

## Hindus origin and culture

### 1) Origin of Hindus

The origin of other religions is easy to trace because of the known birth dates of their founders. The main reasons behind difficulty of finding the exact year of origin of Hinduism are as follows:

- Hinduism was not founded as a religion. It was a way of life or a living culture but later on, the people following this culture were called as Hindus and their culture or civilisation was termed as *Hindu Dharma* or *Sanatana Dharma* or Hinduism.
- The second thing is that there is no single founder of Hinduism as there is for other religions.
- Finally there is no single holy book that is followed, rather over thousands of years many texts were written by many learned people called *Rishis* or sages.

So it is very hard to pinpoint when Hinduism started, but still we can find out an approximate period when some of the practices of Hindus began – it is widely accepted that Hinduism has been around for more than 5,000 years.

### 2) 'Sindhu' in Sanskrit means 'River'

Sindhu in Sanskrit means River. This was the name given to people who lived in the vicinity of Sindhu river( also known as saptha sindhu) now in Pakistan, by Greeks and Arabs. Over the time the word Sindhu became Hindu.

### 3) Originated in India

A billion Hindus all over the world practice Hinduism. It is one of the world's oldest religions. Majority of the world Hindu population currently lives in India, the rest all over the world in many countries.

### 4) Other names of India

- a. Bharat – Land of Vedas (knowledge or light)
- b. Hindustan - Land of Hindus

### 5) Languages

Most of the Hindu scriptures were written in *Sanskrit*. It is considered to be the language of Gods (*Deva Bhasha*). The languages vary according to regions. They speak all the India languages like Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Malyalam, Gujarati, Kannada, Oriya etc.

### 6) Holy books

Four Vedas ( *Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharvana* ) *Upanishads*, *Bhagvadgita*, eighteen Puranas, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* are the main sacred books of Hindus.

## Nine Hindu Beliefs

Our beliefs determine our thoughts and attitudes about life, which in turn direct our actions. By our actions, we create our destiny. Beliefs about sacred matters - God, soul and the universe, are essential to one's approach to life.

Hindus believe many diverse things, but there are a few core concepts on which most Hindus concur. The following nine beliefs offer a simple summary of Hindu spirituality.

1. Hindus believe in a **one, all-pervasive Supreme Being** (Self) – referred to as *Eswara*, *Atman*, *Brahman* or *Paramatma*.
2. Hindus believe in the **divinity of the four Vedas**, the world's most ancient scriptures. These are God's word and the basis of *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal religion.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes **endless** cycles of **creation, preservation and dissolution**.
4. Hindus believe in **karma, the law of cause and effect** by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul **reincarnates**, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that **divine beings exist** in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals and personal devotionals create a communion with these *devas* and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or **Guru**, is essential to know the Supreme Self, as are personal discipline, good conduct, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice **ahimsa (non injury) in thought, word and deed**.
9. Hindus believe that **no religion teaches the only way** to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest living religions, has no beginning. It precedes recorded history. It has no human founder, leading one to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of **consciousness where man and God are one**.

## Hindu customs and traditions

Customs and traditions have always been an important part of every religion and culture. As Hinduism is one of the oldest living religions on the earth, there are a lot of Hindu customs and traditions observed.

1. **Namaste:** When Hindus meet each other, they greet each other by saying '*Namaste*' or '*Namaskar.*' They put together the palms of both hands while saying so.
2. Before the start of any good work and social and religious ceremonies, Hindus **worship Lord Ganesha.**
3. **Hindus do not wear footwear** inside homes, temples, and other holy places.
4. They apply a spot or a line of **kumkum** between the eyebrows on the forehead at the time of worship.
5. **Showing respect** to elders is an integral part of Hindu culture. Younger people touch the feet of their elders to show respect and take blessings from them. Mother, Father, and Teacher are considered as next to god and are highly respected.
6. **Hindus worship many deities.** The most common ones are *Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Ram, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Durga, Ganesh, Karthikeya* or *Murugan* and *Hanuman*.
7. Many **festivals** are celebrated throughout the year. There are different festivals for different deities. *Deepavali, Dasera, Rakshabandhan, Holi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Ram Navami* are some popular ones.
8. Hindus believe that Lord *Vishnu* comes on the earth from time to time to restore *Dharma*. He has done so 9 times so far and the 10<sup>th</sup> one is yet to come. Collectively they are called – **Dasa Avatars.**
9. You would find an altar in every house containing miniature idols of many Hindu deities. They clean and worship them everyday. They all them **Puja Mandir.**
10. Guests are treated with care and respect. The traditional hospitality of a Hindu family is well known for giving importance to a visitor or guest and taking care of them well.

## Hindus and Environment

Hinduism has often been coined as an "environmental friendly" religion. Hindus regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle divine presence, may it be rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora, the mineral world, as well as the stars and planets. It is so because the Divine reality is present as *Prana (life) and Shakti (energy)* in every manifestation of matter.

Just as Hindus greet each other saying "*Namaste*", which means: *I recognize and salute the Divine within you*, so do they **recognize** the same Divine essence, in all around them.

Throughout the long history of India, Hindus have shared a fascination with, and respect for, nature and animals. This attitude went beyond the usefulness. It had to do with **reverence** for all of God's creation. Our ancestors worshipped trees, rivers, birds and stones and connected to the universal principle through Lord *Shiva*.

As we are growing more materialistic, we are losing this connection. Our ancestors saw nature as being a manifestation of God. Therefore they showed **gratitude** towards nature.

### Some key points to Hindu environment consciousness:

***Our natural environment – comprising mountains and hills, rivers, trees and plants – are considered auspicious*** enough to provide space for meditation. Meditation retreats are often found near rivers, mountains or forests.

It was under a banyan tree that the Hindu sages sat in a trance seeking enlightenment and it was here that they held discourses and conducted holy rituals.

***The earth can be seen as a manifestation of the goddess, and must be treated with respect.*** The five elements - space, air, fire, water, and earth - are the foundation of an interconnected web of life.

***Dharma - often translated as "duty" - can be reinterpreted to include our responsibility to care for the earth.*** Simple living is a model for the development of sustainable economies. Our treatment of nature directly affects our *karma*.

***Animals were revered too.*** *Kamadhenu* was the wish-fulfilling cow, whose offspring are all the cattle on earth. The word "go" or cow was very important and is worshipped even today for its usefulness to society.

***Ayurveda, the science of life,*** which is a complete health and medicine system based on nature and its regenerating forces.

***Vastu Shastra*** teaches us how to place and build dwellings, according to the environment it is situated in. It is done in such a way that the surroundings are not damaged by the building's presence, and so that all the natural energies are flowing uninterrupted and

freely, providing comfort, peace and prosperity for the dwellers.

Another facet of Hinduism's environmental concern is to do with food is a very physical example: **vegetarianism**. Typically, Hindu social thought has always included an ecological dimension.

#### **How Hindus integrated nature in to their culture:**

- **Mother earth** – *Bhudevi*, the wife of Lord *Vishnu* and she personifies the earth.
- **“Pancha Mahabhutas”** – the elements (space, air, fire, water, and earth) that constitute the environment are all derived from *prakriti*, the primal energy.
- **The rivers** – Hindus worship rivers as holy, they pray to them and consider taking a bath in them purifying. They also address rivers as “*ma*” meaning “mother”, giving respect to rivers – the source of water is life giving and they recognized this long time ago.
- **The plants** – Hindus pay respects to all plant forms. In most houses *Tulasi* plant seen and worshipped. Banyan tree is also another holy tree. Flowers and leaves are used regularly in prayers as offerings.
- **Fire** – *Agni*, the fire also plays an important part in Hindu rituals. *Havan*, the fire worship is a common practice of offering prayers.
- **The mountains** – Most ancient mountains such as *Himalayas*, Mount *Kailash*, and Mount *Govardhan* etc are considered sacred. They are worshiped as well.
- **The planets** – *Navagrahas* – the nine planets are given the status of gods and worshiped, the temple for *Surya* (sun) at *Konark*, India is a good example. It is also very common to have the *Nava Grahas* in most temples in a separate *mandir* of their own.
- **The animals** – Animals are regarded highly in the whole ecological system. Hindus have elevated them by giving them special status of God’s vehicles – “*Vahanas*”  
Examples: *Vishnu* – *Garuda*/ *Shiva* – the *bull*/ *Saraswathi* – *Swan*/ *Ganesh* – *Mouse*.  
Also in *Dasa avathars*, Lord *Vishnu* incarnated as *Matsya* (fish), *Kurma* (Tortoise), *Varaha* (Boar) – to show the form of life is not important and all forms of life are equal.

## Hindus and Environment – Activity

1. Why do you think Hinduism is environmentally friendly?

---

---

---

---

---

2. Hindus pay *reverence* and *gratitude* to nature around them. Give an example of each.

---

---

---

3. What is the name given to Mother Earth

---

4. What are the *Navagrahas*

---

5. Write the Five elements

---

---

6. Name 4 rivers that you know either from India or Australia

---

---

7. Name two holy plants for Hindus

---

---

8. Why are trees, rivers, animals and mountains important for our living

---

---

---

9. What is *Ayurveda* and what do you know about it

---

---

10. What are the ways in which we can alter our food habits to become more environmentally friendly – name 3 points.

---

---

## - Lord Shiva 's Forms -

*Shiva Bhagwan*, one of the *Trimurti (Trinity)* Gods in Hinduism, is worshipped in various forms and depictions. Among the various forms of Lord *Shiva*, the five main forms worshiped are as Nataraja, Dakshinamurthy, Shivalinga, Ardhanarishvara, and Tripurantaka. Below are details on these important forms and depictions of Lord *Shiva*.

### 1) Nataraja

*Nataraja* is one of the popular forms of Lord *Shiva*. This depiction is due to Lord *Shiva*'s association with dance and music. *Nartaka* ("dancer") and *Nityanarta* ("eternal dancer") names of *Shiva* can be seen in *Shiva Sahasranama*, the 1000 names in praise of Lord *Shiva*. The *Chidambaram Nataraja* Temple in Tamilnadu is a popular temple dedicated to Lord *Nataraja*.

### 2) Dakshinamurthy

*Dakshinamurthy* represents Lord *Shiva* in His aspect as Guru (a teacher) of *Yoga*, music and wisdom and giving exposition to *Shastras*. *Dakshinamurthy* literally means "the One who is facing South (*Daksina*). *Dakshinamurthy* is regarded as the God of wisdom. Also known as *Jnana Dakshinamurti*, this form of Lord *Shiva* is popular in south India, especially Tamilnadu.

#### Dakshinamurthy Temples

The *Mahakaleshwar* Temple in *Ujjain*, one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas* of Lord *Shiva*, is a famous *Dakshinmurthy* Temple in India. The *Ettumanoor Mahadevar* Temple in Kerala is another famous *Dakshinamurthy* shrine where the Lord is worshipped in the form of a *Shivalingam*. The *Alangudi* temple in Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu in India is also dedicated to *Dakshinamurti*.

The *Dakshinamurthy Ashtakam* written by *Guru Adi Shankaracharya* is one of the popular mantra dedicated to this form of *Shiva Shankara*.

### 3) Shiva Lingam

Lord *Shiva* is mainly worshipped in the form of *Shiva Linga* – the most common form is the shape of a vertical rounded column. *Shivalinga* is regarded as a "symbol of the great God of the universe who is all-auspiciousness".

### 4) Ardhanarishvara

*Ardhanarishvara*, one of the 64 manifestations of Lord *Shiva*, is the combined form of *Shiva* and Goddess *Parvati*. This iconographic representation shows him with one half of the body as male (Lord *Shiva*) and the other half as female (Goddess *Parvathi*). *Ardhanarishwara* is sometimes known as *Uma-Maheshwara*.



### ***Ardhanarishvara* Temples**

The *Ardhanareeswarar* Hill Temple in Thiruchengode in Namakkal District of Tamilnadu is one of the most famous temples dedicated to *Ardhanarishvara*. A dancing eight-armed *Ardhanarishvara* can be seen at the *Parashurameshvara* Temple at Bhubaneswar in Orissa. A three-armed *Ardhanarishvara* sculpture with only *Nandi* as a *vahana* is at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple near Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu.

### **5) Tripurantaka**

Lord *Shiva* is often depicted as an archer in the act of destroying *Tripura*, the *Asura*. Also called *Tripurantakesvara* or *Tripurantakeshwara*, in this form Lord *Shiva* is depicted with four arms wielding a bow and arrow.

### **Tripurantaka Temples**

The *Tripurantaka* Temple in Shivamogga district of Karnataka is one of the famous temples where this form of Lord *Shiva* is worshipped. This ancient temple was built by Western *Chalukyas* in the historically town of Balligavi.

## RAMAYANA QUIZ (Quiz on Lord Rama's story)

### BALA KANDAM (Childhood years)

---

1) In which city did King Dasaratha live?

- Mathura       Mithila       Ayodhya       Sarayu

2) The kingdom was prosperous, but the King was sad because he wanted:

- Money       Food       Children       Family

3) What were the names of the wives of King Dasaratha?

- Kausalya, Sita, Sumitra       Kausalya, Kaikeyi, Sumitra  
 Kaikeyi, Manthara, Kausalya       Ahalya, Kausalya, Lakshmi

4) King Dasaratha had three sons. Who was Queen Kausalya's son?

- Rama       Bharata       Lakshmana       Shatrughna

5) Who was Sage Vasishtha?

- A family friend       The Author of the Ramayana  
 The family Guru       The Head of the Army

6) Why did Sage Vishwamitra need help?

- To get through the dangerous forest       To find Sita  
 To fight the rakshasas       To fight Ravana

7) Rama and Lakshmana fought two rakshasas in Vishwamitra's ashram. Who were they?

- Tataka and Kabhandha       Mareecha and Subahu  
 Ravana and Surpanaka       Mareecha and Ravana

8) King Janaka and his daughter Sita lived in which city?

- Ayodhya       Mithila       Ganga       Dandaka

9) When Rama lifted Shiva's great bow and tried to string it, what happened?

- Everyone celebrated       Shiva's bow broke in two       Lakshmana helped Rama

10) Who tried to stop Rama's journey home from Mithila to Ayodhya?

- Dasaratha       Janaka       Parasurama       Vishwamitra

## AYODHYA KANDAM (In the city of Ayodhya)

---

### 11) Who convinced Kaikeyi that Bharata should be the King?

- Sumitra       Rama       Manthara       Soorpanaka

### 12) When everyone else was happy, why did Kaikeyi become angry?

- She was afraid what would happen to her if Rama became king.  
 She didn't like King Dasaratha.  
 She was jealous of Rama.  
 She wanted Dasaratha to be the King.

### 13) What did Kaikeyi want?

- Power and Wealth       Bharata to be King and Rama to be sent away  
 Revenge       Rama to be the King and Bharata to be sent away

### 14) Why did King Dasaratha have to send Rama away?

- King Dasaratha thought Bharata would be a better king than Rama.  
 He had promised Rama that he could go to the forest to fight Rakshasas.  
 He had to honour promises he had made to Kaikeyi.

### 15) Who went to live in the forest?

- Rama, Sita, Lakshmana       Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata  
 Kaikeyi, Sumitra, Kausalya       Rama, Sita, Bharadwaja

### 16) What forest was Rama going to live in?

- Aranya       Dandaka       Chitrakoota       Panchavati

### 17) Why did Bharata go to visit Rama in the forest?

- To visit him with their mothers       To tell him never to return to Ayodhya  
 To beg him to return to Ayodhya       To see where Rama was living

### 18) What did Bharata decide?

- To become the king of Ayodhya  
 To look after Ayodhya until Rama returned from the forest  
 To stay with Rama and let someone else look after Ayodhya

### 19) Why didn't Rama leave the forest?

- He wanted to keep his promise to his father  
 He wanted to explore the forest

## ARANYA KANDAM (Life in exile)

---

**20) What was the name of the Rakshasi who wanted to marry Rama?**

- Manthara       Soorpanaka       Tataka       Mandodari

**21) What did Lakshmana do to the Rakshasi?**

- Marry her       Chase her away       Cut off her ears and nose

**22) How were Ravana and Soorpanaka related?**

- Brother and Sister       Husband and Wife  
 Uncle and Niece       Father and Daughter

**23) What did Ravana ask Mareecha to do?**

- Capture Rama       Fight Rama       Trick Rama

**24) What did Mareecha change himself into to distract Rama?**

- Giant Eagle       Golden Deer       Fierce Tiger       Mighty Rakshasa

**25) When Rama chased Mareecha, why did Lakshmana leave Sita alone?**

- To find Mareecha       To find Ravana  
 To get help from Jatayu       Because Sita told him to help Rama

**26) When no-one except Sita was at the forest home, what did Ravana do?**

- He pretended to be a Holy man asking for food  
 He told her he was lost and needed help

**27) Who saw Sita being carried away by Ravana?**

- Vali       Lakshmana  
 Rama       Jatayu

**28) How did Jatayu try to help Rama and Sita?**

- He attacked the golden deer       He attacked Lanka  
 He attacked Ravana       He flew with the pushpaka vimana to Lanka

**29) Which Rakshasa with one eye did Rama release from a curse?**

- Atisura       Kabandha       Mahishasura       Kumbhakarna

## KISHKINDA KANDAM (In the city of Kishkinda)

---

**30) Where did Rama and Lakshmana find Hanuman?**

- Rishyamooka mountain     Kishkinda     Lanka     In the forest

**31) From whom was Sugreeva hiding?**

- Tara     His brother Vali     His cousin Vali     Angada

**32) When Vali went to fight in the cave why did Sugreeva close it with a large boulder?**

- He thought Vali was dead and he didn't want the Rakshasa to come out  
 He thought the Rakshasa was dead and he didn't want Vali to come out  
 He wanted to be the king of Lanka and have all the power

**33) What did Sugreeva promise Rama?**

- He promised to help Rama find Sita  
 He promised to help Rama get back to Ayodhya

**34) What did Rama promise Sugreeva?**

- He promised to help Sugreeva defeat Vali  
 He promised to live in Kishkinda  
 He promised to go to Sabari's Ashram

**35) What did Rama give Sugreeva during Sugreeva's fight with Vali?**

- Flower Garland     Special Power     Bow and Arrows     King's Crown

**36) What was the name of the kingdom of the Vanaras?**

- Lanka     Kishkinda     Rishyamooka     Dandaka Aranya

**37) Who was Angada?**

- Sugreeva's son     Vali's son     Ravana's son     Vayu's son

**38) How did Sugreeva help Rama?**

- He crossed the ocean to Lanka to find Sita  
 He sent the Vanaras in all directions to search for Sita  
 He forgot all about helping Rama

**39) When Hanuman's group came to the seashore why did they stop?**

- They were afraid of Sampati  
 They couldn't build a bridge  
 Sugreeva didn't tell them to cross the ocean  
 They weren't sure about crossing the ocean and getting back

## SUNDARA KANDAM (*Hanumanji in Lanka*)

---

**40) Who crossed the ocean?**

- Angada     Sampati     Nala     Hanuman

**41) Who was guarding Lanka?**

- Ashwini     A Rakshasa     Lankini     Hamsini

**42) Where did Hanuman find Sita?**

- Ashoka Garden     Aradhna Garden     Amruta Garden

**43) When Sita first saw Hanuman what did she see?**

- A giant Vanara  
 A small cute monkey

**44) Why didn't Sita go back to Kishkinda with Hanuman?**

- She wanted Rama to come and fight Ravana and rescue her  
 She was scared of crossing the ocean  
 She didn't want to leave Lanka

**45) Which son of Ravana caught Hanuman?**

- Akshaya Kumar     Indrajit     Kumbhakarna     Vibheeshana

**46) What did Ravana want to do to Hanuman's tail ?**

- Make it longer     Cut it     Set it on fire

**47) When they lit Hanuman's tail what did he do?**

- Set himself free and escaped  
 Set himself free and set fire to Lanka

**48) What did Sita give Hanuman as a symbol to show Rama?**

- Necklace     Ring     Hair Ornament (Choodamani)

## YUDDHA KANDAM (The war)

---

**49) How did Rama and his army of Vanaras and Bears cross the ocean?**

- Dried it up and walked across
- Flew over it
- Built a bridge of stones and walked over it

**50) Which brother of Ravana joined Rama's side?**

- Kumbhakarna
- Kubera
- Khara
- Vibheeshana

**51) During the great battle between Ravana and Rama, who got very badly hurt?**

- Rama
- Hanuman
- Lakshmana
- Sugreeva

**52) What did Hanuman need the mountain for?**

- Water
- Food
- Shelter
- Medicine

**53) Which brother of Ravana was woken from a long sleep to join the battle?**

- Kumbhakarna
- Kubera
- Khara
- Vibheeshana

**54) What did Ravana look like in battle?**

- He looked very calm and relaxed
- He looked giant and fierce and he had ten heads

**55) When the battle was over:**

- Ravana gave up and gave Sita back to Rama
- Ravana gave up and disappeared
- Ravana was dead and Rama sent for Sita

**56) Who became the king of Lanka?**

- Indrajit
- Kubera
- Khara
- Vibheeshana

**57) When Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana returned to Ayodhya, what happened?**

- Bharata asked Rama to become the King of Ayodhya
- Rama asked Bharata to become the King of Ayodhya

---

*Ram Ram Jaya Raja Ram Ram Ram Jaya Sita Ram*