



# Hindu

## Disclaimer

This resource has been prepared to help staff and students in raising awareness, increasing knowledge and to assist their work at MMU.

The resource has been prepared according to the Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and guidance from

MMU Chaplains. The interpretation of the faith, observances and representation of standards etc. are part of this professional judgement and should not be construed as an authorised or official interpretation. MMU has sought to acknowledge the use of any published material in the text of this resource. Any inadvertent omissions deemed necessary will be corrected upon notification of this error.

## Key beliefs

The term 'Hinduism' is used to describe the ancient religious culture of India. This culture is over 5,000 years old and is practiced by countless millions. Hinduism has neither a single founder, nor a single scripture that is uniquely authoritative.

Hinduism is an amalgamation of several faith traditions. It may be helpful to view Hinduism not so much as a single religion, but as a family of religions. Hindus themselves use various terms such as sanatana-dharma (loosely translated as 'eternal religion') to describe their faith; the word 'Hindu' is originally a geographic designation (those who live east of the Indus River) and is not found in any Hindu scriptures. With 400,000 followers, Hinduism is the fourth largest religion in the UK.

Hindus support fully the notion of reincarnation and that behaviour in this life determines your moral status in the next. There is also a caste system which was introduced by the supreme deity, Brahman. This system is intended to create a just but hierarchical society in which different groups have different hereditary rights.

## Worship elements

Worship is a private matter for each individual. A devout Hindu will usually worship in their home in a room specifically set aside for this purpose. They will also celebrate, along with their community, many religious and cultural festivals.

## Places of worship

Hindus worship at a temple or Mandir. Shoes are taken off before entering and offerings of fruit, flowers and incense can also be made. Some Hindus have a specific room in their home for the practice of worship called 'pooja'. A person may be requested to remove their shoes before entering a Hindu home.

## Food and drink

Hindus uphold the sacredness of all life, including animal life. Devout Hindus will neither eat meat nor fish. Some will not eat eggs. Even those Hindus who have decided to eat meat will nonetheless refuse to eat beef since the cow is seen as a sacred animal. Hinduism forbids the consumption of alcohol. Garlic and onions are thought to be foods discarded by the Gods. Strictly orthodox Hindus will not eat food prepared by someone not belonging to the same level of caste as them.

## Festivals and days of worship

Hindu holy days and festivals follow a lunar calendar, thus dates vary from year to year. A few of the most popular are:

**Diwali** - Known as the festival of lights, this commemorates the return of Lord Rama from His exile in the forest. It is, for many traditions, a new-year celebration. It takes place between late October and the middle of November.

**Dussehra** - A celebration of good conquering evil, this festival last ten days and takes place between late September and the middle of October.

**Holi** - A spring festival to celebrate creation and renewal, linked with Lord Krishna.

**Navaratri** - A nine day festival which celebrates the triumph of good over evil.

**Janmastami** - A celebration marking the appearance on earth of Lord Krishna.

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## Dress

Hindus don't observe any specific cultural dress with stringency. They will gladly wear clothes from other countries, including Western attire. However, Hindu men typically wear a pyjama (narrow trousers) and kurta, which is a loose fitting shirt. Women often wear a sari, a long piece of material wrapped around the body. Married Hindu women wear a bindi - a red powder spot marked on the forehead.

## Text

There is a vast range of Hindu scriptures. Some, like the Vedas, relate the spiritual experiences of the Rishis and are considered to have higher authority. Other scriptures consisting of the narratives of Hinduism are considered to have lower authority; these include the Ramayana and Mahabharata or legendary stories called the Puranas. The Bhagavad-Gita, an excerpt from the Mahabharata is considered to be a synthesis of upanishadic teachings and is revered universally by all Hindus as a scripture of highest authority.

The diversity calendar can be found at [www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities)

This fact sheet has been produced using information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian) with guidance from MMU Chaplains.