



# Introduction

## What Is Hinduism? A Brief Summary

Hinduism is one of the largest world religions, along with religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism. It is also one of the oldest religions. In total, there are over one billion followers of Hinduism in the world today. What we currently refer to as Hinduism was historically and is still currently known as *Sanatan Dharma*, which means the eternal religion. (*Sanatan* means eternal and *dharma* refers to the spiritual path.)

Defining Hinduism is challenging as Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed to set of teachings. Hinduism has an extensive history with many key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books. For these reasons, Hinduism is often described as being a way of life or a family of religions rather than a single religion.

There are a few things that can be said with certainty about Hinduism. One is that it has its roots in India in what was the Indus River Valley in present-day Pakistan. Secondly, most Hindus revere a body of texts as sacred scripture known as the *Vedas*. Thirdly, most Hindus hold and draw on a common system of values known as *dharma*. In addition there are a few foundational aspects as follows:

- The Hindu concept of time and the origins of the universe is one that has no beginning and no end. This present universe was preceded by an infinite number of universes which will be followed by another infinite number of universes.



Figure 1: *Om* or *Aum*, Sacred Sound Symbol

- The majority of Hindus believe in one **supreme god** (*The Brahman*). Everything is a part of and a manifestation of *The Brahman*, the ultimate reality; however, *The Brahman's* qualities and powers may be represented by a great diversity of gods/deities all of which emanate from *The Brahman*.
- The concept of *The Brahman* and the relationship of the Supreme Being with nature and individual souls, as well as *The Brahman's* various manifestations are the subject of many different Hindu schools of philosophy/belief.
- The universe, Earth, and all creatures were created by **Brahma, one of the many gods that emanated from** *The Brahman*.
- The birth and dissolution of the present universe is directly connected to Brahma's life. Human time and that of the gods is different. The lifespan (*Maha Kalpa* or *Paradha*) of Brahma is estimated by some to be over 300 trillion human years. One day and night in Brahma's space and time (*kalpa*) is believed to be over 8 billion human years. Each *kalpa* is further divided into two *artha kalpas* (one day and night), and each of these is further divided into 100 *maha yugas*. Each *maha yuga* consists of a series of four shorter *yugas*, or ages, as follows:
  - *Satya (Krita) Yuga* (Golden Age)
  - *Treta Yuga* (Silver Age)
  - *Dvapara Yuga* (Bronze Age)
  - *Kali Yuga* (Dark Age)

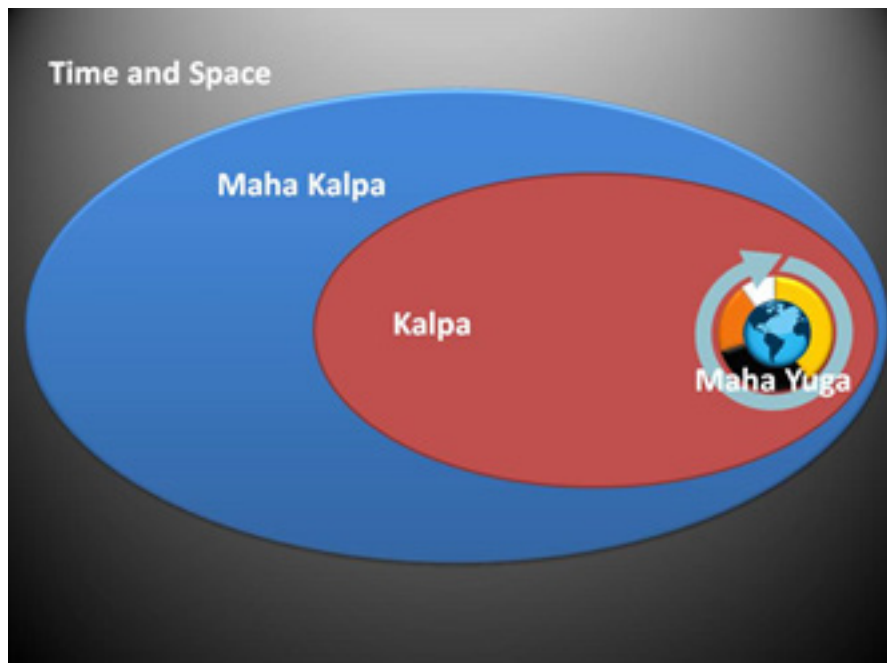


Figure 2: Hindu Concept of Time

- As the Hindu notion of time is cyclical, the universe is thought to continually flow through these four periods of time. As time progresses from one *yuga* (era) to another, human society degrades or diminishes in moral, spiritual, and other qualities to a level lower than before. Eventually, the cycle culminates in the destruction of the existing order at the end of the *Kali Yuga*. After this, the golden era of *Satya Yuga* begins anew. (More recently, based on new interpretations of scriptures, some Hindu's have come to believe that there is a descending and ascending order of the four *yugas*. As such, the order would be reversed moving from *Kali Yuga* to *Dvapara Yuga*, and so on.) Prevailing Hindu calculations and beliefs put us as currently living in the *Kali Yuga* stage.

- Hindus believe that the soul—the real self (*atman*)—is distinct from the temporary body made of matter (*prakriti*). As a result, existence is an ongoing **cycle of birth, death, and rebirth** (*samsara*), governed by *karma*.

- Hindus believe that each soul creates its unique destiny according to the law of *karma* (the universal law of action and reaction). Therefore, one's soul passes through the cycle of successive lives, evolving through many births.

One's next **incarnation** is dependent on how the previous life was lived. If this person has done good things in their life, the good *karma* will be in the soul's favour in the next life.

- The primary problem faced by humans is to be stuck in the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). The goal is to be liberated from this perpetual cycle of *samsara* and achieve *moksha*. *Moksha* is for the human soul (*atman*) to become one with god, to merge the *atman* with *The Brahman* (the ultimate reality, supreme god, or creator). This happens when one's soul is pure. Self-control, truthfulness, non-violence, and compassion are prerequisites for the path to become pure.
- There are different paths towards *moksha* (becoming one with god, liberation, or enlightenment). Different schools of Hinduism historically have debated about whether *moksha* can be achieved within one's life, or only after one's present life. Regardless of the school, Hinduism stresses *moksha* may only be achieved through strict adherence to universal principles through the practice of one's *dharma* (religious duties, rights, laws, conduct, and values) as revealed through Hindu sacred/holy books and usually revealed through one's *guru* (spiritual mentor).
- The term *yoga* is from the Sanskrit language and means union. In Hinduism, *yoga* refers to a variety of systems of philosophy-based practices which outline how one can unite body, mind, and soul, or their actions and thoughts, with divinity, in the quest for *moksha* (liberation/enlightenment).
- *Moksha* can be achieved through a combination of four paths (*Mārga/Yoga*). These are *Jnana/Gyan Yoga* (The Path of Knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (The Path of

## Moksha

The final liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

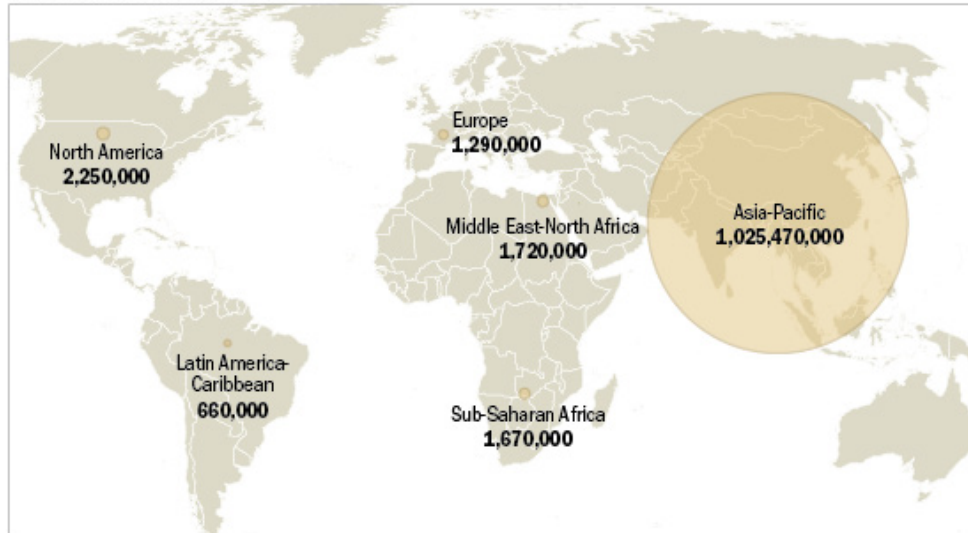
Loving Devotion), *Karma Yoga* (The Path of Selfless and Righteous Action), and *Ashtanga/Raja Yoga* (The Path of Physical Exercise and Meditation).

- There are four goals or objectives of life in Hinduism which collectively are called *purusartha*.
  - *dharma* (virtuous, proper, moral life, duty)
  - *artha* (material prosperity, income security, means of life)
  - *kama* (pleasure, sensuality, emotional fulfillment)
  - *moksha* (unification of the soul with god)
- In Hinduism, human life is believed to comprise four stages called *ashrama*. Ideally every person goes through each of the four stages, although most people do not enter the fourth stage. As well, some spiritual masters/saints may go directly from the first to the fourth stage.
  - First *Ashrama* = *Brahmacharya* (Student Stage)
  - Second *Ashrama* = *Grihastha* (Householder Stage)
  - Third *Ashrama* = *Vanaprastha* (Spiritual Stage)
  - Fourth *Ashrama* = *Sannyasa* (Renunciation Stage)
- Hinduism is a way of life. Every aspect of life—from waking to sleep—is attributed to god. Thus, in Hinduism everything is attributed to the Supreme God. For example
  - In the morning, you worship the sun and treat it like a god as it provides warmth and life.
  - Everyone reveres their parents as gods because their parents gave them life and provided the children with food, shelter, and an upbringing.
  - Knowledge is worshipped as god because knowledge leads the soul closer to *The Brahman*. When a student opens a book, they worship the book before reading it because of the knowledge that it will impart. Likewise, students worship their teacher because they will provide guidance in the students' quest to obtain knowledge.
  - Hindus worship other human beings as gods because they recognize that all souls have *The Brahman* within them. They put their hands together and greet them with *namaste* (originated from Sanskrit, *namah astute*— which, translated into English, literally means, *I bow to you*).
- The main **Hindu texts** are the *Vedas* and their supplements (books derived from the *Vedas*). *Veda* is a Sanskrit word meaning knowledge. These scriptures do not mention the word Hindu but many scriptures discuss *dharma*, which can be translated as code of conduct, law, righteousness, or duty.
- Hindus believe that all life is sacred, and must be loved and revered through *ahimsa* (non-violence).
- Hindus believe that there are many religious paths to salvation and that all religions offer paths that lead to god's love and light.

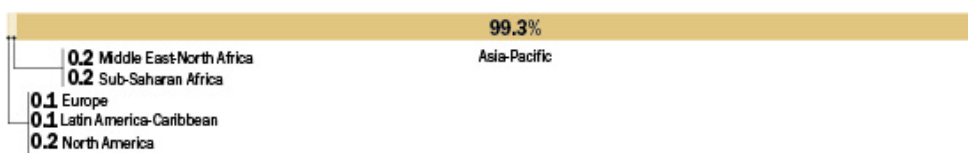
# Hindus in Canada and the World

## Regional Distribution of Hindus

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Hindu population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Map 1: Regional Distribution of Hindus: Population by Region as of 2010



Figure 3: Cremation of a Hindu Labourer Near Victoria, BC. June 15, 1907

Hinduism is the religion of just over one billion people in the world. It is estimated to be the third most common religious affiliation worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2012). About 95% of adherents reside in India, but Hindus represent a significant percentage of the population in many other countries. The United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa have significant Hindu populations, as does Canada.

Immigration from India and other countries to Canada over time has resulted in a significant Canadian Hindu community\*. In 2011, almost 500,000 Canadians identified themselves as being Hindu, representing 1.5% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey). It is estimated that Canada has over 90 Hindu temples, with 63 of them being located in the Toronto area.

Hindus and Sikhs first began immigrating to Canada from Punjab, India around the turn of the 20th century (from the late 1800s to 1910), primarily to British Columbia.



Figure 4: Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims Aboard the SS Komagata Maru

Early Hindu and Sikh immigrants were not well received in Canada and the United States. Laws were soon passed in both countries limiting immigration and other rights. An example is the **Komagata Maru** incident of 1914 that involved the Japanese steamship on which several hundred citizens from what was British India at that time attempted to immigrate to Canada but were denied entry.

The SS Komagata Maru sailed from Hong Kong, then also a colony of the British Empire, via Shanghai, China, and Yokohama, Japan, to Vancouver, carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, British India. Eventually, only 24 passengers were admitted to Canada and disembarked: the other 352 passengers were not allowed to leave the ship. The ship was forced to return to India with the remaining passengers. This was but one of many incidents in the early 20th century in which exclusion laws in Canada and the United States were used to exclude some immigrants.

Until the 1960s, most of Canada's (East) Indian community was of the Sikh faith. In the 2001 national census, 297,200 Canadians identified Hinduism as their faith. The present-day Hindu community in Canada is of diverse national origins, many immigrating from India and former British colonies in East Africa, as well as nations such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. As well, there are Canadian converts to the various sects of Hinduism that have occurred over time as a result of intermarriage with persons of other faiths, and through the efforts of groups such as the Hare Krishna movement, various *Gurus*, and other organizations. Toronto has the largest population of Hindu Canadians with approximately 200,000 living in that metropolitan area.

\* The Canadian Encyclopedia, Hinduism, [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hinduism/](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hinduism/).

## Hinduism in Manitoba

While it is likely there were a few Manitobans of Hindu origins prior to the 1960s, generally the history of Hinduism in Manitoba is traced back to the early 1960s. At that point, a few Hindu families had begun to settle in Manitoba and were mostly living in Winnipeg and Brandon. These early immigrants were well-educated professionals, such as teachers, university professors, medical doctors, engineers, and others. In the early 1970s, more families migrated to Manitoba and, in particular, Winnipeg.



Figure 5: Early Hindu Immigrants Faced Racism in Canada and the United States

This 1905 article from the Sunday Puget Sound American newspaper—Bellingham, Washington—warns of the Hindu “hordes invading” from Canada.

## Winnipeg Area

### *Hindu Society of Manitoba*



Figure 6: Hindu Temple and Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre

In 1970, a few members of the Hindu community in Winnipeg began to discuss the development of a common place of gathering or worship. This resulted in the incorporation of the Hindu Society of Manitoba as a religious and charitable organization on December 9, 1970.

An annual *Diwali* celebration sponsored by the Hindu Society was soon launched and held at a United Church on St. Mary's Road. This was followed by events related to the observation of major Hindu Festivals. Weekly Sunday prayer meetings were added. These meetings became very popular and, while they were initially held at the homes of various devotees, members soon began holding them regularly at the International Centre.

In 1978, the Hindu Society established Vidya Bhavan School to teach Hindi and introduce young children to basic Hindu beliefs and religion. The *Diwali Mela*, a social gathering of Hindus to celebrate *Diwali*, was started by the Society and was initially held in halls across the city. It was an instant success and became the most popular event in the Society's calendar. The *Diwali Mela* is now held annually at the RBC Convention Centre and is attended by more than 5000 members of the Indian community.

In 1979, the Society officially opened the Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre at 854 Ellice Avenue on a *Diwali* night. This first temple was important in bringing the Hindu community together. Eventually, the Hindu Society formed a Temple Building Committee to raise funds and construct a new and larger Hindu Centre. A new Hindu Temple, the Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre, was opened in 2005. It is a 30,000 sq. ft. facility that incorporates a temple, a *puja* hall, offices, four classrooms, a priest's residence, a library, a visiting saint's residence, a community kitchen, a cultural hall with a professional stage, and a gymnasium. Today, both temples are extensively used on a daily basis by the Hindu community.

### *Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha*



Figure 7: Hindu Gods and Goddesses Statues at Hindu Temple and Dr. Raj Pandey Hindu Centre

**Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha** was founded in 1978 by Hindu's of primarily Indo-Guyanese backgrounds. The group's temple and cultural centre is located at 240 Manitoba Avenue in the North End of Winnipeg. Religious and cultural celebrations are offered throughout the year. The Manitoba Hindu Dharmik Sabha also holds its own independent *Diwali Mela* celebration.



### *Durga Devi Mandir (Shanti Seva Sabha and Cultural Centre Inc)*

**Durga Devi Mandir** is a Hindu temple dedicated to the principal and popular goddess, Durga (also known as Devi, amongst other names). She is the central deity in the *Shaktism* tradition of Hinduism, where she is equated with the concept of ultimate reality called *The Brahman*.

This temple is one of three in Winnipeg that has strong Indo-Caribbean origins. The membership comprises mostly Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese families with a few with origins in India. Manitobans of other faiths and origins participate in some of the group's activities.

The group traces its origins to 1999 in Winnipeg with meetings in the home of Pundit Balram Mongru. Pundit Mongru has Guyanese origins. Its activities range from Sunday-morning worship to a variety of community-oriented services. In 2005, the current temple was formally opened.

### *Manitoba Arya Samaj*

The Arya Samaj was founded in the 19th century CE by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in India. It has and continues to be a reformist movement in India and within Hindu-*Dharma* worldwide. It is not a separate religion. Rather, it is a sect within Hinduism. The Arya Samaj doctrine is based on the *Vedas* and rejects the idea of caste, child marriages, and the exclusive role of *Brahmins* as religious leaders. Principles of Arya Samaj do not extol immunity from mistakes, except in the laws of *karma*. The movement teaches monotheism and opposes the use of images in worship, as well as many traditional Hindu rituals.

The teachings of Swami Dayanand reached Guyana in the early 1900s; however, the arrival of missionary Bhai Parmānand in 1910 led to a strong growth of Arya Samaj throughout the country. Manitobans of Guyanese origins, as with the Dharmik Sabha, were instrumental in establishing the Manitoba Arya Samaj.

## Ramakrishna Mandir and Cultural Centre



Figure 8: Sri Ramakrishna Math Temple, Chennai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Math is a monastic group for men founded by Ramakrishna (1836–1886), a 19th-century religious Hindu leader from Bengal.

The Mandir is named for two of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu: Rama and Krishna. It is located at 903 Winnipeg Avenue, and was founded in 1998. The founding Hindu families were descendants of Indian indentured labourers born in Guyana, Trinidad, and other parts of the Caribbean. They brought with them their faith and scriptures. They strive to work and live in harmony with the people of diverse cultures of their adopted lands and, most importantly, continue to follow *Sanaatan Dharma*, the “Hindu way of life.”

The aim of the Mandir is to share the fundamental teachings of *sanaatan dharma* in that there are multiple paths to the One Supreme Divine. Ramakrishna Mandir recognizes and welcomes peoples of all faiths and diversities to partake in the religious and cultural activities, and to share the heritage and the wisdom of the *Vedic* scriptures, the *Epics*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* with rituals, chanting, songs, and celebrations. Weekly programs include *Satsang* on Sundays and *Shiv Rudra Abhisek* on Mondays.

### *International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)*

The Winnipeg ISKCON temple is dedicated to fostering consciousness of Lord Krishna (Lord Jagannath). ISKCON temples are devoted to Lord Krishna and his elder brother Baladeva/Balarama and younger sister Subhadra. Krishna is one of the most widely revered and most popular of all Hindu deities. Krishna is worshipped as the eighth incarnation (*avatar* or *avatara*) of the Hindu god Vishnu and also as a supreme god in his own right.

ISKCON was established in New York by A. C. Bhaktivedanta (also known as Swami Prabhupada). Swami Prabhupada was very successful in spreading his message, particularly to non-Indians. By the time he died in 1977, there were 108 temples spread throughout six continents. ISKCON temples are found in at least 9 Canadian cities from coast to coast.

ISKCON Manitoba provides devotees and seekers a place to find each other and perform spiritual activities. It also offers a program of educational activities to systematically train aspiring devotees. Members of the community include people of various backgrounds and origins. Many are converts drawn by the Hare Krishna movement.

## Beyond Winnipeg

There are Manitobans of Hindu faith throughout the province, although the majority live in or near Winnipeg. Some communities with a significant Hindu population beyond Winnipeg include Brandon and Thompson.

### *Thompson*

In Thompson, there is an active Hindu community. The Hindu Prathna Samaj of Thompson celebrates various special days, such as the Navratri festival, in the Thompson area. As well, some events and functions are held in collaboration with the Sikh community.

### *Brandon*

As with Winnipeg, Hindus in the Brandon area have largely immigrated or migrated to the area since the 1960s. In 2002, it was estimated that there were approximately seventy-eight Hindu families living in the Brandon area. There is currently an initiative to open a temple in Brandon to serve the local Hindu community.

# Notes