

# ISKCON Educational Services

## Did You Know?

### Twenty-five Interesting Facts about Hinduism

1. Academics recognise that 'Hinduism' is a contested and rather arbitrary term. Many Hindus prefer alternative terms, such as Sanatana Dharma (the Eternal Religion) and Vaidika Dharma (the followers of the Vedas). Some prefer 'Hindu Dharma'.
2. There is no single founder, but there are several distinct and predominant founder-figures, ranging from eternal deities, through ancient rishis (seers) to contemporary spiritual leaders.
3. Hindu learning tends to begin with the nature of the self (atman) rather than God. Practically all schools distinguish the eternal self from the temporary, material body.
4. The Hindu words for God are 'Bhagavan' or 'Ishvara'. 'Brahman' is more of a philosophical term meaning 'Spirit' or 'the Absolute Truth'.
5. For most Hindus, the Divine or God lives in three places, as Brahman (everywhere), Antaryami (within the heart ) and Bhagavan (outside, beyond this world)
6. Most Hindus believe in a single Supreme. In much modern thought, there are two main beliefs, namely that he (and/or she) is (i) personal and (ii) impersonal.
7. For most Hindus, the numerous Hindu deities represent various forms and aspects of the (single) Supreme.
8. Practically all deities can be linked, directly or indirectly, to the main three 'couples', the Trimurti and their respective wives. In this way, the many deities can be readily classified.
9. Hindu notions of time and space are distinctive. Time is considered cyclical and unbounded rather than linear and limited. Space is not necessarily centred on Earth. Texts describe vast expanses of both time and space, and various 'dimensions' of existence.
10. Hindus have their own views of history, and do not generally subscribe to the now-dated 'Aryan invasion theory'. They generally date events and texts earlier than scholars.
11. There are 3, 4 or 7 main denominations within Hinduism, based largely around their 'chosen deity' and main focus of veneration (for more details, see further fact sheets or contact ISKCON Educational Services).
12. Hindu groups are also distinguished in three other main ways, namely by (a) their approach to textual and ecclesiastical authority (b) their preferred 'yoga' or discipline, and (c) their specific philosophy (for more details, see further fact sheets or contact ISKCON Educational Services).
13. Hinduism has largely managed to blend religion and philosophy. Not many Hindus consider their tradition a 'faith' or 'belief system', as do most of the Abrahamic traditions/
14. Of the six main *darshanas* (philosophical systems or 'perspectives'), Vedanta is most popular today, and favours the two main notions of 'monism' (an impersonal God) and 'inclusive monotheism (a personal Supreme), often blending the two.
15. Hinduism advocates the spiritual equality of all whilst acknowledging material diversity.

16. Many Hindus consider the ancient varnashrama system to be different from caste (hence beware of translating *varna* as 'caste'). The varnashrama system classifies humans into four varnas (occupational dispositions) and human life into four ashramas (stages).
17. There are widely variant views on the exact significance of India (referring variously to the land, the people, the nation). Some favour nationalism; others lean towards a shared wisdom transcending national and sectarian boundaries; yet others try to blend the two ideas.
18. The cow is sacred, as is all life, but she is especially special for her role as mother. Motherhood and the role of nurture are generally considered core Hindu ideals.
19. Moral issues are best addressed through modern and transferable philosophical principles (such as the three *gunas* – see #22 below) rather than the more dated, context-specific Manu Smriti.
20. Hindu thought, though ancient, still appears relevant to many contemporary issues.
21. Hindu thought promotes economic, environmental and personal-lifestyle sustainability through the ideal of *sattva-guna* (the quality of serenity and goodness). The other two qualities ('*gunas*') are *raja-guna* (passion, ambition) and *tama-guna* (ignorance, darkness).
22. Hindu texts extol the virtues of protecting five sections of society, namely: (1) women (2) children (3) animals, especially cows (4) the elderly, and (5) holy and wise people.
23. Whereas the Abrahamic faiths value religion for community-building – perhaps to counter highly individualistic lifestyles - Hinduism much stresses individual spirituality. Despite this, many stands extol the virtues of *sat-sanga* (or *sadhu-sanga*), the company of saints.
24. Many Hindu words and concepts have entered the English language. Words (and some cultural practices) include *pyjama*, *chutney* and *bungalow*. Concepts include *guru*, *karma* and *avatar*.
25. Sanatana Dharma (the Eternal religion) isn't merely a means of perpetuating conservative, long-standing traditions. Rather it acknowledges that some truths and values are timeless and universal, forever relevant to the human dilemma; at the same time, to be applied with consideration of time, place and circumstance.