

Hinduism revision notes.

Hinduism is a religion which **started around 5000 years ago. Nobody knows who started it** unlike most religions, but we do know that it **started in India**, where it is still strong. However, Hindus have also now moved around the world and taken their religious traditions with them, so there is a large Hindu population in Britain. Hinduism started as a country based religion and it is still obvious that nature has a big impact on Hindus and the way in which they worship.

Hindus believe in **one main God known as Brahman**. Brahman is unlike any person and Hindus struggle to understand the vastness of Brahman, **so they use many hundreds of Gods and Goddesses to help them to try to gain an understanding of Brahman**. Each God or Goddess has a 'job' and qualities which, if put all together, would give people the idea of Brahman which they struggle to understand in any other way. For example, **Ganesha** is said to be the God of knowledge and **Lakshmi** the Goddess of beauty, luck and wealth. They tend to be worshipped at certain types eg. festivals, but Hindus can also worship any of the Gods and Goddesses at any time. Ganesha is a very popular God and is often worshipped at exam time, so the student has a slightly better chance of succeeding in the exam! The Gods and Goddesses appear as pictures or often statues and look quite lifelike, but most Hindus see them as symbolic rather than actual beings.

Hindu worship is very varied, which shows how the religion has developed over the years and can be practised in lots of different ways. Hindus often worship at home, which is called **puja**. Every Hindu home will have some space for a **shrine** containing a picture or statue of their favourite God/ Goddess and other items. Some of the common items in a shrine are candles, a bell, water to wash the God/ Goddess, coloured powders and food offerings made by the family. When a person or family worships (which will be daily) the bell will be rung to show that worship is beginning, the candle will be lit and food will be offered to the statue. This is then 'blessed' by the God/ Goddess and becomes known as **Prasad**. This food is then donated to charity or eaten by the family themselves – not wasted.

Worship in the **Mandir** (Hindu temple) is similar in many ways. People will bring offerings to present to the God/ Goddess and offer prayers in front of the shrine. Hindus will definitely attend the Mandir at festival time and some go regularly but there is no rule over worship.

Traditionally, Hindu society was separated into different **castes or varnas**. A person would be **born into a caste and stay there throughout that life** – no chance of swapping caste. This sounds negative in the sense that some people were stuck in quite low castes and couldn't do anything to change it or improve themselves but it did also keep society running as all

types of jobs were covered. Also, if the person in a caste did not do what that caste expected of them, they would suffer in their next life. The 4 castes were:-

Brahmins – priests and religious advisors

Kshatriyas – rulers and fighters

Vaishyas – traders (shopkeepers) and skilled workers

Shudras – unskilled workers

There was a fifth group who were not part of this system, called the **Untouchables**. It was a very hard life if you were an Untouchable, as people looked down on them, wouldn't have them as friends and made them do all of the dirtiest jobs.

The caste system is now pretty much part of Hindu history as it is now against the law to discriminate against people in India but it is part of Hindu history.

Hindus have a strong belief in life after death but it is different from many other religious beliefs. They believe in a system called **reincarnation**, which means that a soul can and probably will live thousands of times in different body forms. The aim is that a soul becomes pure and good enough to join with Brahman and stop living but that can take ages to achieve. Reaching that point is called **Moksha**.

Hindus believe that the soul need to get both its **karma** and **dharma** right before it has any chance of going to Brahman. **Karma means actions** – so doing good things will gain the soul credit and doing bad things will harm its chances. At the end of the current life, it will be a weigh up of the good against the bad to decide whether the next life will be up or down. **Dharma means duties** – what we have to do in life. This is where the caste system came back in – we said that the different castes had to do certain jobs. If the person didn't do their duties, the soul would be damaged and the next life would be a step down.

Think of reincarnation as being like a game of snakes and ladders – without the luck of rolling the dice to go up the ladders. Hindus have to work hard to get their soul close to Brahman and they can fall a long way if they get it wrong – could become a soul in a plant or animal. That means that they would have a long climb back up through being different kinds of people before they stood a chance of their soul going to Brahman.