

Avatar	A god who descends to earth as a human or other animal in order to fight evil and re-establish goodness
Brahman	A supreme being in which most modern Hindus believe; the source of everything, including the gods
Caste System	A series of social classes that determine someone's job and status in society
Deity	A God or Goddess
Dharma	The moral law that Hindus must follow; the word can be translated as 'duty' or 'righteousness'
Diwali	The festival of lights, celebrated by nearly all Hindus
Karma	The forces that influence people's fortune and future reincarnation
Mandir	A Hindu term for a temple
Moksha	Escaping from samsara and never dying or becoming reincarnated again; the term literally means 'release'
Monotheist	Someone who believes in only one God
Polytheist	Referring to belief in many gods; someone who believes in many gods is a polytheist
Puja	Hindu worship, either at home or in a temple.
Murti	An image of a god or goddess
Reincarnation	When a soul is reborn by passing into a new body
Samsara	The continual process of death and reincarnation; also the entire universe as we know it
Trimurti	A term for the three main Hindu gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

The aim of this unit is to explore the religious faith of Hinduism. You will look at the Hindu religious beliefs and practices that take place.

The Ramayana:

Dashratha, King of Ayodhya, has four sons by three different wives: Rama (who was the eldest), Lakshman and Satrugna (who were twins) and Bharat (the youngest). Rama has married Sita and Dashratha wishes to pass the throne to his eldest son. But the mother of Dashratha's youngest son, Barat, is jealous and wants her child to be king. She forces Dashratha to exile Rama, Sita and Lakshman to the forest for 14 years.

In the forest the evil demon Ravana seizes Sita and takes her to his island home of Lanka. Rama follows a trail of Sita's jewellery and then meets Hanuman, the monkey-king. Hanuman uses his magic power of flight to discover where Sita is and then, with Rama, they raise an army of animals and march on Lanka.

Rama kills Ravana with a magic arrow and then, their exile over, he returns to Ayodhya with Sita and Lakshman. The people light their way home with little lamps left outside their homes.

Hindu Gods and Goddesses:

Brahman is a term used by Hindus to describe God or the Supreme Being. It can also refer to the 'divine consciousness'. Brahman is a supreme, universal spirit that is eternal and unchanging. Hindu holy books refer to Brahman as being present throughout the entire universe and Hindus believe that all living beings carry a part of Brahman within them. This divine spark is known as the *atman*, or soul, and it is immortal. Brahman can be shown in many forms and this includes *deities*, or representations of the divine.



What does Hinduism teach about life after death?

Most Hindus believe that humans are in a cycle of death and rebirth called samsara. When a person dies, their atman is reborn in a different body.

Some believe rebirth happens directly at death, others believe that an atman may exist in other realms.

Hindus believe in karma or 'intentional action'. Many believe good or bad actions in life leading to positive or negative merit, determines the atman's rebirth.

Some Hindus believe that humans may be reborn in animal form, and that rebirth from human to animal form only occurs if an atman has repeatedly failed to learn lessons in human form.

Living life according to teachings in the scriptures will eventually lead to moksha. Some Hindu scriptures describe moksha as the atman becoming absorbed with Brahman, from where each atman is believed to originate. Other Hindu scriptures describe moksha as living in the realm of a personal God.



Hindu Festivals:

Diwali is one of the most recognised and celebrated festivals in Hinduism and is known as the festival of lights. It is usually celebrated in October or November and lasts five days. It links to the famous story of *Rama* and *Sita* and remembers the victory of good over evil. The festival is celebrated by cleaning the home and getting the accounts in order for the next financial year. Hindus also have firework displays and light diva lamps in memory of Rama's heroic rescue of his kidnapped wife and queen, Sita. It is said that long ago people lit diva lamps to help light the way back home for Rama and Sita after Rama defeated the evil ten-headed demon king *Ravana*, who had kidnapped Sita. Hindus also worship *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, in the hope that they will have a prosperous new year, as Diwali is the beginning of the Hindu New Year.

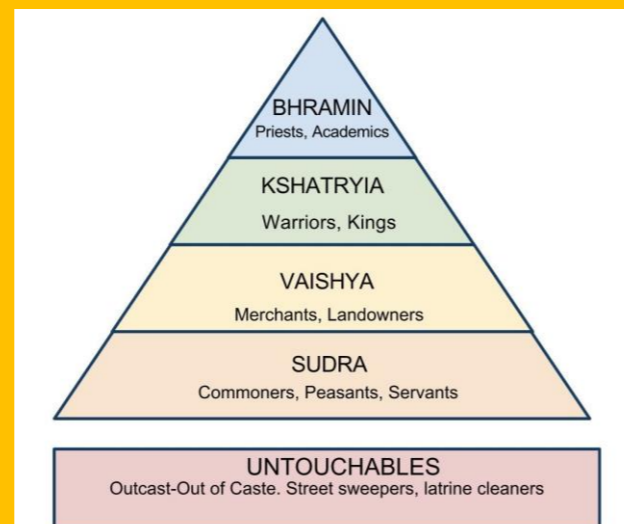


Holi is known as the festival of colours and is celebrated during the spring. Hindus wear brightly coloured clothes and throw coloured powders over each other, which covers them from head to toe. The festival lasts two days and is in February or March, at a time when the moon is full. At Holi, Hindus remember the victory of **Prahlad** over the demon girl Holika. Holika was ordered by an evil king to slay Prahlad, the king's son. Prahlad was very devoted to Vishnu whereas the king hated Vishnu. The festival is a celebration of **good over evil** because Holika was burnt in a fire when she tried to kill Prahlad. The festival became known as Holi to remember these events.



The Caste System:

The Caste system is a system in India that was once mainly used by Hindus. It started as a job system but later became a social class system that depends on one's ancestry. This system has been generally accepted for about 3000 years. There are four castes in this system, and one class regarded as the "Untouchables". There are also castes in some countries other than India as the system spread to South Asia about 2000 years ago. For centuries, this system dictated one's marriages, geographical location, and occupation. The Indian government today works to decrease this discrimination, such as with the quotas set in government jobs in 1950.



Events that occur at important rites of passage (samsara's):

Birth: Prayers are said when a baby is born. At 11 days old the baby's hair is cut off and weighed (the weight in gold is given to charity). Prayers are also said when the baby leaves the house for the first time, eats solid food, and gets their ear pierced.

Sacred Thread Ceremony: Celebrates when a child is ready to take part in Hindu worship.

Marriage: Two people are tied together in front of the sacred fire. They begin the journey of life as two people.

Death: Hindu bodies are cremated; it is hoped that the ashes can be spread into the sacred river Ganges (or another body of water).

For daily devotion, many Hindu families have a home shrine, often in a corner of the best room in the house. It is a way of honouring the gods and goddesses. Worship at the shrine may involve the whole family, or sometimes it is done alone. A daily puja ceremony uses all five of the senses. For this a Hindu needs the following:

Object	Use in worship	Sense
Bell	To awaken the god or goddess and symbolise the beginning of the worship.	Hearing
Food	To make a gift, fruit or other food is placed in the shrine as an offering to the deity.	Tasting
Murti	An image of the god or goddess being worshipped.	Seeing
Incense and flowers	Burning incense sticks fill the room with scent, symbolising the presence of the deity. Flowers are often placed in the shrine to honour the deity.	Smelling
Kum-kum powder	Making a coloured mark on the worshipper's forehead shows honour to the deity and reminds the worshipper of their devotion throughout the day.	Touching

Typically, a worshipper will ring a bell to begin, before lighting some incense and washing the murti. Flowers or fruit are placed in the shrine and a lamp is lit – usually a candle lamp. Arati lamps often use ghee for fuel and have many wicks. The lamp is circled around in front of the murti, symbolising the light and love of the gods and goddesses. Hymns (bhajans) or mantras are sung or said. Then the worshipper marks their forehead with kum-kum powder, and also marks the murti as a blessing.

