



Understanding Faith

Hinduism



AUM / OM

by

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Understanding Faith – **Hinduism**

Background



Overview of Hindu faith

HINDUISM:

- is a major world religion / third most popular religion,
- around 900+ million followers world-wide.
- about 83% of Indian population regard themselves as Hindus.
- is also the third most popular faith in Britain with 500,000+ followers.
- in Swindon - 1,008 citizens registered themselves as Hindus (*census 2001*)



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Background



Origins of Hindu faith

HINDUISM:

- is over 3000 years old, with elements of the faith are much older.
- has no founder, single teacher, nor prophets.
- not a single unified religion but various sects.
- originated on the banks of the river Indus.
(Indus valley civilisation)
- belief in a universal soul or God called Brahman,
 - but there are many other deities - Krishna, Shiva, Rama and Durga.
- belief that existence is a cycle of birth-death-rebirth.
- governed by Karma (law of action).
 - one's own deeds are responsible for the making of one's fate



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Fundamentals



Philosophical bases of Hinduism

Belief in God almighty (*Parmeshwer*)

Realisation of Divine Power – He is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe

Prayer (*Prarathana*)

Unity with the Divine Power

Reincarnation (*Punar janma*)

Immortality of soul....without ending or beginning - oneness with god himself

Karma (Law of Action) (*Purushartha*)

*“As a man does so shall he reap” – closely linked with reincarnation and cycles of rebirth.
The conditions under which one is born is of one’s making*

Compassion for all living things (*Prani Daya*)

*Reverence and spiritual unity with all forms of life.
Doctrine of Non-Violence and compassion for all beings and God’s creatures*



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Origins - History



Prehistoric religion: (3000-1000 BC)

The earliest evidence for elements of the Hindu faith dates back as far as 3000 BCE. This early Indian culture is sometimes called the Indus Valley civilisation

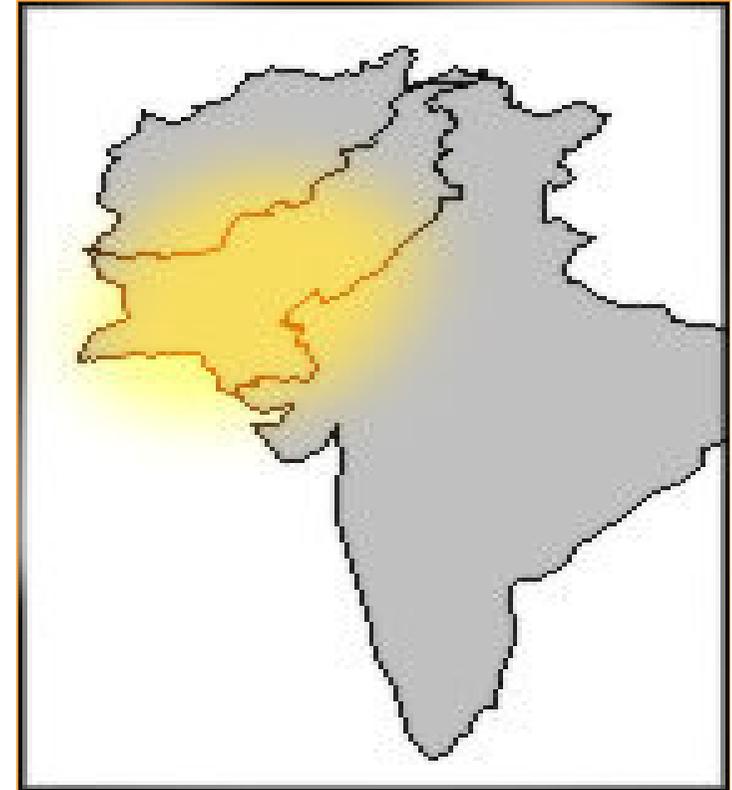
Pre-classical (Vedic) (2000 – 1000 BC)

Some time in the second millennium BCE the Aryan people arrived in north-west India. They brought with them their language and their religious traditions. These both influenced and were influenced by the religious practices of the peoples who were already living in India. Over time, the different religious practices tended to blend together.

Writings (800 BC)

Aspects of the Aryan faith began to be written down around 800 BC in literature known as the Vedas. These developed from their oral and poetic traditions.

You can see some of the Vedic traditions in Hindu worship today.





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Origins - History



The Rise of "Hinduism" (1000 BC)

This period saw Hinduism gaining strength at the expense of Buddhism. However it was probably developments in Hinduism itself that helped the faith to grow. **Hinduism now included not only the appeal of devotion to a personal god, but had seen the development of its emotional side with the composition and singing of poems and songs. This made Hinduism an intelligible and satisfying road to faith to many ordinary worshippers.**

The Arrival of Islam (7 – 12 BC)

Islam arrived in the Ganges basin in the 7th century, but its influence was not really felt until the Turks arrived in the 11th and 12th centuries BC. Islam and Hinduism were in conflict because, although the mystical traditions of both religions had some common ground, Muslim rulers sought to conquer Hindu territories and from the 17th century, to assert the authority of Islam. Islam was established, and as they say “that is History” became modern-day Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Hinduism remained strongest in the southern India



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Evolution



The End of the Era

During the last centuries of the previous era, the Mauryan empire ruled much of India. The most famous ruler, Asoka, although a Buddhist himself, thought that the Brahman religion was worthy of respect. Brahmanism revived with the end of Mauryan rule, and at the same time devotion to individual gods, such as Vishnu and Siva, began to grow. Some of the early Hindu images date from this period.

The Start of the Current Era

The first 400 years BC were a time of upheaval in the Hindu heartland. A variety of invaders ruled the area, bringing injections of their own cultures and beliefs. Hinduism strengthened, and the Sects or followers of specific gods grew stronger. Goddesses too, began to attract followers.

Other faiths with strong links to Hinduism

- **Buddhism**
- **Jainism**
- **Sikhism**



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Evolution



HINDU – People and their Faith

The word '**Hindu**' originates from the word 'Sindhu'. Sindhu is a river in India called river Indus in the English language and the people who settled along the banks came to be known as 'Hindus', thus their religion was known as "Hindu Dharma (faith)".

These people's Dharma and as the teachings were based on the Vedas, it was called the 'Vedic Dharma'. For the faith full at that time and even today, this ancient religion of mankind became "**Sanatan Dharma**" (Universal faith)

Followers of Hindu faith today

- **Hindu Sanatan Dharma** - All embracing and not following any particular Hindu sect

Typical followers of specific saints or sect

- Shree **Krishna or Radha-Krishna**
- Lord **Rama, Vishnu or Shiva**
- **Shakti-mata**, the mother goddess also known as Durga-mata or Kali-mata
- **International Society for Krishna Consciousness** (Hare-Krishna Movement)
- **Swami Narayan mission**
- Shree **Sai Baba (or Baba)**



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Worship



Hindu Worship

Introduction

Hindu worship, or Puja, involves images (murtis) and prayers (mantras). Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple.

- All worships start with prayers/mantra in praise of Ganesh who is revered as the key saint in Hindu worship

Individual rather than communal

Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity. Worshippers repeat the names of their favourite gods and goddesses, and repeat mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to god.

Worship at home

The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where prayers are said and offerings are made.

- A shrine can be anything : a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity. Family members often worship together. Rituals should strictly speaking be performed three times a day.



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Worship



Worship of Brahma (God)

Brahma is the Creator. However, Brahma is not worshipped in the same way as other gods because it is believed that his work - that of creation - has been done. Hindus worship other expressions of Brahma, which take a variety of forms.

Hindus are often classified into three groups according to which form of Brahman they worship:

- Those who worship **Vishnu** (the preserver) and Vishnu's important incarnations Rama, Krishna and Narasimha;
- Those who worship **Shiva** (the destroyer)
- Those who worship the Mother Goddess, **Shakti**, also called Parvati, Maha lakshmi, Durga or Kali.



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Worship



Other Vedic Gods

Indra, the god of storms was once the Vedic king of all gods but has, over time, lost some influence.

- Indra's main function is in leading the warriors
- Indra fights not only human enemies, but also demons.

Agni is the Vedic god of fire and is one of the supreme gods of the Rig-Veda.

- Agni is believed to take the offerings to the other world through fire.
- Agni is represented by the ram.

Varuna is the third Vedic god whose influence persists today.

- Varuna presides over the orderliness of the universe.
- Varuna rules over the night sky.
- Varuna is believed to know everything.
- Varuna is the god of truth and moral judgements.
- Varuna knows the secrets of all hearts.



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Celebration & holy Days



Hindu Holy Days & Festival Celebrations

Hindu festivals are Astrological based are largely linked with the movements of the sun and moon and with seasonal changes, but they also incorporate the myths of the Ramayana, and Krishna's activities.

DIWALI (Deepvali) : A festival of lights which celebrates the New Year.

MAKAR SANKRANTI : The first Hindu festival of the solar calendar year.

MAHA SHIVRATRI : Hindu festival dedicated to Shiva, one of the deities of the Hindu Trinity.

HOLI : The spring festival celebrates creation and renewal.

RAMA NAVMI : Celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, son of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya.

RAKSHA BANDHAN : The Hindu festival that celebrates brotherhood and love.

JANMASHTMI : The festival marks birth of Krishna, most highly venerated God in the Hinduism

GANESH CHATURTI : This festival sees Hindus all over the world celebrating the birthday of Lord Ganesh.

NAVRATRI : & Durga Puja : Navratri (nine nights) is the greatest Hindu festivals to celebrate powers of Durga.

DASSEHRA : Tenth day Durga Puja of celebration in honour of Durga or Kali.



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Scriptures



The VEDAS, SAMHITAS and UPANISHADS

The Vedas are the most ancient religious texts which define truth for Hindus. They got their present form between 1200-200 BC and were introduced to India by the Aryans. Hindus believe that the texts were received by scholars direct from God and passed on to the next generations by word of mouth. Vedic texts are also described SHURITI (pronouncements/teaching) and for thousands of years, the texts were passed on orally.

Contents of the Vedas (*written in Sanskrit*)

The Vedas are four compositions, and each Veda in turn has four parts (Samhita) which are arranged chronologically.

- **The Samhitas** *are the most ancient part of the Vedas, consisting of hymns of praise to God in four chapters.*
 - **Rig-Veda Samhita** (c.200 BC) is the oldest of the four Vedas and consists of 1028 hymns praising the ancient gods.
 - **Yajur-Veda Samhita** is used as a handbook by priests performing the Vedic rituals.
 - **Sama-Veda Samhita** consists of chants and tunes for singing at the sacrifices.
 - **Atharva-Veda Samhita** (c. 900 BC) preserves many traditions which pre-date the Aryan influence and consists of spells, charms and magical formulae.
- **The Brahmanas** *are rituals and prayers to guide the priests in their duties.*
- **The Aranyakas** *concern worship and meditation.*
- **The Upanishads** *consist of the mystical and philosophical teachings of Hinduism.*



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Scriptures



The Bhagvat Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** "Song of God" is in Sanskrit text composed during the Mahabharata. It has 700 verses, but there is evidence to show that some old manuscripts had 745 verses. Lord Krishna as the speaker of the Bhagavad Gita, is referred to within as bhagvan (the divine one), and the verses themselves, using the range and style of Sanskrit with similes and metaphors, are written in a poetic form that is traditionally chanted; hence the title, which translates to "the Song of the Divine One".



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Scriptures



The Bhagvat Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** is revered as sacred by the Hindu traditions, and especially so by followers of Krishna. It is commonly referred to as *The Gita*. The content of the text is a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna taking place on the battlefield of just prior to the start of a climactic war. Responding to Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma, Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and Prince and elaborates on a number of different Yogic and Vedantic philosophies, with examples and analogies. This has led to the Gita often being described as a concise guide to Hindu philosophy and also as a practical, self-contained guide to life. During the discourse, Krishna reveals his identity as the Supreme Being Himself, blessing Arjuna with an awe-inspiring glimpse of His divine absolute form.

The Bhagavad Gita is also called *Gītapani* as well as *Yogupani* implying its status as an 'Upanishad'. Since it is drawn from the Mahabharata, it is a text, however referring to it as an Upanishad is intended to give it status comparable to that of shuriti, or revealed knowledge.



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Scholars



Hinduism and YOGA

VEDANTA / YOGA

The study of Vedas contain many branches of knowledge dealing with different subject matters of Hindu faith. The section dealing Brahma (God-the supreme being) is called **Vedanta**. It is studied in the Ashrams through life of deep meditation, Yoga and study of Scriptures.

Yoga means to join/to be at one with or to bring together. In its pure sense is “to establish contact with god through meditation and prayer”

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534)

was an ascetic Vaishnu monk and social reformer. Chaitanya was a notable proponent for the Vaishnava school of Bhakti Yoga based on the philosophy of the Bhagvat Gita, specifically he worshipped the forms of Radha and Krishna and popularised the chanting of the Hare-Krishna mantra.



Understanding Faith – **Hinduism** Scholars



Rama Krishna Paramahansa (1836-1886)

Another school of Hinduism developed under the influence of Rama Krishna Paramahansa, who put much greater emphasis on devotion to God.

He combined the trend of popular Hinduism with its many images with a belief in a loveable Almighty God, for he could see God in many forms.

He preached without a complicated theology and without an over-reliance on the scriptures.

It was a pluralist approach to Hinduism which helped it to find its feet in the modern world.



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Scholars



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

The work of Ramakrishna Paramahansa was continued and extended by Swami Vivekananda who, after 12 years of ascetic study and discipline, was responsible for promoting the Hindu tradition and thought in the west. He taught that the divine is in everything and promoted the Ramakrishna Mission which is well known for its social work as well as being a focus for Hindu religious thought



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Scholars



Western Influence

Hinduism as it is known and recognised today has been greatly affected by the influence of western thought and practices. In the 18th and 19th centuries, missionaries from Europe attempted to convert Hindus to Christianity with varying degrees of success. This challenged Hindu leaders to reform many practices and in some cases, revive old practices. This period has been recognised as a period of Hindu revivalism.

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)

An early leader in this field was Ram Mohan Roy, a scholar who spoke Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit alongside his native Bengali.

In 1828, he founded the Brahmo Samaj, based on the teachings of the Upanishads. Whilst he based much of his work on the teachings of the Upanishads, his social outlook was progressive and he was keen to develop education and particularly the establishment of western sciences into Indian culture.

Ram Mohan Roy died in Bristol of meningitis while on a visit to Europe.

There is a statue of him at College Green in Bristol.



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Scholars



International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISCON)

More often known as the Hare Krishna, the movement is often recognised as the western face of Hinduism. Its origins can be traced back to Chaitanya, a fifteenth century devotee of Krishna, who chanted devotional songs to Krishna. His teachings were promoted in the 20th century by Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, who had a vision of taking the message of Chaitanya to the west shortly before his death in 1936.

This work was taken up by Prabhupada who took that message to the United States and eventually established bases around the world to promote those teachings.



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Customs



In Hindu Society like any other Social Order many Customs and traditions have developed over time. Often the issue of Cast system is brought up and the basis of that system is:

VARNAS (Social Class / Order)

This is not a classification in any Hindu doctrine but a tradition of social division* that developed over time. According to the duties performed and quality of person they were classified in social order that came to be known as **Varnas** or Jatis (Verna means to choose) :

- **Brahmins** – Engaged in religious work and imparting knowledge of faith.
- **Kshtriya** – The warrior and political types.
- **Vaishya** – Involved Trade, Commerce, Industry and Agriculture .
- **Sudra** – General labourers.

* Over many centuries, this complex system of casts has developed in India. This hierarchical social structure developed through birth, marriage and occupation. Today in India these systems are frowned upon in most communities and are abolished by law.



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Prayer

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि
धीयो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

Main Hindu Prayer ‘Gayatra Mantra’

Aum Bhoor Buvah Swah
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayaat

Meaning:

O God,
Thou art, the giver of life,
The remover of pains and sorrows and bestower of happiness,
O Creator of the universe, we meditate on thy supreme sin-destroying light,
May thou guide our intellect in the right direction.

Yajur-Veda 36.3

AUM... Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. (AUM...peace, peace, peace.)

Thank you for your participation