pregnancy), [Pumsavana](/wiki/Pumsavana) (rite before the fetus begins moving and kicking in womb), [Simantonnayana](/wiki/Simantonnayana) (parting of pregnant woman's hair, baby shower), *Jatakarman* (rite celebrating the new born baby), *Namakarana* (naming the child), *Nishkramana* (baby's first outing from home into the world), *Annaprashana* (baby's first feeding of solid food), *Chudakarana* (baby's first haircut, tonsure), *Karnavedha* (ear piercing), *Vidyarambha* (baby's start with knowledge), [Upanayana](/wiki/Upanayana) (entry into a school rite),[[115]](#cite_note-118)[[116]](#cite_note-119) *Keshanta* and *Ritusuddhi* (first shave for boys, menarche for girls), [Samavartana](/wiki/Samavartana) (graduation ceremony), [Vivaha](/wiki/Hindu_wedding) (wedding), *Vratas* (fasting, spiritual studies) and [Antyeshti](/wiki/Antyeshti) (cremation for an adult, burial for a child).[[117]](#cite_note-120) In contemporary times, there is regional variation among Hindus as to which of these [sanskaras](/wiki/Saṃskāra) are observed; in some cases, additional regional rites of passage such as [*Śrāddha*](/wiki/Śrāddha) (ritual of feeding people after cremation) are practiced.<ref name=pvkanesamsk/><ref group=web name=loclifecycle>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

### Bhakti (worship)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|Priest attending a](/wiki/File:Kumuthavalli_AvatharaAthalam.jpg) [murthi](/wiki/Murthi) [*Bhakti*](/wiki/Bhakti) refers to devotion, participation in and the love of a personal god or a representational god by a devotee.<ref name=encyclopediabrit>[Bhakti](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/63933/bhakti), Encyclopedia Britannica (2009)</ref><ref name=karen>Karen Pechelis (2011), Bhakti Traditions, in The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies (Editors: Jessica Frazier, Gavin Flood), Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-0826499660, pages 107-121</ref> *Bhakti marga* is considered in Hinduism as one of many possible paths of spirituality and alternate means to [moksha](/wiki/Moksha).[[118]](#cite_note-121) The other paths, left to the choice of a Hindu, are *Jnana marga* (path of knowledge), *Karma marga* (path of works), *Rāja marga* (path of contemplation and meditation).<ref name=johnmartin>John Martin Sahajananda (2014), Fully Human Fully Divine, Partridge India, ISBN 978-1482819557, page 60</ref>[[119]](#cite_note-122) [Bhakti](/wiki/Bhakti) is practiced in a number of ways, ranging from reciting [mantras](/wiki/Mantra), [japas](/wiki/Japa) (incantations), to individual private prayers within one's home or in a temple or near a river bank, sometimes in the presence of an idol or image of a deity.[[120]](#cite_note-123)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Bhakti is sometimes practiced as a community, such as a [Puja](/wiki/Puja_(Hinduism)), [Aarti](/wiki/Aarti), musical [Kirtan](/wiki/Kirtan) or singing [Bhajan](/wiki/Bhajan), where devotional verses and hymns are read or poems are sung by a group of devotees.[[121]](#cite_note-124)[[122]](#cite_note-125) While the choice of the deity is at the discretion of the Hindu, the most observed traditions of Hindu devotionalism include [Vaishnavism](/wiki/Vaishnavism) (Vishnu), [Shaivism](/wiki/Shaivism) (Shiva) and [Shaktism](/wiki/Shaktism) (Shakti).[[123]](#cite_note-126) A Hindu may worship multiple deities, all as henotheistic manifestations of the same ultimate reality, cosmic spirit and absolute spiritual concept called [Brahman](/wiki/Brahman) in Hinduism.[[124]](#cite_note-127)[[125]](#cite_note-128)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

Bhakti marga, states Pechelis, is more than ritual devotionalism, it includes practices and spiritual activities aimed at refining one's state of mind, knowing god, participating in god, and internalizing god.[[126]](#cite_note-129)[[127]](#cite_note-130) While Bhakti practices are popular and easily observable aspect of Hinduism, not all Hindus practice Bhakti, or believe in god-with-attributes (*saguna Brahman*).[[128]](#cite_note-131)[[129]](#cite_note-132) Concurrent Hindu practices include a belief in god-without-attributes, and god within oneself.[[130]](#cite_note-133)[[131]](#cite_note-134)

### Festivals[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|300px|right|The festival of lights-](/wiki/File:Deepawali-festival.jpg) [Diwali](/wiki/Diwali), is celebrated by Hindus all over the world. Hindu festivals ([Sanskrit](/wiki/Sanskrit): *Utsava*; literally: "to lift higher") are ceremonies that weave individual and social life to [dharma](/wiki/Dharma).<ref name=sandrarobinson/><ref name=yustf>Karen-Marie Yust (2005), Sacred Celebrations, in Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality (Editor: Karen-Marie Yust), Rowman & Littlefield, ISBN 978-0742544635, page 234, see also Chapter 18</ref> Hinduism has many festivals throughout the year, where the dates are set by the lunisolar [Hindu calendar](/wiki/Hindu_calendar), many coinciding with either the full moon (*Holi*) or the new moon (*Diwali*), often with seasonal changes.<ref name=denisecushf>Sandra Robinson (2007), Encyclopedia of Hinduism (Editors: Denise Cush et al), Routledge, ISBN 978-0700712670, page 907</ref> Some festivals are found only regionally and they celebrate local traditions, while a few such as *Holi* and *Diwali* are pan-Hindu.<ref name=denisecushf/>[[132]](#cite_note-135) The festivals typically celebrate events from Hinduism, connoting spiritual themes and celebrating aspects of human relationships such as the Sister-Brother bond over the *Raksha Bandhan* (or [Bhai Dooj](/wiki/Bhau-beej)) festival.<ref name=yustf/>[[133]](#cite_note-136) The same festival sometimes marks different stories depending on the Hindu denomination, and the celebrations incorporate regional themes, traditional agriculture, local arts, family get togethers, [Puja](/wiki/Puja_(Hinduism)) rituals and feasts.<ref name=sandrarobinson>Sandra Robinson (2007), Encyclopedia of Hinduism (Editors: Denise Cush et al), Routledge, ISBN 978-0700712670, pages 908-912</ref>[[134]](#cite_note-137) Some major regional or pan-Hindu festivals include: [Template:Div col](/wiki/Template:Div_col)

* [Makar Sankranti](/wiki/Makar_Sankranti)
* [Maha Shivaratri](/wiki/Maha_Shivaratri)
* [Pongal](/wiki/Pongal)
* [Holi](/wiki/Holi)
* [Navaratri](/wiki/Navaratri)
* [Vasant Panchami](/wiki/Vasant_Panchami)
* [Thaipusam](/wiki/Thaipusam)
* [Ram Navami](/wiki/Ram_Navami)
* [Krishna Janmastami](/wiki/Krishna_Janmastami)
* [Ganesh Chaturthi](/wiki/Ganesh_Chaturthi)
* [Shigmo](/wiki/Shigmo)
* [Dussera](/wiki/Dussera)
* [Durga Puja](/wiki/Durga_Puja) or [Durga Ashtami](/wiki/Durga_Ashtami)
* [Diwali](/wiki/Diwali)
* [Gudi Padwa](/wiki/Gudi_Padwa)
* [Ugadi](/wiki/Ugadi)
* [Bihu](/wiki/Bihu)
* [Bonalu](/wiki/Bonalu)
* [Rath Yatra](/wiki/Rath_Yatra)
* [Guru Purnima](/wiki/Guru_Purnima)
* [Raksha Bandhan](/wiki/Raksha_Bandhan)
* [Onam](/wiki/Onam)
* [Gowri Habba](/wiki/Gowri_Habba)
* [Chhath](/wiki/Chhath)
* [Vishu](/wiki/Vishu)

[Template:Div col end](/wiki/Template:Div_col_end)

### Pilgrimage[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [200px|thumb|right| Pilgrimage to](/wiki/File:Kedarnathroute.jpg) [Kedarnath](/wiki/Kedarnath)

[Pilgrimage](/wiki/Pilgrimage) is not mandatory in Hinduism, though many adherents undertake them.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) While there are different yet similar pilgrimage routes in different parts of India, all are respected equally well, according to the universality of Hinduism. The following pilgrimage sites are most famous amongst Hindu devotees:

* Old Holy cities as per Puranic Texts: [Varanasi](/wiki/Varanasi) formerly known as Kashi, [Allahabad](/wiki/Allahabad) formerly known as Prayag, [Haridwar](/wiki/Haridwar)-[Rishikesh](/wiki/Rishikesh), [Mathura](/wiki/Mathura)-[Vrindavan](/wiki/Vrindavan), and [Ayodhya](/wiki/Ayodhya).
* Char Dham (Famous Four Pilgrimage sites): The four holy sites [Puri](/wiki/Puri), [Rameswaram](/wiki/Rameswaram), [Dwarka](/wiki/Dwarka), and [Badrinath](/wiki/Badrinath) (or alternatively the [Himalayan](/wiki/Himalaya) towns of [Badrinath](/wiki/Badrinath), [Kedarnath](/wiki/Kedarnath), [Gangotri](/wiki/Gangotri), and [Yamunotri](/wiki/Yamunotri)) compose the [*Char Dham*](/wiki/Char_Dham) (*four abodes*) pilgrimage circuit.
* Kumbh Mela: The [*Kumbh Mela*](/wiki/Kumbh_Mela) (the "pitcher festival") is one of the holiest of Hindu pilgrimages that is held every 12 years; the location is rotated among [Allahabad](/wiki/Allahabad), [Haridwar](/wiki/Haridwar), [Nashik](/wiki/Nashik), and [Ujjain](/wiki/Ujjain).
* Major Temple cities: [Puri](/wiki/Puri), which hosts a major [Vaishnava](/wiki/Vaishnavism) [Jagannath](/wiki/Jagannath) temple and [Rath Yatra](/wiki/Ratha-Yatra_(Puri)) celebration; [Katra](/wiki/Katra,_Jammu_and_Kashmir), home to the [Vaishno Devi](/wiki/Vaishno_Devi) temple; [Madurai](/wiki/Madurai), which is home to [Meenakshi Amman Temple](/wiki/Meenakshi_Amman_Temple); Three comparatively recent temples of fame and huge pilgrimage are [Shirdi](/wiki/Shirdi), home to [Sai Baba of Shirdi](/wiki/Sai_Baba_of_Shirdi), [Tirumala - Tirupati](/wiki/Tirumala_-_Tirupati), home to the [Tirumala Venkateswara Temple](/wiki/Tirumala_Venkateswara_Temple); and [Sabarimala](/wiki/Sabarimala), where [Swami Ayyappan](/wiki/Swami_Ayyappan) is worshipped.
* Shakti Peethas: Another important set of pilgrimages are the [*Shakti Peethas*](/wiki/Shakti_Peethas), where [the Mother Goddess](/wiki/Shakti) is worshipped, the two principal ones being [*Kalighat*](/wiki/Kalighat) and [*Kamakhya*](/wiki/Kamakhya).

## Person and society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

### Varnas[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Hindu society has been categorised into four classes, called *varnas*. They are the [*Brahmins*](/wiki/Brahmin): Vedic teachers and priests; the [*Kshatriyas*](/wiki/Kshatriya): warriors and kings; the [*Vaishyas*](/wiki/Vaishya): farmers and merchants; and the [*Shudras*](/wiki/Shudra): servants and labourers.[[135]](#cite_note-138) The [*Bhagavad Gītā*](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) links the *varna* to an individual's duty (*svadharma*), inborn nature (*svabhāva*), and natural tendencies ([*guṇa*](/wiki/Guṇa)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The [*Manusmṛiti*](/wiki/Manusmriti) categorises the different castes.<ref group=web>[Manu Smriti Laws of Manu](http://www.webcitation.org/5noFbaeZw) 1.87-1.91</ref>

Some mobility and flexibility within the varnas challenge allegations of social discrimination in the caste system, as has been pointed out by several sociologists,[[136]](#cite_note-139)[[137]](#cite_note-140) although some other scholars disagree.[[138]](#cite_note-141) Scholars debate whether the so-called [*caste system*](/wiki/Caste_system_in_India) is part of Hinduism sanctioned by the scriptures or social custom.[[139]](#cite_note-142)<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) And various contemporary scholars have argued that the caste system was constructed by the [British colonial regime](/wiki/British_Raj).[[140]](#cite_note-143) A [renunciant](/wiki/Sannyasa) man of knowledge is usually called *Varnatita* or "beyond all varnas" in Vedantic works. The bhiksu is advised to not bother about the caste of the family from which he begs his food. Scholars like Adi Sankara affirm that not only is Brahman beyond all varnas, the man who is identified with Him also transcends the distinctions and limitations of caste.[[141]](#cite_note-144)

### Yoga[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]

[thumb|right|200px| text|A statue of](/wiki/File:Shiva_Bangalore_.jpg) [Shiva](/wiki/Shiva) in yogic meditation. [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

In whatever way a Hindu defines the goal of life, there are several methods (yogas) that sages have taught for reaching that goal. [Yoga](/wiki/Yoga) is a Hindu discipline which trains the body, mind and consciousness for health, tranquility and spiritual insight. This is done through a system of postures and exercises to practise control of the body and mind.[[142]](#cite_note-145) Texts dedicated to Yoga include the [Yoga Sutras](/wiki/Yoga_Sutras), the [Hatha Yoga Pradipika](/wiki/Hatha_Yoga_Pradipika), the [Bhagavad Gita](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) and, as their philosophical and historical basis, the Upanishads. Yoga is means, and the four major *marga* (paths) discussed in Hinduism are: [Bhakti Yoga](/wiki/Bhakti_Yoga) (the path of love and devotion), [Karma Yoga](/wiki/Karma_Yoga) (the path of right action), [Rāja Yoga](/wiki/Rāja_Yoga) (the path of meditation), [Jñāna Yoga](/wiki/Jñāna_Yoga) (the path of wisdom)<ref name=bhaskaressentgeneral>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> An individual may prefer one or some yogas over others, according to his or her inclination and understanding. Practice of one yoga does not exclude others.

### Symbolism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]

[thumb|200px|The Hindu deity](/wiki/File:Ganesha-aum.jpg) [Ganesha](/wiki/Ganesha) is sometimes linked to the symbol [*Om*](/wiki/Om).[[143]](#cite_note-146) 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 or cultural traditions. The syllable [*Om*](/wiki/Om) (which represents the [*Brahman*](/wiki/Brahman) and [Atman](/wiki/Atman_(Hinduism))) has grown to represent Hinduism itself, while other markings such as the [Swastika](/wiki/Swastika#Hinduism) sign represent auspiciousness,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and [*Tilaka*](/wiki/Tilaka) (literally, seed) on forehead – considered to be the location of spiritual third eye,[[144]](#cite_note-147) marks ceremonious welcome, blessing or one's participation in a ritual or rite of passage.[[145]](#cite_note-148) Elaborate *Tilaka* with lines may also identify a devotee of a particular denomination. Flowers, birds, animals, instruments, symmetric [mandala](/wiki/Mandala) drawings, objects, idols are all part of symbolic iconography in Hinduism.[[146]](#cite_note-149)[[147]](#cite_note-150)

### Ahimsa, vegetarianism and other food customs[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Hindus advocate the practice of [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) (non-violence) and respect for all life because divinity is believed to permeate all beings, including plants and non-human animals.[[148]](#cite_note-151) The term [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) appears in the [Upanishads](/wiki/Upanishad),[[149]](#cite_note-152) the epic [Mahabharata](/wiki/Mahabharata)[[150]](#cite_note-153) and [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST) is the first of the five [*Yamas*](/wiki/Yamas) (vows of self-restraint) in [Patanjali's Yoga Sutras](/wiki/Yoga_Sutras_of_Patanjali).[[151]](#cite_note-154) [left|thumb|200px|A *goshala* or cow shelter at](/wiki/File:Gosala_in_Guntur,_India.jpg) [Guntur](/wiki/Guntur) In accordance with [*Template:IAST*](/wiki/Template:IAST), many Hindus embrace vegetarianism to respect higher forms of life. Estimates of strict [lacto vegetarians](/wiki/Lacto_vegetarian) in India (includes adherents of all religions) who never eat any meat, fish or eggs vary between 20% and 42%, while others are either less strict vegetarians or non-vegetarians.[[152]](#cite_note-155) Those who eat meat seek [Jhatka](/wiki/Jhatka) (quick death) method of meat production, and dislike [Halal](/wiki/Halal) (slow bled death) method, believing that quick death method reduces suffering to the animal.[[153]](#cite_note-156)[[154]](#cite_note-157) The food habits vary with region, with Bengali Hindus and Hindus living in Himalayan regions, or river delta regions, regularly eating meat and fish.[[155]](#cite_note-158) Some avoid meat on specific festivals or occasions.[[156]](#cite_note-159) 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,[[157]](#cite_note-160) and Hindu society honours the cow as a symbol of unselfish giving.[[158]](#cite_note-161) There are many Hindu groups that have continued to abide by a strict [vegetarian](/wiki/Vegetarian) diet in modern times. Some adhere to a diet that is devoid of meat, eggs, and seafood.[[159]](#cite_note-162) Food affects body, mind and spirit in Hindu beliefs.<ref name=Vasudha>Narayanan, Vasudha. "The Hindu Tradition". In A Concise Introduction to World Religions, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby and Alan F. Segal. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007</ref><ref name=Rosen>Rosen, Steven. Essential Hinduism. 1st. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006. Page 188</ref> Hindu texts such as Śāṇḍilya Upanishad[[160]](#cite_note-163) and Svātmārāma<ref name=svatmaram>[Hatha Yoga Pradipika](https://archive.org/stream/hathayogapradipika/hatha_yoga_pradipika#page/n219/mode/2up/search/food) verse 1.58-63, pages 19-21</ref>[[161]](#cite_note-164) recommend [Mitahara](/wiki/Mitahara) (eating in moderation) as one of the [Yamas](/wiki/Yamas) (virtuous self restraints). The Bhagavad Gita links body and mind to food one consumes in verses 17.8 through 17.10.<ref name=ckc>Christopher Key Chapple (2009), The Bhagavad Gita: Twenty-fifth–Anniversary Edition, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-1438428420, pages 641-643</ref>

Some Hindus from certain sects - generally Shakta,[[162]](#cite_note-165) and Hindus in regions such as Bali and Nepal[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[163]](#cite_note-166) practise [animal sacrifice](/wiki/Animal_sacrifice_in_Hinduism).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In contrast, most Hindus, particularly the Vaishnava abhor and vigorously oppose animal sacrifice.[[164]](#cite_note-167)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

## Institutions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]

### Temple[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]

[Template:Infobox](/wiki/Template:Infobox) [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) A [Hindu temple](/wiki/Hindu_temple) is a house of god(s).[[165]](#cite_note-168) It is a space and structure designed to bring human beings and gods together, infused with symbolism to express the ideas and beliefs of Hinduism.<ref name=stellakvol1>[Stella Kramrisch](/wiki/Stella_Kramrisch), The Hindu Temple, Vol 1, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-81-208-0222-3, pages 1-16</ref> A temple incorporates all elements of Hindu cosmology, the highest spire or dome representing [Mount Meru](/wiki/Mount_Meru) – reminder of the abode of Brahma and the center of spiritual universe,[[166]](#cite_note-169) the carvings and iconography symbolically presenting [dharma](/wiki/Dharma), [kama](/wiki/Kama), [artha](/wiki/Artha), [moksa](/wiki/Moksa) and [karma](/wiki/Karma).[[167]](#cite_note-170)[[168]](#cite_note-171) The layout, the motifs, the plan and the building process recite ancient rituals, geometric symbolisms, and reflect beliefs and values innate within various schools of Hinduism.<ref name=stellakvol1/> A Hindu temple is a spiritual destination for many Hindus (not all), as well as landmarks for arts, annual festivals, [rite of passage](/wiki/Sanskara_(rite_of_passage)) rituals, and community celebrations.[[169]](#cite_note-172)[[170]](#cite_note-173) [Hindu temples](/wiki/Hindu_temple) come in many styles, diverse locations, deploy different construction methods and are adapted to different deities and regional beliefs.[[171]](#cite_note-174) Two major styles of Hindu temples include the Gopuram-style found in south India, and Nagara-style found in north India.[[172]](#cite_note-175)[[173]](#cite_note-176) Other styles include cave, forest and mountain temples.[[174]](#cite_note-177) Yet, despite their differences, almost all Hindu temples share certain common architectural principles, core ideas, symbolism and themes.<ref name=stellakvol1/>

Many temples feature one or more idols ([murtis](/wiki/Murti)). The idol and *Grabhgriya* in the Brahma-pada (the center of the temple), under the main spire, serves as a focal point (*darsana*, a sight) in a Hindu temple.[[175]](#cite_note-178) In larger temples, the central space typically is surrounded by an ambulatory for the devotee to walk around and ritually circumambulate the Purusa (Brahman), the universal essence.<ref name=stellakvol1/>

### Ashrama[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=38)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Traditionally the life of a Hindu is divided into four *Āshramas* (phases or life stages; unrelated meanings include monastery).[[176]](#cite_note-179) The four *asramas* are: [Brahmacharya](/wiki/Brahmacharya) (student), [Grihastha](/wiki/Grihastha) (householder), [Vanaprastha](/wiki/Vanaprastha) (retired) and [Sannyasa](/wiki/Sannyasa) (renunciation).<ref name=rks>RK Sharma (1999), Indian Society, Institutions and Change, ISBN 978-8171566655, page 28</ref>

*Brahmacharya* represents the bachelor student stage of life. *Grihastha* refers to the individual's married life, with the duties of maintaining a household, raising a family, educating one's children, and leading a family-centred and a [dharmic](/wiki/Dharma) social life.<ref name=rks/> *Grihastha* stage starts with [Hindu wedding](/wiki/Hindu_wedding), and has been considered as the most important of all stages in sociological context, as Hindus in this stage not only pursued a virtuous life, they produced food and wealth that sustained people in other stages of life, as well as the offsprings that continued mankind.<ref name=aw0>Alban Widgery (1930), [The Principles of Hindu Ethics](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2377977), International Journal of Ethics, 40(2): 232-245</ref> *Vanaprastha* is the retirement stage, where a person hands over household responsibilities to the next generation, took an advisory role, and gradually withdrew from the world.<ref name=alnu>Albertina Nugteren (2005), Belief, Bounty, And Beauty: Rituals Around Sacred Trees in India, Brill Academic, ISBN 978-9004146013, pages 13-21</ref>[[177]](#cite_note-180) The *Sannyasa* stage marks renunciation and a state of disinterest and detachment from material life, generally without any meaningful property or home (Ascetic), and focussed on [Moksha](/wiki/Moksha), peace and simple spiritual life.[[178]](#cite_note-181)[[179]](#cite_note-182) The Ashramas system has been one facet of the [Dharma](/wiki/Dharma) concept in Hinduism.<ref name=aw2>Alban Widgery (1930), [The Principles of Hindu Ethics](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2377977), International Journal of Ethics, 40(2): 237-239</ref> Combined with four proper goals of human life ([Purusartha](/wiki/Purusartha)), the Ashramas system traditionally aimed at providing a Hindu with fulfilling life and spiritual liberation.<ref name=aw0/> While these stages are typically sequential, any person can enter *Sannyasa* (ascetic) stage and become an Ascetic at any time after the *Brahmacharya* stage.[[180]](#cite_note-183) *Sannyasa* is not religiously mandatory in Hinduism, and elderly people are free to live with their families.[[181]](#cite_note-184)

### Monasticism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=39)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|200px|right text|A sadhu in](/wiki/File:Indian_sadhu_performing_namaste.jpg) [Madurai](/wiki/Madurai), India. Some Hindus choose to live a [monastic](/wiki/Monastic) life (Sannyāsa) in pursuit of [liberation](/wiki/Moksha) or another form of spiritual perfection.<ref name=ellinger70/> Monastics commit themselves to a simple and celibate life, detached from material pursuits, of meditation and spiritual contemplation.<ref name=bhaskaranandaessential112>[Template:Harvnb](/wiki/Template:Harvnb)</ref> A Hindu monk is called a [*Sanyāsī*](/wiki/Sannyasa), *Sādhu*, or *Swāmi*. A female renunciate is called a *Sanyāsini*. Renunciates receive high respect in Hindu society because of their simple [ahimsa](/wiki/Ahimsa)-driven lifestyle and dedication to spiritual liberation ([moksha](/wiki/Moksha)) – believed to be the ultimate goal of life in Hinduism.[[179]](#cite_note-182) Some monastics live in monasteries, while others wander from place to place, depending on donated food and charity for their needs.[[182]](#cite_note-185)

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=40)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

### Periodisation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=41)]

[Template:History of South Asia](/wiki/Template:History_of_South_Asia)

[James Mill](/wiki/James_Mill) (1773–1836), in his [*The History of British India*](/wiki/The_History_of_British_India) (1817),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) distinguished three phases in the history of India, namely Hindu, Muslim and British civilisations.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This periodisation has been criticised for the misconceptions it has given rise to.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Another periodisation is the division into "ancient, classical, mediaeval and modern periods".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) An elaborate periodisation may be as follows:[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

* Prevedic religions (pre-history and Indus Valley Civilisation; until c. 1750 BCE);
* Vedic period (c. 1750-500 BCE);
* "Second Urbanisation" (c. 500-200 BCE);
* Classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE-1100 CE);[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)
* Pre-classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE-300 CE);
* "Golden Age" (Gupta Empire) (c. 320-650 CE);
* Late-Classical Hinduism - Puranic Hinduism (c. 650-1100 CE);
* Islam and Sects of Hinduism (c. 1200-1700 CE);
* Modern Hinduism (from c. 1800).

### Origins[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=42)]

Hinduism is a fusion[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) or synthesis[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) of various Indian cultures and traditions.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) Among the roots of Hinduism are the [historical Vedic religion](/wiki/Historical_Vedic_religion) of [Iron Age India](/wiki/Iron_Age_India),[[183]](#cite_note-186) itself already the product of "a composite of the indo-Aryan and Harappan cultures and civilizations",[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) but also the [Sramana](/wiki/Sramana)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) or renouncer traditions[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) of [northeast India](/wiki/Maurya_Empire),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and mesolithic[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and neolithic[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) cultures of India, such as the religions of the [Indus Valley Civilisation](/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilisation),[[184]](#cite_note-187) [Dravidian](/wiki/Dravidian_peoples) traditions,[[185]](#cite_note-188) and the [local traditions](/wiki/Adivasi)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and [tribal religions](/wiki/Tribal_religions_in_India).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

This "Hindu synthesis" emerged after the Vedic period, between 500[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)-200[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) BCE and c. 300 CE,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) the beginning of the "Epic and Puranic" c.q. "Preclassical" period, [Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and incorporated śramaṇic[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and Buddhist influences[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and the emerging *bhakti* tradition into the Brahmanical fold via the *smriti* literature.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) From northern India this "Hindu synthesis", and its societal divisions, spread to southern India and parts of [Southeast Asia](/wiki/Southeast_Asia).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

### Prevedic religions (until c. 1750 BCE)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=43)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|The so-called](/wiki/File:Shiva_Pashupati.jpg) [*Pashupati*](/wiki/Pashupati) seal, [Indus Valley civilization](/wiki/Indus_Valley_civilization). The earliest [prehistoric religion](/wiki/Prehistoric_religion) in India that may have left its traces in Hinduism comes from mesolithic as observed in the sites such as the rock paintings of [Bhimbetka rock shelters](/wiki/Bhimbetka_rock_shelters) dating to a period of 30,000 BCE or older,[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) as well as neolithic times.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) Some of the religious practices can be considered to have originated in 4000 BCE. Several [tribal religions](/wiki/Tribal_religions_in_India) still exist, though their practices may not resemble those of prehistoric religions.<ref group=web>[PHILTAR, Division of Religion and Philosophy, University of Cumbria, *Tribal Religions of India*](http://www.philtar.ac.uk/encyclopedia/india/tribal.html)</ref>

According to anthropologist [Possehl](/wiki/Gregory_Possehl), the [Indus Valley Civilization](/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilization) "provides a logical, if somewhat arbitrary, starting point for some aspects of the later Hindu tradition".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The religion of this period included worship of a Great male god, which is compared to a proto-Shiva, and probably a Mother Goddess, that may prefigure [Shakti](/wiki/Shakti). However these links of deities and practices of the Indus religion to later-day Hinduism are subject to both political contention and scholarly dispute.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

### Vedic period (c. 1750-500 BCE)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=44)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

#### Origins and development[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=45)]

|  |
| --- |
| **Indo-Aryan migration and Vedic period** |
| [400px|thumb|center|Scheme of](/wiki/File:IE_expansion.png) [Indo-European migrations](/wiki/Indo-European_migrations) from ca. 4000 to 1000 BCE according to the [Kurgan hypothesis](/wiki/Kurgan_hypothesis). The magenta area corresponds to the assumed [*Urheimat*](/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_Urheimat_hypotheses) ([Samara culture](/wiki/Samara_culture), [Sredny Stog culture](/wiki/Sredny_Stog_culture)). The red area corresponds to the area which may have been settled by Indo-European-speaking peoples up to c. 2500 BCE; the orange area to 1000 BCE. (Christopher I. Beckwith (2009), *Empires of the Silk Road*, Oxford University Press, p.30) [thumb|center|400px|Map of the approximate maximal extent of the Andronovo culture. The formative](/wiki/File:Andronovo_culture.png) [Sintashta-Petrovka](/wiki/Sintashta_culture) culture is shown in darker red. The location of the earliest [spoke](/wiki/Spoke)-wheeled [chariot](/wiki/Chariot) finds is indicated in purple. Adjacent and overlapping cultures ([Afanasevo culture](/wiki/Afanasevo_culture), [Srubna culture](/wiki/Srubna_culture), [BMAC](/wiki/BMAC)) are shown in green. [thumb|center|400px|Archaeological cultures associated with](/wiki/File:Indo-Iranian_origins.png) [Indo-Iranian migrations](/wiki/Indo-Iranian_migration) (after [EIEC](/wiki/Encyclopedia_of_Indo-European_Culture)). The [Andronovo](/wiki/Andronovo_culture), [BMAC](/wiki/BMAC) and [Yaz](/wiki/Yaz_culture) cultures have often been associated with Indo-Iranian migrations. The [GGC](/wiki/Gandhara_grave_culture), [Cemetery H](/wiki/Cemetery_H_culture), [Copper Hoard](/wiki/Copper_Hoard_Culture) and [PGW](/wiki/Painted_Grey_Ware_culture) cultures are candidates for cultures associated with Indo-Aryan movements. [thumb|center|400px|Early Vedic Period.](/wiki/File:Early_Vedic_Culture_(1700-1100_BCE).png) [thumb|center|400px|Late Vedic Period.](/wiki/File:Late_Vedic_Culture_(1100-500_BCE).png) |

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

The Vedic period, named after the Vedic religion of the [Indo-Aryans](/wiki/Indo-Aryan_peoples),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) lasted from c. 1750 to 500 BCE.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) The Indo-Aryans were pastoralists[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) who migrated into north-western India after the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization,[Template:SfnTemplate:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

During the early Vedic period (c. 1500 - 1100 BCE[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)) Vedic tribes were pastoralists, wandering around in north-west India.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) After 1100 BCE the Vedic tribes moved into the western Ganges Plain, adapting an agrarical lifestyle.[Template:SfnTemplate:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Rudimentary state-forms appeared, of which the [Kuru](/wiki/Kuru_Kingdom)-Pañcāla union was the most influential.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) It was a tribal union, which developed into the first recorded [state-level society](/wiki/State_(polity)) in [South Asia](/wiki/South_Asia) around 1000 BCE.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) This, according to Witzel, decisively changed the Vedic heritage of the early Vedic period, collecting the Vedic hymns into collections, and shifting ritual exchange within a tribe to social exchange within the larger Kuru realm through complicated Srauta rituals.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In this period, states Samuel, emerged the Brahmana and Aranyaka layers of Vedic texts, which merged into the earliest Upanishads.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) These texts began to ask the meaning of a ritual, adding increasing levels of philosophical and metaphysical speculation,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) or ["Hindu synthesis"](/wiki/Hinduism#Roots_of_Hinduism).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

#### Vedic religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=46)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The Indo-Aryans brought with them their language[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and religion.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The Vedic beliefs and practices of the pre-classical era were closely related to the hypothesised [Proto-Indo-European religion](/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_religion),[[186]](#cite_note-189)[[187]](#cite_note-190) and the [Indo-Iranian religion](/wiki/Proto-Indo-Iranian_religion).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

The Vedic religion history is unclear and "heavily contested", states Samuel.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In the later Vedic period, it co-existed with local religions, such as the mother goddess worshipping [Yaksha](/wiki/Yaksha) cults.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)<ref group=web>[Encyclopedia Britannica, *yaksha*](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651312/yaksha)</ref> The Vedic was itself likely the product of "a composite of the indo-Aryan and Harappan cultures and civilizations".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) David Gordon White cites three other mainstream scholars who "have emphatically demonstrated" that Vedic religion is partially derived from the [Indus Valley Civilizations](/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilization).[[188]](#cite_note-191)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) Their religion was further developed when they migrated into the [Ganges Plain](/wiki/Indo-Gangetic_Plain) after c. 1100 BCE and became settled farmers,[Template:SfnTemplate:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) further syncretising with the native cultures of northern India.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

The composition of the Vedic literature began in the 2nd millennium BCE.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[189]](#cite_note-192) The oldest of these Vedic texts is the [Rigveda](/wiki/Rigveda), composed between c. 1500-1200 BCE,[Template:SfnTemplate:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) though a wider approximation of c. 1700-1100 BCE has also been given.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[190]](#cite_note-193) The first half of the 1st millennium BCE was a period of great intellectual and social-cultural ferment in ancient India.[[191]](#cite_note-194)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) New ideas developed both in the Vedic tradition in the form of the Upanishads, and outside of the Vedic tradition through the Śramaṇa movements.[[192]](#cite_note-195)[[193]](#cite_note-196)[[194]](#cite_note-197) For example, prior to the birth of the Buddha and the Mahavira, and related Sramana movements, the Brahmanical tradition had questioned the meaning and efficacy of Vedic rituals,[[195]](#cite_note-198) then internalized and variously reinterpreted the [Vedic fire rituals](/wiki/Srauta) as ethical concepts such as Truth, Rite, Tranquility or [Restraint](/wiki/Temperance_(virtue)).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The 9th and 8th centuries BCE witnessed the composition of the earliest Upanishads with such ideas.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[196]](#cite_note-199)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp) Other ancient [Principal Upanishads](/wiki/Principal_Upanishads) were composed in the centuries that followed, forming the foundation of classical Hinduism and the [Vedanta](/wiki/Vedanta) (conclusion of the [Veda](/wiki/Veda)) literature.[[197]](#cite_note-200)

### "Second Urbanisation" (c. 500-200 BCE)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=47)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Increasing urbanisation of India between 800 and 400 BCE, and possibly the spread of urban diseases, contributed to the rise of ascetic movements and of new ideas which challenged the orthodox [Brahmanism](/wiki/Brahmanism).[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) These ideas led to [Sramana](/wiki/Sramana) movements, of which Mahavira (c. 549–477 BCE), proponent of [Jainism](/wiki/Jainism), and [Buddha](/wiki/Buddha) (c. 563-483), founder of [Buddhism](/wiki/Buddhism), were the most prominent icons.[[196]](#cite_note-199)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)

The [ascetic](/wiki/Sannyasa) tradition of Vedic period in part created the foundational theories of [samsara](/wiki/Samsara) and of [moksha](/wiki/Moksha) (liberation from samsara), which became characteristic for Hinduism, along with Buddhism and Jainism.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

These ascetic concepts were adopted by schools of Hinduism as well as other major Indian religions, but key differences between their premises defined their further development. Hinduism, for example, developed its ideas with the premise that every human being has a soul (*atman*, self), while Buddhism developed with the premise that there is no soul or self.[[198]](#cite_note-201)[[199]](#cite_note-202)[[200]](#cite_note-203) The chronology of these religious concepts is unclear, and scholars contest which religion affected the other as well as the chronological sequence of the ancient texts.[[201]](#cite_note-204)[[202]](#cite_note-205) Pratt notes that [Oldenberg](/wiki/Hermann_Oldenberg) (1854-1920), [Neumann](/wiki/Karl_Eugen_Neumann) (1865-1915) and [Radhakrishnan](/wiki/Sarvapalli_Radhakrishnan) (1888-1975) believed that the Buddhist canon had been influenced by Upanishads, while [la Vallee Poussin](/wiki/Louis_de_La_Vallée-Poussin) thinks the influence was nihil, and "Eliot and several others insist that on some points such as the existence of soul or self the Buddha was directly antithetical to the Upanishads".[[203]](#cite_note-206)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

### Classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE – 1100 CE)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=48)]

From about 500 BCE through about 300 CE, the Vedic-Brahmanic synthesis or "Hindu synthesis" continued.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Classical Hindu and Sramanic (particularly Buddhist) ideas spread within Indian subcontinent, as well outside India such as in [Central Asia](/wiki/Central_Asia),[[204]](#cite_note-207) and the [parts of Southeast Asia](/wiki/Greater_India) (coasts of Indonesia and peninsular Thailand).[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)[[205]](#cite_note-208)

Pre-classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE – 300 CE)

The "Hindu synthesis" or "Brahmanical synthesis"[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) incorporated [Sramanic](/wiki/Sramana) and Buddhist influences[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Which](/wiki/Template:Which) into the "Brahmanical fold" via the *smriti* literature.[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) According to Embree, several other religious traditions had existed side by side with the Vedic religion. These indigenous religions "eventually found a place under the broad mantle of the Vedic religion".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) The [*smriti*](/wiki/Smriti) texts of the period between 200 BCE-100 CE affirmed the authority of the [Vedas](/wiki/Vedas). The acceptance of the ideas in the Vedas and Upanishads became a central criterium for defining Hinduism, while the heterodox movements rejected those ideas.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

The major Sanskrit epics, [*Ramayana*](/wiki/Ramayana) and [*Mahabharata*](/wiki/Mahabharata), which belong to the *smriti*, were compiled over a protracted period during the late centuries BCE and the early centuries CE.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> These are legendary dialogues interspersed with philosophical treatises. The [Bhagavad Gita](/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita) was composed in this period and consolidated diverse philosophies and soteriological ideas.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

During this period, the foundational texts of several schools of [Hindu philosophy](/wiki/Hindu_philosophy) were formally written down, including [Samkhya](/wiki/Samkhya), [Yoga](/wiki/Yoga), [Nyaya](/wiki/Nyaya), [Vaisheshika](/wiki/Vaisheshika), [Purva-Mimamsa](/wiki/Purva-Mimamsa) and [Vedanta](/wiki/Vedanta).[[206]](#cite_note-209) The [Smriti](/wiki/Smriti) literature of Hinduism, particularly the [Sutras](/wiki/Sutra), as well as other Hindu texts such as the [Arthasastra](/wiki/Arthasastra) and [Sushruta Samhita](/wiki/Sushruta_Samhita) were also written or expanded during this period.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[207]](#cite_note-210) Many influential Yoga Upanishads, states Gavin Flood, were composed before 3rd century CE.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[208]](#cite_note-211) Seven Sannyasa Upanishads of Hinduism were composed between the last centuries of the 1st millennium BCE and before the 3rd century CE.[[209]](#cite_note-212)[[210]](#cite_note-213) All these texts describe Hindu renunciation and monastic values, and express strongly Advaita Vedanta tradition ideas. This, state Patrick Olivelle and other scholars, is likely because the monasteries of Advaita tradition of Hinduism had become well established in ancient times.[[211]](#cite_note-214)[[212]](#cite_note-215)[[213]](#cite_note-216) The first version of [Natyasastra](/wiki/Natyasastra) – a Hindu text on performance arts that integrates Vedic ideology – was also completed before the 2nd century CE.[[214]](#cite_note-217)[[215]](#cite_note-218)

"Golden Age" (Gupta Empire) (c. 320–650 CE)

During the [Gupta period](/wiki/Gupta_Empire), the first stone and cave [Hindu temples](/wiki/Hindu_temple) dedicated to [Hindu deities](/wiki/Hindu_deities) were built, some of which have survived into the modern era.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) Numerous monasteries and universities were also built during the Gupta dynasty era, which supported Vedic and non-Vedic studies, including the famed [Nalanda](/wiki/Nalanda).<ref name=scharfe2002p144>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>[[216]](#cite_note-219) The first version of early Puranas, likely composed between 250 and 500 CE, show continuities with the Vedic religion, but also an expanded mythology of Vishnu, Shiva and Devi (goddess).[[217]](#cite_note-220) The Puranas were living texts that were revised over time,[[218]](#cite_note-221) and Lorenzen suggests these texts may reflect the beginnings of "medieval Hinduism".[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

Late-Classical Hinduism - Puranic Hinduism (c. 650–1100 CE)

After the end of the Gupta Empire, power became decentralised in India. The disintegration of central power also led to regionalisation of religiosity, and religious rivalry.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Rural and devotional movements arose within Hinduism, along with [Shaivism](/wiki/Shaivism), [Vaisnavism](/wiki/Vaisnavism), [Bhakti](/wiki/Bhakti) and [Tantra](/wiki/Tantra),[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) that competed with each other, as well as with numerous sects of [Buddhism](/wiki/Buddhism) and [Jainism](/wiki/Jainism).[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) [Buddhism declined](/wiki/Decline_of_Buddhism_in_India), though many of its ideas, and even the Buddha himself, were absorbed into certain Brahmanical traditions.[[219]](#cite_note-222) Srauta rituals declined in India and were replaced with Buddhist and Hindu initiatory rituals for royal courts.[[220]](#cite_note-223) Over time, some Buddhist practices were integrated into Hinduism, monumental Hindu temples were built in South Asia and Southeast Asia,[[221]](#cite_note-224) while Vajrayana Buddhism literature developed as a result of royal courts sponsoring both Buddhism and [Saivism](/wiki/Shaivism).[[222]](#cite_note-225) The first edition of many Puranas were composed in this period. Examples include [Bhagavata Purana](/wiki/Bhagavata_Purana) and [Vishnu Purana](/wiki/Vishnu_Purana) with legends of Krishna,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) while [Padma Purana](/wiki/Padma_Purana) and [Kurma Purana](/wiki/Kurma_Purana) expressed reverence for Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti with equal enthusiasm;[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) all of them included topics such as Yoga practice and pilgrimage tour guides to Hindu holy sites.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[223]](#cite_note-226) Early colonial era orientalists proposed that the Puranas were religious texts of medieval Hinduism.<ref name=ursapp331>Urs App (2010), The Birth of Orientalism, University of Pennsylvania Press, ISBN 978-0812242614, pages 331, 323-334</ref> However, modern era scholars, such as Urs App, Ronald Inden and Ludo Rocher state that this is highly misleading because these texts were continuously revised, exist in numerous very different versions and are too inconsistent to be religious texts.<ref name=ursapp331/>[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[224]](#cite_note-227) Bhakti ideas centered around loving devotion to Vishnu and Shiva with songs and music, were pioneered in this period by the Alvars and Nayanars of South India.[[225]](#cite_note-228)[[226]](#cite_note-229) Major Hinduism scholars of this period included [Adi Shankara](/wiki/Adi_Shankara), Maṇḍana-Miśra, Padmapada and Sureśvara of the Advaita schools;[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Sabara, Vatsyayana and Samkarasvamin of [Nyaya](/wiki/Nyaya)-Vaisesika schools; Mathara and *Yuktidipika* (author unknown) of [Samkhya](/wiki/Samkhya)-[Yoga](/wiki/Yoga_(philosophy)); Bhartrhari, Vasugupta and [Abhinavagupta](/wiki/Abhinavagupta) of Kashmir Shaivism, and [Ramanuja](/wiki/Ramanuja) of Vishishtadvaita school of Hinduism (Sri Vaishnavism).[[227]](#cite_note-230)[[228]](#cite_note-231)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

### Islamic rule and Bhakti movement of Hinduism (c. 1200-1750 CE)[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=49)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|](/wiki/File:Zahir_al-Din_Muhammad_Babur_-_Babur_and_His_Warriors_Visiting_a_Hindu_Temple_-_Walters_W59622B_-_Full_Page.jpg)[Babur](/wiki/Babur) visits a Hindu temple.

The Islamic rule period witnessed Hindu-Muslim confrontation and violence,[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) but "violence did not normally characterize the relations of [Muslim](/wiki/Muslim) and Hindu."[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Enslavement of non-Muslims, especially Hindus in [India](/wiki/India), was part of the Muslim raids and conquests,[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) but after the 14th century slavery become less common,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and in 1562 "Akbar abolished the practice of enslaving the families of war captives."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) [Akbar](/wiki/Akbar) recognized Hinduism, protected Hindu temples, and abolished discriminatory [Jizya](/wiki/Jizya) (head taxes) against Hindus,[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) but occasionally, Muslim rulers of the [Delhi Sultanate](/wiki/Delhi_Sultanate) and the [Mughal Empire](/wiki/Mughal_Empire), before and after Akbar, from 12th century to 18th century, destroyed Hindu temples[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn) and [persecuted non-Muslims](/wiki/Persecution_of_Hindus).

Though Islam came to Indian subcontinent in the early 7th century with the advent of Arab traders, it started impacting Indian religions after the 10th century, and particularly after the 12th century with the establishment and then expansion of [Islamic rule](/wiki/Muslim_conquest_in_the_Indian_subcontinent).[Template:SfnTemplate:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) During this period Buddhism declined rapidly, and a distinct Indo-Islamic culture emerged.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Under Akbar an "intriguing blend of Perso-Islamic and Rajput-Hindu traditions became manifest."[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) Nevertheless, many orthodox *ulamas* ("learned Islamic jurists") opposed the rapprochement of Hinduism and Islam,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) and the two merely co-existed,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) although there was more accommodation at the peasantry level of Indian society.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

According to Hardy, the Muslim rulers were not concerned with the number of converts, since the stability and continuity of their regime did not depend on the number of Muslims.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In general religious conversion was a gradual process, with some converts attracted to pious Muslims while others converted to Islam to gain tax relief, land grant, marriage partners, social and economic advancement,[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) or freedom from slavery.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn) In border regions such as the Punjab and eastern Bengal, the share of Muslims grew as large as 70% to 90% of the population, whereas in the heartland of Muslim rule, the upper Gangetic Plain, the Muslims constituted only 10 to 15% of the population.[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

Between 14th and 18th century, Hinduism revived in certain provinces of India under two powerful states, viz. [*Vijayanagar*](/wiki/Vijayanagara_Empire) and [*Maratha*](/wiki/Maratha_Empire). The 14th and 15th century [Southern India](/wiki/South_India) saw the rise of the [Hindu Vijayanagar Empire](/wiki/Vijayanagar_Empire), which served as a barrier against invasion by the Muslim sultanates of the north, and it fostered the reconstruction of Hindu life and administration.<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> [Vidyaranya](/wiki/Vidyaranya), also known as Madhava, who was the 12th Jagadguru of the Śringeri Śarada Pītham from 1380-6,[[229]](#cite_note-232) and a minister in the Vijayanagara Empire,<ref name=talbot>Cynthia Talbot (2001), Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0195136616, pages 185–187, 199–201</ref> helped establish Shankara as a rallying symbol of values, and helped spread historical and cultural influence of Shankara's Vedanta philosophies.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)<ref name=blakemichael>R. Blake Michael (1992), The Origins of Vīraśaiva Sects, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-8120807761, pages 60–62 with notes 6, 7 and 8</ref> The [Hindu Maratha Confederacy](/wiki/Maratha_Empire) rose to power in 18th century and ended up overthrowing Muslim power in India[[230]](#cite_note-233)[[231]](#cite_note-234) In New Zealand the number is also around 300,000.<ref group=web>["The Growing Global Interest In Yoga"](http://www.wellpark.co.nz/blog/2012/4/the-growing-global-interest-in-yoga) Monday 16 April 2012 [Template:Wayback](/wiki/Template:Wayback)</ref>

#### Hindutva[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=53)]

In the 20th century, Hinduism also gained prominence as a political force and a source for national identity in India. With origins traced back to the establishment of the [Hindu Mahasabha](/wiki/Hindu_Mahasabha) in the 1910s, the movement grew with the formulation and development of the [Hindutva](/wiki/Hindutva) ideology in the following decades; the establishment of [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh](/wiki/Rashtriya_Swayamsevak_Sangh) (RSS) in 1925; and the entry, and later success, of RSS offshoots [Jana Sangha](/wiki/Jana_Sangha) and [Bharatiya Janata Party](/wiki/Bharatiya_Janata_Party) (BJP) in electoral politics in post-independence India.<ref name=Ram-Prasad>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> Hindu religiosity plays an important role in the nationalist movement.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[Template:RefnTemplate:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

## Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=54)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [right|320px|thumb|**Hinduism - Percentage by country**](/wiki/File:Hinduism_percent_population_in_each_nation_World_Map_Hindu_data_by_Pew_Research.svg) [Template:Hinduism by country](/wiki/Template:Hinduism_by_country) Hinduism is a major religion in India. Hinduism was followed by around 79.8% of the country's population of 1.21 billion (2011 census) (960 million adherents).<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> Other [significant populations](/wiki/Hinduism_by_country) are found in Nepal (23 million), Bangladesh (15 million) and the [Indonesian](/wiki/Hinduism_in_Indonesia) island of [Bali](/wiki/Bali) (3.9 million).[[237]](#cite_note-240) The majority of the Vietnamese [Cham people](/wiki/Cham_people) also follow Hinduism.[[238]](#cite_note-241) Countries with the greatest proportion of Hindus from [Hinduism by country](/wiki/Hinduism_by_country) ([Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of)):

1. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 81.3%<ref group=web>[2011 Nepal Census Report](http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/National%20Report.pdf)</ref>
2. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 79.8%
3. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 48.5%[[239]](#cite_note-242)# [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 28%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>
4. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 27.9%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>
5. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 25%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>
6. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 22.5%
7. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 20%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>
8. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 12.6%<ref group=web>Department of Census and Statistics,[The Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka-2011](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/index.php?fileName=pop43&gp=Activities&tpl=3)</ref>
9. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 9.6%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>
10. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 7.2%
11. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 6.7%
12. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 6.3%[[web 4]](#cite_note-243)# [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 6.25%
13. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 6%
14. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 5.1%[[web 5]](#cite_note-244)# [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 5%
15. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 3%
16. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 2.3%
17. [Template:Flag](/wiki/Template:Flag) 2.1%<ref group=web>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

Demographically, Hinduism is the [world's third largest religion](/wiki/Major_religious_groups), after [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity) and [Islam](/wiki/Islam).[[240]](#cite_note-245)

### Conversion debate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=55)]

In the modern era, religious conversion from and to Hinduism has been a controversial subject. Some state the concept of missionary conversion, either way, is anathema to the precepts of Hinduism.<ref name=arvindmr>Arvind Sharma (2011), Hinduism as a Missionary Religion, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-1438432113, pages 31-53</ref>

Religious conversion to Hinduism has a long history outside India. Merchants and traders of India, particularly from the Indian peninsula, carried their religious ideas, which led to religious conversions to Hinduism in southeast Asia.[[241]](#cite_note-246)[[242]](#cite_note-247)[[243]](#cite_note-248) Within India, archeological and textual evidence such as the 2nd century BCE [Heliodorus pillar](/wiki/Heliodorus_pillar) suggest that Greeks and other foreigners converted to Hinduism.[[244]](#cite_note-249)[[245]](#cite_note-250) The debate on proselytization and religious conversion between Christianity, Islam and Hinduism is more recent, and started in the 19th century.<ref name=rafiuddinahmed>Rafiuddin Ahmed (1992), Muslim-Christian Polemics, in *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages* (Editor: Kenneth Jones), State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0791408278, pages 93-120</ref><ref name=ayeshajalal>Ayesha Jalal (2010), Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia, Harvard University Press, ISBN 978-0674047365, pages 117-146</ref>[Template:Refn](/wiki/Template:Refn)

Religious leaders of some Hindu reform movements such as the [Arya Samaj](/wiki/Arya_Samaj) launched *Shuddhi* movement to proselytize and reconvert Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism,<ref name=csadcock>CS Adcock (2014), The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0199995448, pages 1-35, 115-168</ref>[[246]](#cite_note-251) while those such as the [Brahmo Samaj](/wiki/Brahmo_Samaj) suggested Hinduism to be a non-missionary religion.<ref name=arvindmr/> All these sects of Hinduism have welcomed new members to their group, while other leaders of Hinduism's diverse schools have stated that given the intensive proselytization activities from missionary Islam and Christianity, this "there is no such thing as proselytism in Hinduism" view must be re-examined.<ref name=arvindmr/><ref name=csadcock/>[[247]](#cite_note-252) The appropriateness of conversion from major religions to Hinduism, and vice versa, has been and remains an actively debated topic in India,[[248]](#cite_note-253)[[249]](#cite_note-254)[[250]](#cite_note-255) and in Indonesia.[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=56)]

Hinduism

[Template:Div col](/wiki/Template:Div_col)

* [Hinduism in Southeast Asia](/wiki/Hinduism_in_Southeast_Asia)
* [Balinese Hinduism](/wiki/Balinese_Hinduism)
* [Atheism in Hinduism](/wiki/Atheism_in_Hinduism)
* [Criticism of Hinduism](/wiki/Criticism_of_Hinduism)
* [Hindu](/wiki/Hindu)
* [Hindu calendar](/wiki/Hindu_calendar)
* [Hindu deities](/wiki/Hindu_deities)
* [Hindu denominations](/wiki/Hindu_denominations)
* [Hindu mythology](/wiki/Hindu_mythology)
* [Hindu reform movements](/wiki/Hindu_reform_movements)
* [Hinduism by country](/wiki/Hinduism_by_country)
* [Jagran](/wiki/Jagran)
* [Ethics of Hinduism](/wiki/Ethics_of_Hinduism)
* [Rulership in Hinduism](/wiki/Rulership_in_Hinduism)
* [Vedic-Puranic chronology](/wiki/Vedic-Puranic_chronology)
* [List of Hindu temples](/wiki/List_of_Hindu_temples)
* [List of notable Hindus](/wiki/List_of_Hindus)
* [List of converts to Hinduism](/wiki/List_of_converts_to_Hinduism)
* [List of related articles](/wiki/List_of_Hinduism-related_articles)

[Template:Div col end](/wiki/Template:Div_col_end)

Related systems and religions

[Template:Div col](/wiki/Template:Div_col)

* [Ayyavazhi](/wiki/Ayyavazhi)
* [Buddhism](/wiki/Buddhism)
* [Christianity and Hinduism](/wiki/Christianity_and_Hinduism)
* [Eastern philosophy](/wiki/Eastern_philosophy)
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