

# Hindus

## Origins

Hinduism has been traced back to the third millennium B.C. Archaeologists working in the Punjab and Indus valleys have discovered evidence of purification and fertility rites, including statues of goddesses. During the second millennium B.C., according to the traditional view, a nomadic people known as the Aryans, possibly from Southern Russia and the Balkans, migrated into India and influenced Hinduism, for example emphasising the role of fire and the things in the natural world as gods. The traditional view of the Aryans and Hinduism is questioned by some who argue that the role of the Aryans is overstated. The Aryan influence is also said to have been responsible for the body of religious literature known as the Vedas, which had been written by around 800 B.C. During the first millennium A.D., poems and songs were composed which helped to make Hinduism more appealing to ordinary people. Interpretative literature known as the Brahmanas developed during this period. Brahmanic Hinduism was later superseded by more mystical writings such as the Upanishads.

In the nineteenth century Rammohan Roy established the movement known as Brahma Samaj (Society of God). He encouraged education generally, particularly the study of Western science. Ramakrishna Paramahansa emphasised a loving God and placed less emphasis on Hindu scriptures.

## Today

There are around 900 million Hindus worldwide. Around 80 per cent of Indians are Hindu. There are four main denominations: the Vaishnavas, the Shaivas, the Shaktas and the Smartas. These each have their own deity, with the Smartas worshipping five deities. Hindus will often worship deities from all four traditions. A so-called 'modern Hinduism', incorporating many Western ideals, has developed from radical reform movements, of which there were four main ones, including Gandhi's Satyagraha.

## What the mainstream says

- Gods can be worshipped as idols.
- Brahma is the creator of the universe and of all beings.
- There is a trinity of gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
- The goddess Durga manifests herself as nine separate goddesses.
- The soul can be reincarnated.
- The sum of a person's actions is called Karma. The *satvik karma* is selfless and for the benefit of others; the *rajasik karma* is selfish, the *tamasik karma* is supremely selfish.
- Dharma is the path of righteousness.
- Moksha is pursuit of liberation from the cycle of reincarnation, loss of the egoistic self, and union with Brahman.
- There are four life stages: "Brahmacharya" (the Student Stage), "Grihastha" (the Householder Stage), "Vanaprastha" (the Hermit Stage), "Sannyasa" (the Wandering Ascetic Stage).

(Source: <http://hinduism.about.com>)

## Suggested initial Scriptural approach

Paul's words that "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4) succinctly show, firstly, that there is one God, and secondly, that idols are nothing. This can be used as a basis to develop arguments that challenge two of the main beliefs of Hinduism. Another important aspect to address is the Bible teaching concerning the soul.