



Key facts:

Hindu traditions have no one founder or formal creedal statement. Hindu tradition dates back to thousands of years BCE. The word 'Hindu' comes from a Persian form of the ancient Sanskrit word 'Sindhu', which was used to describe the river Indus. The term Hinduism is used to describe the ancient religion of India. Those who practise Hinduism often call it the Sanatan Dharma, or the eternal way. Hinduism is complex; perhaps it is better seen as a number of similar religious traditions, not a single faith. Hinduism is extremely diverse, depending on things such as culture, family background and geographical location, endlessly varied in forms of expression, and in belief.

Hindu ideas about God / the divine

Brahman is the name given to the ultimate life force. Many Hindus would say there are many gods and goddesses but only one God and that is Brahman. The most important deities are the Trimurti which represents the three aspects of God. These are Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the preserver and Shiva – the dissolver.

Hindu families will devote themselves to one or two particular gods or goddesses as a way of coming to God.

Some people devote themselves to the human forms of the god Vishnu, known as Avatars. Vishnu is believed to have come to Earth in human and animal form for example as Rama and Krishna.

Worship

For most Hindus, there is an emphasis on worship in the home: parents teach their children how to pray. Worship in the mandir, or temple, has some individual elements as well as communal aspects. Many Hindu homes will have a room or a corner of a room set aside for a shrine before which puja, or worship, will be performed. In the mandir in this country there will be several shrines to different gods and goddesses whereas in India each mandir is often devoted to one deity.

Communal worship at the mandir usually takes place twice a day. At the mandir, Murtis (images of gods and goddesses) are properly consecrated, whereas they may not be in the home.

Dharma

Dharma is fulfilling the duties of a Hindu, both those that are religious and those that relate to the society and the extended family. There are many important duties such as looking after your dependants, the sick or elderly, those needy in society, avoiding arguments, ahimsa (respect for life) and worshipping.

Festivals

There are many festivals and special times which draw together family and community. There are some large community celebrations such as those for Divali and Janamashtami). Some other important festivals are Navaratri, Holi, Shivaratri and Raksha Bandan.

Samskaras

There are four stages of Hindu life: student, householder, retirement and renunciation. The various samskaras, or ritual steps, are sacraments designed to initiate a new stage of life. Not all of these are carried out by all Hindus. Instead it depends on the family that each person belongs to.



Key vocabulary:

Hindu scriptures are of two types:

- **Shruti** means that which is heard. Shruti are also called revealed truths. These are scriptures which Hindus believe were revealed by God to holy men, who interpreted them for people to aid their spiritual development. One example of these is the **Vedas** which were written in Sanskrit.
- **Smriti** means that which is remembered. Smritis, which are also called remembered truths. Many of these are stories, often in the form of poems. The stories tell of the Trimurti and talk about the right way to behave. They explain the beliefs and values of the Hindu way of living. An example of these is the Ramayana which tells the story of Rama and Sita

Mandir: A temple/ place of worship

Puja: An area of the home that is dedicated to worship

Karma: the law of cause and effect. This is the idea that every action has a positive or negative effect. Karma is the sum of everything that an individual does: good and bad.

Samsara: a belief in the cycle of reincarnation or rebirth. If they lead a good life and fulfil their duties in this life then their next life will be better than their present one. If they lead a bad life they will be reborn into a life less comfortable. Eventually Hindus hope they will be able to step off the wheel of birth and death and achieve Moksha, spiritual freedom, when the soul or Atman is no longer reborn

The sacred thread ceremony: this happens when a boy is starting his education, often aged about seven. A boy is given a thread of cotton with three strands on it. He must wear this and make vows of commitment promising to worship God, to respect holy men and their writing, to honour parents, elders and ancestors and to do his duty to the poor and all living things.