



Ealing Agreed Syllabus: guidance for teachers

KS2.2: Beliefs and practices,
Hinduism

Overall aim: To explore some of the beliefs and practices that fall under the umbrella term "Hinduism"

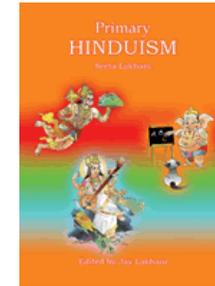
<i>Origins</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	
		know that the Hindu dharma originated in India; think about the origins of their own family's traditions and beliefs.
<i>Aim:</i> to introduce class to the Hindu dharma.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Note: If you are teaching this unit early in key stage 2 (years 3 or 4), finish with the lesson on ahimsa. If you are teaching this unit late in key stage 2 (years 5 or 6), finish with the lesson on reincarnation, karma and moksha.</p>		
<p>Starter: On a large sheet of paper draw a schematic of a lotus. Tell class that this is one of the important symbols of Hinduism, because even though it has its roots in mud it blossoms in the light, which Hindus see as a sign of how they should live their lives. Get class to suggest words relating to Hinduism (e.g. puja, dharma, reincarnation). You will probably get more words if there are Hindu children in the class, but even if there are only one or two suggestions, put these on the petals of the lotus, saying that you will be adding to this throughout the course of the lesson.</p>		<p>Image of lotus (background info)</p> <p>Be sure and draw on the experience and beliefs of your Hindu students and teachers.</p> <p>Introduction to Hinduism https://content.lgfl.org.uk/secure/faiths/primary_uk_sa/sa_item663310_2/subject/module/video/item685156/grade2/module649434/index.html (You will need your LGfL login and password to access the above.)</p> <p>http://www.hinduacademy.org/schools/secondaryschoolspage1.htm</p>
<p>Activity 1: Ask pupils where in the world Hindus live? Where do they think Hinduism came from? Can they locate it on a map? Can they locate India on a world map? Which continent is it part of?</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Read the passage about the Indus Valley and the river Sindu from the secondary school page of the online Hindu academy (see link right). Ask pupils what they notice about the spelling of Indus and Sindu (i.e. add an H and it will become Hindu). Look at the map from that site on the IWB, looking particularly at the place names. What is Lanka called now? What is the capital of India?</p>		

Activity 3: Pupils draw a map of India in their books, labelling the key places e.g. River Sindhu, Indus Valley, etc. They then write a paragraph about the origin of the Hindus.

Activity 4: As a class look at sites about Hinduism and discuss what they say about the religion's origin. Tell them that it is considered by many to be the world's oldest religion, and explain that no one really knows how Hinduism began, as it began thousands of years ago when there weren't written records. However there are many theories behind how it came about. Tell them the classical theory, which is that the Aryan people came to India and brought with them a religion based on beliefs that are now found in books called the *Vedas*. These beliefs mixed with the beliefs of the people already living in the Indus Valley to form Hinduism.

Activity 5: Explain to pupils that though we call this religion Hinduism, many Hindus call it Dharma, or Sanatan ('eternal') Dharma, which refers to the rules, customs and ethics required to sustain human society. But Hindus also believe that each individual has their own Dharma, i.e. that way of being that allows them to contribute the most they can to society. (One way to explain this would be to say that at their age, it is a pupil's dharma to be a student. And that it is the teacher's dharma to nurture learning in the students.)

Plenary: Ask the review question 'What are the origins of Hinduism?' Discuss as a class the answers that are given.



Primary Hinduism, Seeka Lakhani, ISBN 0-9549567. Available from: <http://www.hinduacademy.org/schools/secondaryschoolresources.htm>

<i>The many as one</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand that Hindus believe that there is one divine agency, Brahman, who can appear in many forms.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore the concept of different manifestations of one divinity.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	Pupils explain believing in one god, even though there appear to be many.
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: Explore and demonstrate greetings known by the class, celebrating the languages and cultures represented. Explain that greetings and gestures often have ancient meanings, e.g. men would shake hands to demonstrate that they weren't carrying weapons.</p>		<p>Photocopies of pictures of the Trimurthi.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> If there are Muslim children in the class, they can be allowed to cut out Word Art pictures of the names of the gods, rather than figurative examples.</p> <p>Key words for lotus diagram:</p> <p>Namaste, Brahman, Trimurti, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva</p>
<p>Activity 1: Invite any Hindu children in the class or a Hindu member of staff to demonstrate and share their understanding of the 'namaste' greeting, drawing out the Hindu belief about the divine in every person. Invite the children to take turns explaining whether they agree or disagree with this belief and with each other's views.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Discuss that Hindus believe in one god, Brahman, but that Brahman, though formless, can be perceived in different ways, using the analogy that you are you, but you are also someone's friend, son/daughter, niece/nephew etc. Another comparison is to the Christian Trinity. But in the case of the Hindu gods and goddesses there are many more than three.</p>		
<p>Activity 3: Discuss the Trimurti and what the three gods Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma represent. Ask pupils what they think Brahma might have created. Look at the preserver Vishnu and discuss what he looks like. What does preserver mean? His role is to get rid of evil upon the earth. Look at his weapons: how do you think he does this? Look at a picture of Shiva, the destroyer. Does that mean he is a bad god? What do you think he destroys?</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Allow pupils to cut out pictures/names of the gods and stick them into their books: lower able pupils to annotate them by pointing out weapons, clothing, and jewellery etc., more able pupils to write a couple of sentences about each god.</p>		
<p>Plenary: Add new key words to the lotus diagram. Discuss the importance of the many as one in Hindu belief.</p>		

TriDevi	Pupils will	understand that in Hindu belief the 'divine' can manifest in female form as well as in male form; they will think about women and/or girls that have inspired them.
Aim: to explore Hindu beliefs around female manifestations of the divine	SEN	
	Gifted	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: Ask class what jobs women can do? Can they be doctors? Can they be in the army? Can they be professors? Can they be rulers? Review the idea that one divine being can appear in many forms. Point out that in addition to male forms (e.g. Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna etc.) Hindus also worship divinity in female form. Show a video clip (e.g. from YouTube) of the festival of Navaratri ("Nine nights"). Explain that during the nine nights of the festival Hindus worship different forms of the Goddess.</p>		<p>BBC site about Navaratri: http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/zhfjxnb</p> <p>RE: Online banquet about meaning, purpose and gender of power (excellent resource) http://www.reonline.org.uk/what-do-we-and-hindus-think-about-the-meaning-purpose-and-gender-of-power/</p> <p>Key words for lotus diagram:</p> <p>Navaratri, Durga, Parvati, Saraswati, Lakshmi</p> <p>Note: make sure that any Muslim children in the class know that they can avoid putting human figures in their artwork.</p>
<p>Activity 1: On the IWB, show some pictures of the various Hindu goddesses, e.g. Parvati, Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati. Explain that these goddesses are considered to be manifestations of <i>shakti</i>, which is the energy or power in all living things. Talk about some of the things associated with these forms, e.g. power with Parvati, protection with Durga, abundance and wealth with Lakshmi, and learning with Saraswati. Talk about the festival of Vasant Panchami (see background information) which is particularly appropriate for school children.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Read the story of Durga and the demon Mahisa (see background information). Show some images on the IWB of how this event has been portrayed in sculpture and painting. Make sure pupils understand that Durga was a goddess especially created to kill Mahisa, and that each of the male gods provided her with their weapon, e.g. trident from Shiva, disc from Vishnu etc.</p>		
<p>Activity 3: Pupils draw a picture to represent either the story of Durga or the importance of learning and creativity to Saraswati (e.g. if they play a musical instrument, they could picture it with Saraswati). They write a few sentences to explain the picture.</p>		
<p>Conclusion: Add new key words to the lotus diagram. Pupils share their work and explain their understanding of Saraswati and Durga.</p>		

<i>Hindu beliefs</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	hear about the main beliefs shared by Hindus and explore some of them in some depth; they will consider their own reactions to some of these beliefs.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore the main beliefs of Hinduism.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: In pairs, pupils discuss what beliefs are and what beliefs they have, feeding back their ideas to the class. Classify the beliefs into religious and non-religious. What is the difference between them? Be sure and point out that although people who are not religious don't believe in a god they still have beliefs, for instance that human life is valuable and meaningful. Look at the religious beliefs: what do they mean? How many pupils agree with them?</p>		<p>Nine main beliefs of Hinduism:</p> <p>http://www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/nineb/</p> <p>Note: A simplified list can be found in the background information.</p> <p>Key words for lotus diagram:</p> <p>Dharma, reincarnation, karma, moksha (liberation), guru, ahimsa</p>
<p>Activity 1: Read through the first of the nine main beliefs of Hinduism (a simplified version can be found in the background information). Ask pupils what does it mean? Repeat with the other eight beliefs.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: As a class, discuss which of the main beliefs they think is important and/or interesting and why. Question the choices.</p>		
<p>Activity 3: In table groups, get pupils to discuss the nine beliefs and to pick out the five that they think are the most important. Get them to rank their choices. Groups to feedback their choices to the class, explaining why they chose them over the others.</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Pupils write out the beliefs in their books using simple sentences.</p>		
<p>Conclusion: Add new key words to the lotus diagram. Recap the meaning of belief. Ask pupils why they think our beliefs are important. Discuss this as a class.</p>		

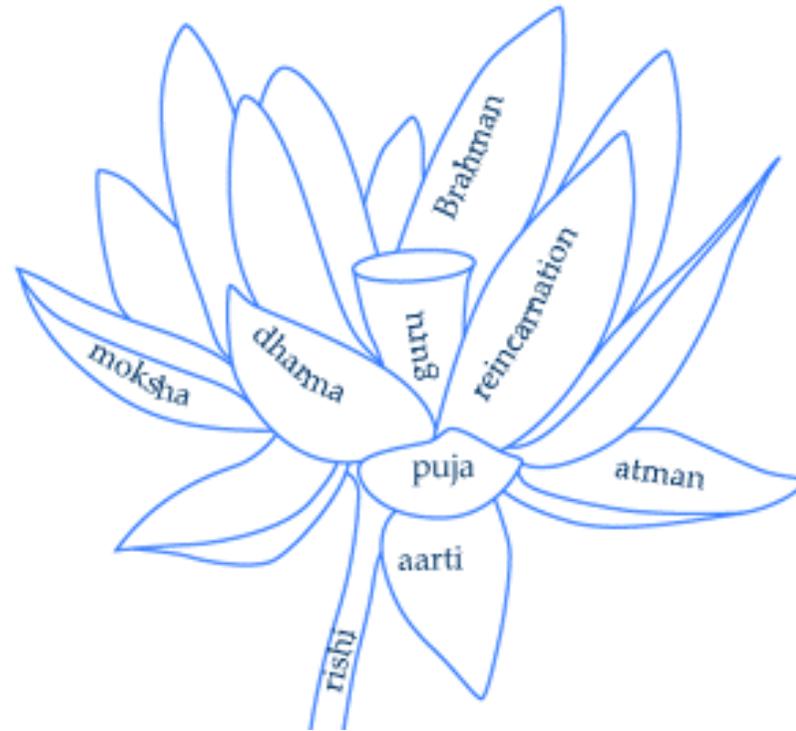
Puja	Pupils will	understand that puja, either in the home or in the mandir, is an expression of a Hindu's desire to be close to the divine; think about what they do to concentrate on what is meaningful in their life.
Aim: to look at how Hindus manifest their beliefs in ritual.	SEN	
	Gifted	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: On the IWB show the video of worship in the mandir on the LGfL Espresso site or YouTube videos of a temple aarti ceremony, e.g. at the Swaminarayan temple in Neasden. If the class has visited a mandir, review the sights, sounds and smells. Discuss the role of the priest. Show the video of the priest waking the deities in Preston Mandir (CLEO website). Discuss the respect the priest is showing to the images of the deities.</p>		<p>Worship in the mandir:</p> <p>https://content.lgfl.org.uk/secure/fai/ths/primary_uk_sa/sa_item663310_2/subject/module/video/item339423/grade2/module649434/index.html</p> <p>Worship in the home:</p> <p>https://www.asia.si.edu/pujaonline/puja/homes.html</p> <p>A short video of the priest waking the deities in Preston Mandir:</p> <p>http://www.cleo.net.uk/resources/displayframe.php?src=239/consultants_resources%2Fre%2Fwtgv%2Fwtg.html</p>
<p>Activity 1: Remind the class that although Hindus believe in one formless divinity, Brahman, they worship Brahman in many forms. And that in a mandir they are likely to see images (<i>murti</i>) that represent various deities, such as Krishna, Ganesha, Durga etc. And that these images are treated with the devotion and respect that believers extend to Brahman.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Pupils examine various artefacts of Hindu worship. For instance, you could assemble an example of a home shrine, using either a statue or a picture of one of the gods. Show a puja thali and explain the use and meaning of the objects on the tray. Light an aarti lamp or incense and demonstrate how a believer or priest would wave it in front of the image, explaining that Hindus believe that this aarti ritual is a way of welcoming Brahman into the home or temple.</p>		
<p>Activity 3: In their RE books, pupils create their own puja thali of items important to them, or things that make them a good person. They colour it in appropriately and write an explanation of each of the items they have chosen to include.</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Ask pupils if they have ever seen anyone with a red mark (<i>tilak</i>) on their forehead. Explain that this mark symbolises submission to Brahman.</p>		
<p>Plenary: Add new key words to the lotus diagram (Mandir, pandit, puja thali, aarti, murti, tilak). Pupils explain what they have included in their thali and why.</p>		

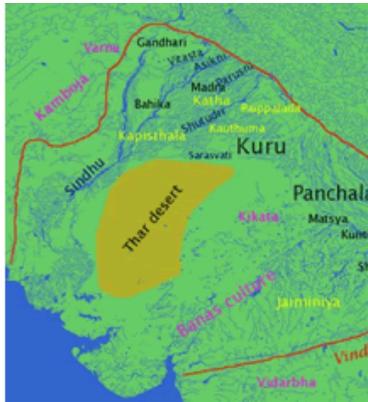
<i>Ahimsa</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	understand the consequences of the Hindu value of ahimsa; consider what they think regarding how humans should treat the planet and each other.
<i>Aim:</i> to understand that beliefs and values affect our behaviour.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: On the IWB, play a video of people or monks chanting Om (Aum). Show class the Aum symbol, explaining that Hindus believe that this is the sound of the universe being created. Show a picture of Vishnu sleeping on the serpent Anata before the beginning of creation. Read the Hindu creation story found in the background information. Explain that this is one way Hindus tell the story of the creation of the universe. Play the Om chant again. What do the pupils feel when they listen to this chant now that they know the story?</p>		<p><i>Note:</i> If you are teaching this unit early in key stage 2, finish with this lesson. If you are teaching this unit late in key stage 2 you could teach the following lesson instead</p> <p>Key words for lotus diagram: Aum/Om</p>
<p>Activity 1: Ask class if they know what the Golden Rule is, i.e. to treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Point out that one of the most important Hindu values is known as ‘ahimsa’, i.e. “do no harm”, which is a variation on the golden rule.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Remind class of the namasté greeting, which means, “I bow to the divine in you.”</p>		
<p>Activity 3: Return to the idea of Brahman as the formless being within all the gods, and explain that Hindus also believe that Brahman is within all creation. Therefore Hindus extend the golden rule to all living creatures, and this is the basis of the value of ahimsa.</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Ask class to think about practical consequences of this value, e.g. vegetarianism, and respect for the environment.</p>		
<p>Plenary: Add new key words to the lotus diagram. As a class, agree a set of rules for how they believe human beings should treat animals and the environment.</p>		

<i>Karma/Moksha</i>	<i>Pupils will</i>	begin to understand the concepts of karma and moksha; reflect on their own philosophy of life.
<i>Aim:</i> to explore one of the key aims of the Hindu religious life.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: Have an open discussion about why pupils think bad things happen to good people. Look at some religious and philosophical answers? What does the class think of these explanations?</p>		<p>Key word for lotus diagram: Atman, moksha, reincarnation</p>
<p>Activity 1: Explain that you are going to look at one way Hindus answer this question. Review the Trimurti, i.e. Brahman as three gods with the individual functions of creation, preservation and destruction. How does this reflect the experience of life as a cycle, i.e. we are born, we grow, we die, other beings are born etc.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Explain the Hindu concept of Atman, which is not quite the same thing as the idea of ‘soul’. Point out that Hindus believe that every creature’s essence, their Atman, survives death and is reincarnated in another form. Thus an individual Atman can live through many life times.</p>		
<p>Activity 3: Consider examples of cause and effect that pupils can relate to, e.g. if they engage in sporting activities or play a musical instrument they get better the more they practice. If they don’t work hard at school they are likely to get bad results, and so on: in other words what they do affects their future.</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Explain that karma is the Hindu concept of responsibility and accountability, and that Hindus believe that karma is what determines the fate of an individual Atman. This is how they explain bad things happening to a good person, e.g. they did something wrong in their past life.</p>		
<p>Activity 5: Finally, explain that Hindus believe that moksha, ‘liberation’, occurs when the Atman breaks the cycle of rebirth and becomes one with Brahman. This is what Hindus yearn for, and what they strive for in their spiritual practice.</p>		
<p>Plenary: Add new key words to the lotus diagram. Class to relate their personal responses to these concepts, comparing them to their own beliefs.</p>		

Key words	Namaste, Brahman, Trimurti, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Navaratri, Durga, Parvati, Saraswati, Lakshmi, dharma, reincarnation, karma, moksha (liberation), guru, ahimsa, Mandir, pandit, puja thali, aarti, murti, tilak, atman
Points to note	If there are Muslim children in the class, allow them to cut out Word Art pictures of the names of the gods, rather than pasting figurative examples into their workbooks.
Expected outcomes (Note: these depend on the choice of final lesson taught in this unit)	
<p>Pupils are working at emerging levels if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are able to name a few Hindu gods. ▪ are able to recognise the symbol of Aum and say what it represents. ▪ know that Hindus believe in reincarnation. ▪ are able to say what they might see in a Hindu temple. <p>Pupils are working at expected levels if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ understand that Hindus believe in one god, Brahman, who is given different names and forms. ▪ know that the symbol Aum represents the first sound of creation, and are able to recount the Hindu creation story ▪ are able to explain the concept of karma. ▪ understand that Hindus perform puja or worship in the home and in the temple and are able to describe a bit of ritual. <p>Pupils are exceeding expectations if they are able to do all of the above. In addition they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are able to draw comparisons between the Hindu belief in one god with many representations to the existence of many religions and philosophies. ▪ are able to discuss the benefits of <i>ahimsa</i> for social cohesion. ▪ are able to articulate their own response to the Hindu beliefs in reincarnation, karma and moksha. ▪ are able to describe the role of <i>murti</i> (images) in Hindu worship. <p>Note: assessment opportunities for the lesson on the TriDevi can be found on the ReOnline banquet here: http://www.reonline.org.uk/what-do-we-and-hindus-think-about-the-meaning-purpose-and-gender-of-power/</p>	

Background information





The term 'Hindu' was coined by visitors to India several centuries ago. It is derived from references to the river that flows in the Northwest of India. The name of that river, the Indus, has been pronounced as 'Sindhu' and 'Hindu'. Hence the people who lived in that part of the world were called Hindus, and their religion Hinduism.

Some practitioners of Hinduism prefer to call it 'Sanatan Dharma', *sanatan* meaning eternal and indicating that *dharma* was not founded by one specific person or book but was and is 'seen' and understood by many highly developed spiritual individuals, *rishis* and *rishikas*.

Most Hindus still live in India but a large number now live in many other parts of the world.

Left: Vedic India and Sindhu River ([wikimedia](#))

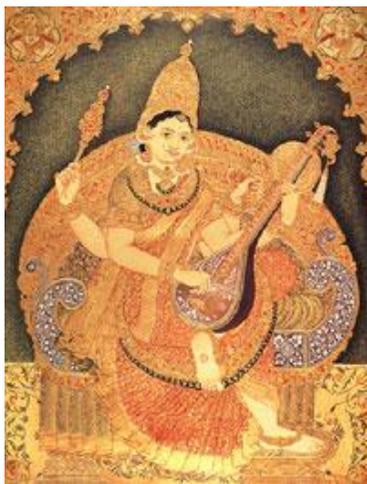
Dharma is an important term in Indian religions. In Hinduism it means 'duty,' 'virtue,' 'morality,' even 'religion' and it refers to the power which upholds the universe and society. Hindus generally believe that dharma was revealed in the *Vedas* although a more common word there for 'universal law' or 'righteousness' is *rita*. Dharma is the power that maintains society; it makes the grass grow, the sun shine, and makes us moral people or rather gives humans the opportunity to act virtuously.

But acting virtuously does not mean precisely the same for everyone; different people have different obligations and duties according to their age, gender, and social position. Dharma is universal but it is also particular and operates within concrete circumstances. Each person therefore has their own dharma known as *sva-dharma*. What is correct for a woman might not be for a man or what is correct for an adult might not be for a child.

The importance of *sva-dharma* is illustrated well by the *Bhagavad Gita*. This text, set before the great battle of the *Mahabharata*, depicts the hero Arjuna riding in his chariot driven by his charioteer Krishna between the great armies. The warrior Arjuna questions Krishna about why he should fight in the battle. Surely, he asks, killing one's relatives and teachers is wrong and so he refuses to fight.

Krishna assures him that this particular battle is righteous. Arjuna's *sva-dharma* was to fight in the battle because he was a warrior, but he must fight with detachment from the results of his actions and within the rules of the warriors' dharma. Indeed, not to act according to one's own dharma is wrong and called *adharma*.

Correct action in accordance with dharma is also understood as service to humanity and to God. The idea of what has become known as *sanatana dharma* can be traced back to the *puranas* - texts of antiquity. Those who adhere to this idea of one's eternal dharma or constitution, claim that it transcends other mundane dharmas - that it is the *para dharma*, the ultimate dharma of the self. It is often associated with *bhakti* movements, who link an attitude of eternal service to a personal deity. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/concepts/concepts_1.shtml



Saraswati

[EGfL](#)

Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, is honoured along with the other goddesses during the festival of Navaratri. However she also has her own festival, Saraswati puja, also known as Vasant Panchami. Celebrated on the fifth day of the lunar month of Magh, it usually occurs at the onset of spring during January or February, when the fields are full of blossoming mustard. This colour is picked up in clothing and food—even the statues of the goddess are adorned in garments of saffron.

People pray for wisdom and understanding on this day. *Rangolis*—traditional designs inscribed on the floor or ground—are often drawn at the foot of the goddess's statue, fish designs considered particularly auspicious. Family members bathe early in the morning and dress in white or yellow clothes, and children bring their schoolbooks to be blessed by Saraswati.

In India, schools are closed for the day, allowing students to participate in the festivities in the temple. Considered to be a particularly auspicious day for the beginning of learning, parents choose this day to teach their children their very first words.

In the *Rig Veda*, Saraswati is represented as a river deity, goddess of the Indus Valley river of the same name. At the time when the Vedas were written, worship was primarily performed on the banks of the river, with sacrifices consigned to Agni, the sacred ritual fire. When the Saraswati river dried up in the 4th millennium BCE, ritual and belief underwent transformation that was subsequently explained in the *Upanishads*. It was said that the gods entrusted Saraswati with the task of taking Agni to the sea. Prior to this time, the sacrificial fire had been seen as the sole link between humans and their deities. But when Saraswati completed her mission and returned Agni to the sea, the ritual of sacrifice came to be replaced by a sacrifice of self through the pursuit of creativity and knowledge.



[Brooklyn Museum](#)

There once was a powerful being named Mahisa who asked the god Brahma for the gift of immortality. "Impossible," Brahma replied. "Everyone who is born must die!" Mahisa, thinking he was being very clever, then said, "Well, then, make it so only a woman can kill me," and Brahma granted his wish.

Convinced he would never be killed, Mahisa gathered up a great demon army and marched on the king of heaven, the god Indra. A terrible battle ensued, lasting nearly a thousand years. Finally Indra and the rest of the gods were defeated and had to flee. All was in chaos. Helpless and afraid, the gods turned to Brahma for advice. Brahma admitted that it was he who had given Mahisa his power by letting him know that he could only be slain by a woman. The gods, too, believed that this would never happen, and were on the verge of giving up completely when Brahma took them to Lord Shiva, who in turn took them to Lord Vishnu. (cont. on next page)



Durga defeats Mahisa

www.exoticindiaart.com

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva grew red with anger as they listened to the tales of the defeat of Indra and the other gods at the hands of Mahisa and his army. From this anger they produced a righteous energy, which streamed from their mouths, creating a single mass of light: into this light a woman appeared, her body shining with the brilliance of a thousand suns, and it was thus that Durga was born.

At once, each of the gods gave her their weapons—a trident, a disc, a sword, an axe, a conch, a mace, a discus, a rope, a bow and some arrows. They also gave her a fierce tiger to ride. Holding the weapons in her many hands, Durga let out a terrible roar; her tiger responded with one of his own, and armed with the strength of all the gods, Durga went to her home in the mountains.

Mahisa, hearing of the arrival of a mysterious woman radiating beauty sent her a message, planning to claim her for his bride. With a smile Durga responded: “I can only marry the man who can defeat me in battle.” Believing that she was ‘only a woman’ and therefore nothing to fear, Mahisa accepted her challenge, and set off with his army to conquer her.

When they met, Durga called out to him, “You fool! Do you remember how you wished to die at the hands of a woman? Get ready to die!” She lifted her weapons and mounted her tiger, and Mahisa and his army advanced.

Durga’s weapons swirled: the mountains were torn in two, the clouds were scattered in the sky. Her tiger pounced upon the demon army, killing thousands. Able to change shapes, Mahisa gave up his real form to become a maddened black buffalo. Bellowing and stamping he ran straight at Durga. The battle was fierce; the earth shook with their fury.

During the battle, Mahisa assumed many forms, becoming sometimes a lion, sometimes an elephant that uprooted rocks and hills and hurled them at Durga, who shattered them with her sword. Again, Mahisa was a buffalo, snorting a mighty wind from his broad nostrils until Durga threw her rope around his neck. The buffalo tried to free himself, but the more he struggled, the tighter she made the rope: to her, fighting Mahisa was nothing more than a sport.

At last she dismounted and sprang on his back. With her foot on his neck, she thrust her trident into his chest and Mahisa fell dead. At once his armies were defeated. The observing gods called out to her: “We salute you, great Goddess! But for you, even we, who are immortals, could do nothing. But for your coming, heaven itself would have fallen down.”



Navaratri dance

www.redbridgerenet.co.uk



Durga Puja, Calcutta

indiansanskriti.files.wordpress.com

Every year during the lunar month of Ashwin/Kartik, Hindus observe ten days of ceremonies, rituals, fasts and feasts in honour of the supreme mother goddess; while it is known by different names, this is one of the few festivals celebrated across India.

In the north, the first nine days of the festival—known as **Navaratri**, ‘nine nights’—are observed as a rigorous fast. In Gujarat this time is the occasion for two special dances. *Gorba* (‘womb’) is a graceful dance that women perform around a lamp contained within the ‘womb’ of a pot, a way of honouring the goddess who is mother to the fire of life in us all. The *dandia* is a complex dance performed by both men and women holding sticks festooned with bells that they strike against those of their partner in increasingly frenzied rhythms.

In Bengal the eighth day of Navaratri is known as **Durga Puja**. Durga means ‘inaccessible’, the goddess perceived as the personification of the *shakti* (‘divine energy’) of Lord Shiva. Huge structures called *pandals* are constructed and decorated to house communal services and celebrations. On the final day an earthen statue of Durga is taken in procession to a nearby river, where it is ceremonially immersed and given a passionate send-off, marking the return of the goddess to her home on Mount Kailash after her brief visit to Earth.

In the south the final day of the festival is observed as **Dussehra** (‘tenth’), during which the triumph of good over evil is celebrated in mythic terms as the death of the demon king Ravana. Huge effigies of Ravana are burned amidst the cacophany of fireworks.



Pages from the Vedas

www.venoastrology.com

Hindus believe (simplified from: <http://www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/nineb/>):

- 1) in a one Supreme Being who is both inside creation and beyond it.
- 2) in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and other sacred texts, e.g. Agamas, Upanishads, the Gita.
- 3) that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
- 4) in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates their own destiny by their thoughts, words and deeds.
- 5) that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births, until it achieves *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of rebirth.
- 6) that divine beings (devas and gods) exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotion create a communion with these divine beings.
- 7) That in order to find liberation it is important to have guidance from a guru, to be disciplined and well-behaved, to perform rituals such as purification and pilgrimage, to know oneself, to meditate and to surrender in God.
- 8) that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered. They therefore practice *ahimsa* (noninjury) in thought, word and deed.
- 9) that no one religion teaches the only way to salvation, but rather that all genuine paths deserve tolerance and understanding.



Puja Thali

shopping.oneindia.in



Aarti ceremony, Varanasi

www.flickr.com

Puja is the religious ritual that Hindus perform on a variety of occasions to pray or show respect to God. The purpose of puja is to communicate with God, to keep a thread to continuity, of relationship, between this physical world and the subtle inner worlds. Puja also serves as a means of offering love, praise, thanks, and supplication. During puja an image (murti) or other symbol of the god serves as a means of gaining access to the divine. This icon is not the deity itself; rather, it is believed to be filled with the deity's cosmic energy. It is a focal point for honouring and communicating with the god. For the devout Hindu, the murti's artistic merit is important, but it is secondary to its spiritual content. The objects are created as receptacles for spiritual energy that allow the devotee to experience direct communication with his or her gods.

Pujas vary in their scale, duration, the number of deities being honoured, and whether it is being performed for public or private benefit. Most practicing Hindus perform puja once or twice a day. Puja should be done after a shower or bath and it is recommended that rites be performed before food intake to ensure full concentration. Puja is also performed on special occasions in addition to the daily ritual.

The pujas performed daily in a temple or dwelling differ from those performed during a special occasion in that they require greater resources and usually more than one priest. But regardless of scale, all pujas follow the same simple principle, i.e. treat the deity like an honoured guest.

Puja consists of meditation (dhyana), austerity (tapa), chanting (mantra), scripture reading (svadhyaya), offering food (bhog) and prostrations (panchanga or ashtanga pranama, dandavat). The individual also applies a tilaka mark on the forehead with sandalwood paste, and then a vermilion (kumkum) dot (chandlo) in its centre. This signifies submission to God. Puja is usually concluded with aarti.

Puja can be divided into the following steps: 1) Invocation 2) Offering 3) Prayer 4) Conclusion (Aarti) 5) Immersion

Five things can be found on the puja thali (tray): 1. A pot of water for ritual cleansing. 2. A bell to call the family to worship. 3. A tiny pot of the red gum paste to mark the forehead. 4. An aarti lamp for the aarti ceremony where everybody passes their hands over the lighted lamp and then over their forehead to make them feel closer to God. 5. An incense burner.



Vishnu in cosmic sleep
(Note Brahma arising on the lotus from Vishnu's navel)

www.mythfolklore.net



Aum

thumbs.dreamstime.com

In the beginning there was no heaven, no earth and no space between. A dark ocean lapped against the shores of emptiness and floating on the waters was a giant cobra, Ananta the king of serpents. Resting on his endless coils lay Lord Vishnu, protected by the mighty serpent. Everything was peaceful, still and silent. Nothing moved.

Then, from the depths of the sea a humming sound began: '*Aum*'

The sound grew and spread, filling the emptiness and throbbing with energy: '*Aum*'

Vishnu awoke. It was time. The long night had ended and as the dawn began to break, a magnificent white lotus flower grew from Vishnu's navel. Sitting in the middle of the lotus blossom, was Lord Brahma, the Creator, also asleep: while Brahma slept nothing existed.

Vishnu spoke, "Awake! It is time to begin," and a mighty wind swept up the waters and Lord Vishnu and the serpent king vanished.

Brahma awoke and began to create the world. He remained in the lotus flower boat, floating and tossing on the great ocean. Then he stood, raised his arms and calmed the winds. He split the lotus flower into three, making one part into the heavens, another part into the earth and the third part into the sky. In that moment the world had begun.

Brahma created grass, flowers, trees and plants of all kinds to cover the new earth. To these he gave the sense of touch. Next he created the animals and the insects, large and small, to live on the land. Some had fur, some had skin, some had scales, some were armoured, some were tiny and some huge, some timid and some fierce. He made birds fly in the air and fish swim in the sea. To all these creatures, he gave the senses of touch and smell. He gave them the power to see, hear and move.

Now Brahma made someone to care for the world, someone to enjoy it and take care of it. He created a new and different creature, humankind, made as male and female: the man was called Manu, 'wise', and the woman was called Shatarupa, 'mysterious'.

Manu and Shatarupa had been created out of Lord Brahma himself. They walked off into the world Brahma had given them to take over their new responsibilities. Hindus believe that a part of the spirit of the one formless god – Brahman – can be found in all creation. It gives creation life. Hindus also believe that the world will continue to exist until Brahma falls asleep again, at which point it will cease to exist and all will return to Brahman again until Brahma awakes once again.