



# Hinduism

Hinduism is perhaps the most complex and confusing pagan religion in the world today. It is marked by extremes and contradictions.

For example, Hinduism places such high premium on life that faithful Hindus would never intentionally kill an insect, a predator, or a poisonous snake; yet they let millions of their own people live in abject poverty.

Some Hindus withdraw from social circles, while others, such as Mahatma Gandhi, become persuasive politicians with millions of followers.

Some Hindus inflict their bodies with terrible pain for religious discipline, while others live sedate, comfortable lives.

We do not know exactly when Hinduism began. Hindus do not revere any one founder or pioneer thinker, and the first Hindu writings were probably recorded long after the religion began. It seems that Hinduism arose about the time Moses was leading the Hebrews to the Promised Land.

There are 800 million Hindus living in the world today, more than twice the number of people living in the United States.

Dr. Louise Renou, who has studied Hindu writings for many years, observes:

*No founders' initiative, no dogma, no reformers have imposed restrictions on (Hinduism's) domain; on the contrary, the contributions of the centuries have been superimposed without ever wearing out the previous layers of development.*

Because of this, Hindus have many different books of scripture, and they respect all of them – even though their scriptures radically disagree. They follow hundreds of different rituals and worship a teeming multitude of gods.

To understand how all of this came about, let us try to look back at the beginnings of Hinduism.

## Origins of Hinduism

Strong warring tribes known as the Aryans moved into India in the time of Abraham (c. 2000 B.C.). The Aryans brought to India their language (known as proto-Sanskrit) and their religion, a crude form of animism. They brought hymns, chants, and rituals associated with their worship of nature, and by 1000 B.C. they had recorded many of these hymns in writing.

They called these collections of hymns the Vedas (Sanskrit, “revealed wisdom”). So about the time David was composing the Psalms, the Aryans were composing their religious songs, the Vedas.

About 200 years later, the priests of this religion began compiling books of doctrine called the Brahmanas. They also made a series of handbooks called the Sutras, which described their doctrines in a more systematic way. They did this around 800-600 B.C., about the time Daniel and his friends were witnessing to their conquerors in Babylon.

About the time of Christ, a Hindu writer composed a long epic poem known as the Bhagavad-Gita, which describes a battle between a man named Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna. In the course of their struggle, the poem reveals that Krishna was the god Vishnu, who took human form to offer salvation to anyone who would surrender his life to Krishna.

Because this seems so similar to the gospel of Jesus Christ, some scholars call the Bhagavad-Gita the “New Testament of Hinduism.” Of course, nothing could be further from the truth; a fictitious god like Krishna can’t do anything to save us. Yet the Hindus were talking about this at the same time the real Savior was walking the streets of Jerusalem. Was that just a coincidence?

Later, Hindu wise men compiled books called the Puranas (Sanskrit, “ancient tales”), which described the myths of Rama, Krishna, and other gods. These stories are very popular among Hindu people today.

## Facts About Hinduism

- Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion, surpassed only by Christianity and Islam in numbers.
- As one of the world’s most ancient religions, Hinduism is still growing in many countries around the world.
- There are 800 million Hindus in the world today, which is 13.5% of the world population.
- Hindus have a broad religious tradition where you can find 33 million distinct gods that are worshipped and 200 million cows that are considered holy.
- Hindu schools of thought can be philosophical and mystical, but popular practice among the majority of Hindus is idolatrous and steeped in superstition.
- Hinduism readily absorbs elements of other religions that it comes in contact with, as it has done with Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam.
- Some Hindus believe Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, and one guru, Satya Sai Baba, even claims to be the reincarnation of Jesus himself.

## The Caste System

Related to Hinduism, the caste system divides people into social groups by racial heritage and determines a person’s position in society.

Although outlawed by the government, the caste system still divides Indians into 6,400 distinct social groups. Caste has an influence on a Hindu's response to the Gospel. Eighty percent of Christians in India today come from the lower castes. Many of the higher castes have never clearly heard the good news of Jesus Christ and are resistant toward Christianity because they perceive it as a lower caste religion.

## Hindus Around The World

There are 13 million Hindus outside India. You don't necessarily need to go to India to be with Hindus. In fact, here in the U.S., there are significant numbers of Hindus in cities like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The following is a list of areas with sizeable Hindu populations.

Country/Region	Hindu Population
India	957,636,314
Nepal	21,294,843
Malaysia	1,063,741
Middle East	792,872
South Africa	156,973
United Kingdom	514,762
Mauritius	1,250,882
United States	1,528,670
Trinidad	21,737
Fiji	362,603
Canada	336,901
Suriname	470,784
Kenya	369,137

Western culture is influenced by Hinduism more than many people realize, often under innocent-sounding names and disguises.

Touring India provides a first-hand view of much of the architecture, lifestyle, people, and results of Hinduism. While traveling, observe the destructive influence these dark designs of Satan have on the lives of people, contrasting with the life and countenance of those who have found Christ.

*Adapted from "Where Was God When Pagan Religions Began,"  
Nelson, 1980, Lester Frank Sumrall.*