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From the Editors

It is with profound pleasure that we bring you this special edition on Hinduism. This edition endeavours to answer frequently asked questions by Hindus who have migrated to Australia from many different countries. It is impossible to encapsulate the timeless Hindu philosophy and religious practices in a few pages. Therefore, we have only addressed the questions that have been repeatedly asked during our numerous presentations and SATSANGS.

We have addressed very briefly on frequently asked questions; however, much more information is available to address these questions comprehensively. We will attempt to answer some advance level questions in detail in our future publications.

We sincerely hope that the contents of this edition will assist you to clarify some of the basic and practical queries on Hinduism to our younger generations.

The editors acknowledge the various sources of information which assisted us to compile this special edition.

95,473 declared Hindu population in Australia in 2001.

	<u>1996</u>		<u>2001</u>		<u>Change</u>
	<u>'000</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>'000</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Hinduism	67.3	0.4	95.5	0.5	41.9

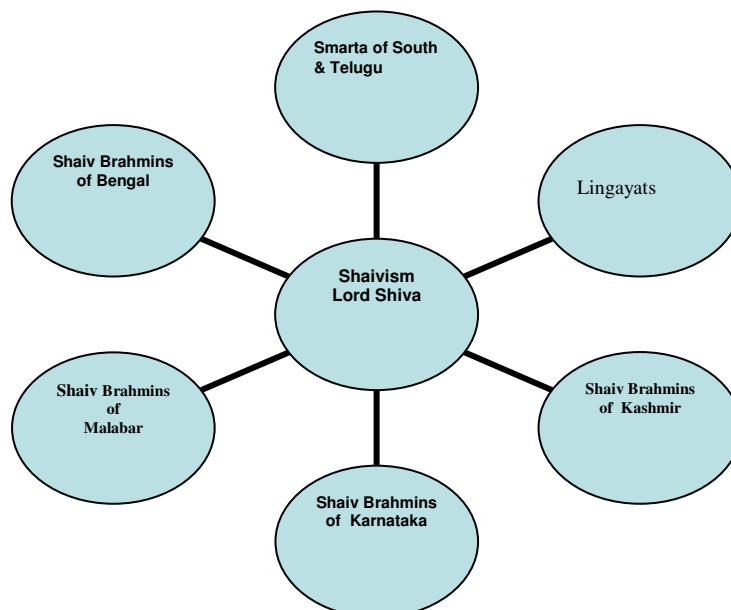
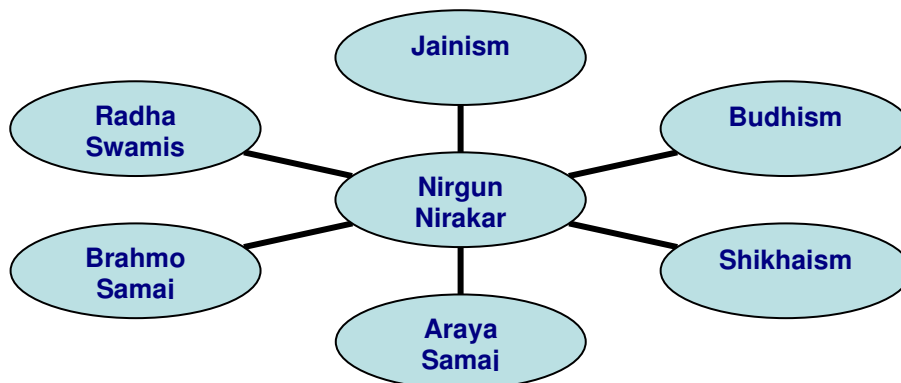
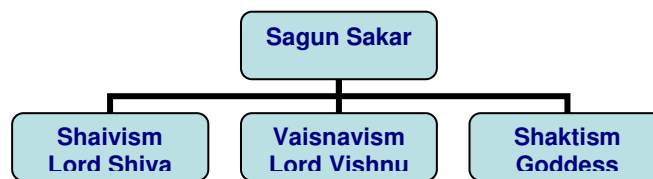
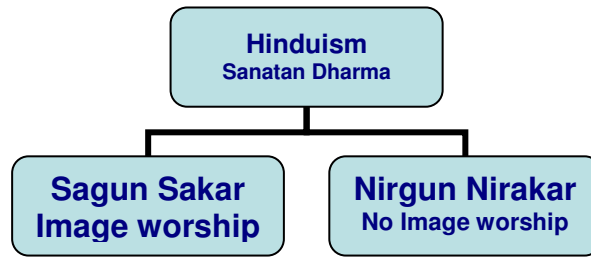
Source: ABS data available on request, 1996 and 2001 Censuses of Population and Housing.

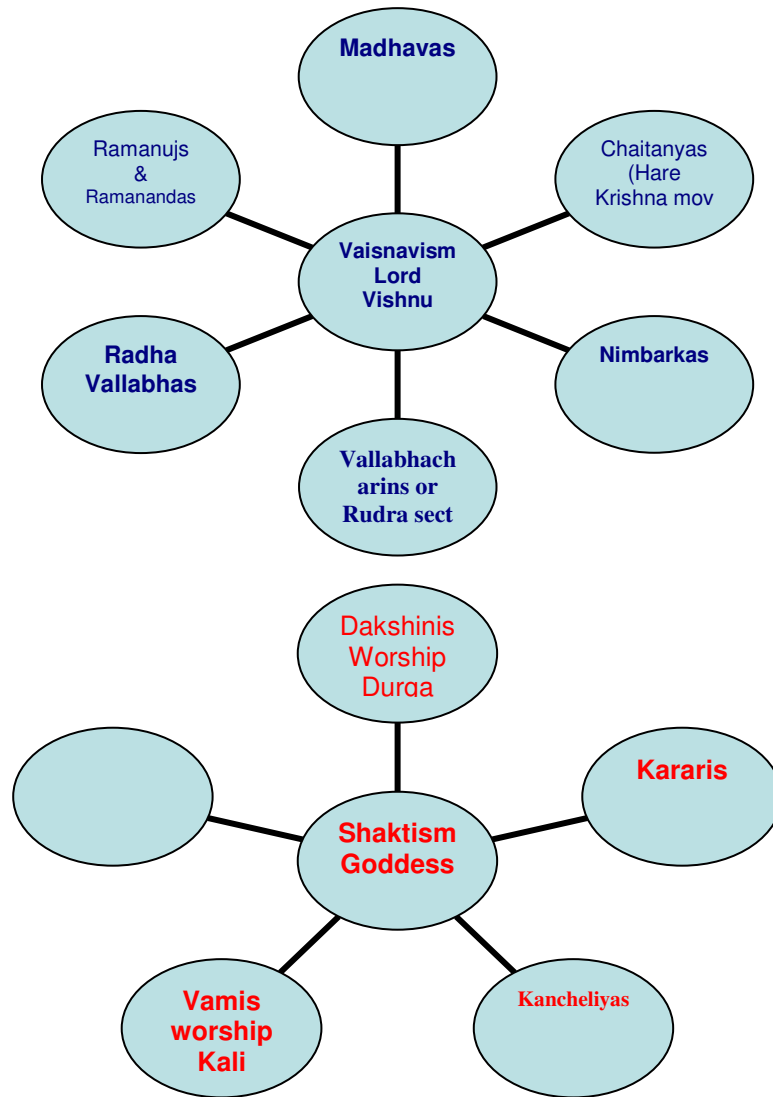
Current geographic distribution of Hindus

Of the total Hindu population of the world, about 94% (890 million) live in [India](#). Other countries with a significant Hindu population include:

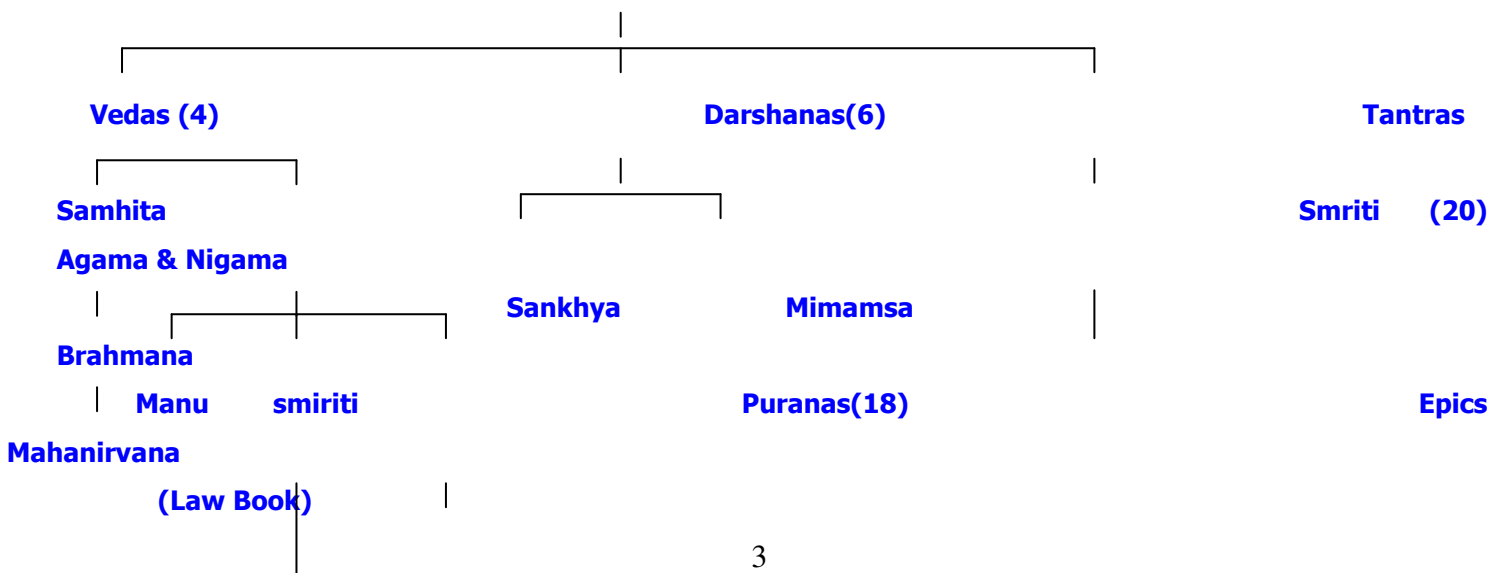
- [Nepal](#) (22.5 million)
- [Indonesia](#) (4.3 million)
- [Sri Lanka](#) (3 million)
- [Malaysia](#) (1.5 million)
- [South Africa](#) (1.1 million)
- [Russia](#) (700,000)
- [Bhutan](#) (560,000)
- [Canada](#) (320,000)
- [Guyana](#) (270,000)
- * [Bangladesh](#) (14.4 million)
- * [Pakistan](#) (3.3 million)
- * [Philippines](#) (1.8 million)
- * [United States](#) (1.5 million)
- * [United Kingdom](#) (1 million)
- * [Mauritius](#) (600,000)
- * [Kenya](#) (330,000)
- * [Fiji](#) (300,000)
- * [Trinidad and Tobago](#) (250,000)

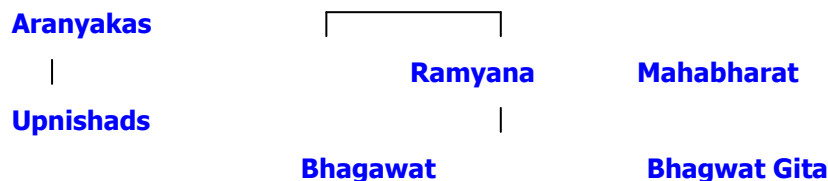
Source: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Hinduism>





Hindu Scriptures





Miscellaneous

In addition, there are the Sauras, who worship the Sun-God; Ganapatyas who worship Ganesh as supreme; and Kumaras who worship Skanda as the godhead.

Akas Mukhis, Gudasas, Jangamas, Karalingis, Nakhis, Rukharas, Sukharas, Urdhabahus, Ukkaras are all Saiva sects.

Charana Dasis, Dadu Panthis, Hari Chandis, Kabir Panthis, Khakis, Maluk Dasis, Mira Bais, Madhavis, Rayi Dasis, Senais, Sakhi Bhavas, Sadma Panthis, are all Vaishnava sects.

Frequently asked questions about Hinduism part 1

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is one of the world's major religions and holds the distinction of being the most ancient of the world's religion. The word Hindu is a combination of the first letter "Hi" of Himalayas and the last compound "ndu" of the word *Bindu*. It refers to India as Hindusthan, a country lying between the Himalayan Mountains and *Bindu Sarovar* (Cape Commorin Sea). Hinduism was originally known as Dharma. It is also called **Sanatana Dharma**; the word Sanatana means eternal. Hinduism is the means whereby any individual can actually recognise and act in accordance with their divinity and simultaneously live in peace and harmony within the life of materiality in the present.

Is Hinduism a religion or is it a culture?

The truth is - it is both a religion and a way of life. Hinduism is a way of life, a philosophy on life. Hinduism asks each one of us to search for the Divine within us. We are all divine and each one of us has the capacity to realise divinity within us; therefore each one of us is a Hindu by birth. It is through ignorance we do not know our divinity. Under the umbrella of Hinduism, today one finds numerous religious denominations promoting and practicing the Hindu philosophies throughout the world.

Who Founded Hinduism?

Hinduism has no founder. It does not owe its existence to any specific prophet. It is based on divine revelations experienced by a series of sages, called *Rishis*, while they were in intense meditation. The divine knowledge received by the Rishis is contained in four sacred books called *Vedas*. The word Vedas means knowledge, as *Vedas* is the fountainhead of all knowledge.

How old is Hinduism?

Hinduism is the world's oldest known religion. It predates recorded history. Hinduism is the first religion of humankind.

What is the status of Hinduism at the present time?

There are over one billion Hindus today (2005). Most are in India, but Hindus live all over the world. Sizable Hindu populations live in Nepal, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, America, Canada, England, New Zealand and some other countries. Australian census 2000 indicates that with more than 100,000 Hindu families in Australia, Hindu religion is rapidly on the increase in the country.

To which major world religion do most Indians belong?

Approximately 80% of the Indians around the world are Hindus. The modern trend reveals that Hinduism is attracting devotees from many parts of the western world. The Hare Krishna, Advaita and Vedanta and have significant numbers of non Indian practising members

Is there any Hindu nation in the world?

Yes, Nepal - approximately 95% Hindus live in the country.

What is the definition of God in Hinduism?

According to Hindu thought, God is; the infinite Supreme Reality; the Absolute Truth; a divine conscience energy form which energises flow; the sole cause behind everything visible and invisible; the creator of the entire universe. God is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and self-evident. God has no beginning and no end. The concept of God in Hinduism is very deep rooted, but basically it goes like this: The ParBrahm is God,. The ParBrahm firstly manifested himself into two formless essences, the Nirguna Brahman (without attributes) and the Saguna Brahman (with attributes). The Brahman is the supreme personality, but cannot be seen. The first manifestation of the Saguna Brahman is Maha kala (time), and then it manifested itself into the Trimurti. Hinduism is a panesthetic monosthetic faith, which basically means, the belief that God is one, but resides in all that exists.

What are the Hindu scriptures?

Hindu scriptures can be divided into the following categories:

The **Shruti** or literature consisting of the Vedas

The **Smriti** literature consisting of the Dharma shastras or the law books.

The **Itihasas** comprising of the two epics

The **Puranas** or **Itihasas** consisting of the ancient lore

The **Agamas** dealing with the mechanics of ritual worship

The **Darsanas** dealing with the various schools of philosophical thought.

What are the Vedas?

The Vedas are part of the Shruti literature. Shruti means that which is heard. The Vedas are considered to be divine in origin and not man made. The rules that apply to the universe and its inter-relationships with its parts through time require an appropriately qualified person to understand and than to clearly explain them. Divine intervention also becomes necessary for revelation to occur. For example, Isaac Newton did not create gravity he explained the rules that would help others to benefit and expand on it.

Hence we say no one truly knows how old they are. Some of the Rig Vedic verses were perhaps composed in the early phases of human civilization. For centuries they were passed down from one generation to another through oral tradition. They were probably rendered into written form during the epic period, around 1500 BC. The Vedas are eternal (Nitya) and out of this world (Apauruseya). Hindus believe that God brings the Vedas into this world at the beginning of every cycle of creation for the welfare of the mankind and withdraws them again at the end of it. The Vedas are revealed to the mankind through Rishis (*rsi*) or great seers. The Rsis were considered to be the mind born children of Brahma, who were created solely for the purpose of introducing the Vedas to the mankind. The word *rsi* means he who had seen (*drs*) the Truth. The word 'veda' means knowledge or wisdom and from the word veda are derived the words vid (to know), vidya (study or education), vidvan (the scholar) and vedavid (the knower of the Vedas).

The 'Vedas' are the primary scriptures of **Sanatan Dharma**. The Vedas shaped ancient Indian society and governed ethics and morality. The Vedas can be identified in terms of their origin into "Shruti" (verbal) and "Smriti"(written). A Sage named Krishna Dvaipayana (*Ved Vyasa*) recorded and documented them as **Yajur Veda** which was the original Veda. Due to its voluminous content it was classified into four categories: -1. **Yajur Veda**, 2. **Rig Veda** , 3. **Sama Veda**, 4. **Atharva Veda** .The sages who shaped the Hindu religion merely reiterated the knowledge of the Vedas.

Who is the compiler of Vedas?

VedaVyasa also known as Badarayana or Krishnadvaipayana

What are the divisions of the Vedas?

Each Veda is divided into four parts, namely the **Mantra, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishad**. The Mantra part contains mantras or hymns addressed to various gods and goddesses, which are chanted during ritualistic prayers or invocations according to a particular rhythm. The **Mantra** part is concerned mostly with the pronunciation of the words and the vibrations they create in the minds of the invokers and in the physical atmosphere that surround them so as to render the descent of the divine forces easier and swifter. The **Brahmana** part contains information about rites and rituals and serves as a kind of guide book that explains the method and the manner in which the rituals are to be conducted. The **Aranyakas**, or the forest books deal with the significance

and philosophical back ground of various rituals. The fourth part of the Veda is called the Upanishad. The **Upanishads** are books of deep spiritual knowledge known as Vedanta. There are hundreds of Upanishads ascribed to the four Vedas of which 12 are considered to be the most important.

Which Veda is in musical form?

Sama Veda

Which Veda is for chanting?

Rig Veda

Which Veda is for sacrifice?

Yajur Veda

Which Veda is for modern Science?

Arharva Veda.

How many Mantras and Sukthas are there in Vedas?

It has 10,581 mantras and 1000 suktas.

What do the Vedas symbolize?:

The four parts of the Vedas have significance and relevance to the four stages (ashramas) of human life, namely brahmacharya, grihastashrama, vanaprastha and sanyasashrama respectively. How this is so is explained below.

1. **Brahma-acharya** : Brahmacharya is the phase of studentship. During this phase a student of the Vedas is expected to memorize the mantras completely and recite them with utmost accuracy. At this stage in life for a man, the mantra part of the Vedas is important.
2. **Grihastha-ashrama**: This is the stage of the householder. During this phase each adult is expected to lead a righteous life and live like Lord Vishnu on earth working for the preservation of his family and society through righteous deeds. For him at this stage, knowledge of Brahmanas gain importance, because they deal with the techniques of karmakanda.
3. **Vana-prastha**: This is the stage of forest dwelling. During this phase a person leaves his house and properties to the care of his children and retires into the solitude of the forest with his wife, to lead a spiritual life. The knowledge contained in the Aranyakas is useful to him during this phase.. (Interested readers may visit our sacred scriptures section and read the Aitareya Aranyaka available there under the heading the Upanishads.)
4. **Sanyasa-ashrama**: This is final stage of renunciation in the life of an individual during which he renounces the worldly life completely and spends the rest of his life in

the contemplation of God and Self. During this stage the knowledge of the Upanishads is very useful to him. According to another classification the contents of the Vedas are divided into three parts instead of four. These are the first part known as karma-kanda or the procedural part comprising of the Mantras and the Brahmanas, the second part known as upasana-kanda or the contemplative part consisting of the Aranyakas and the third part known as Jnana-kanda or the knowledge part comprising of the Upanishads.

What is Smriti?

In contrast to the Shruti literature, which contains revelations, the Smriti literature is a product of human intellect.

It contains the works of various individuals who base their information and interpretations upon the Vedas. Smriti means that which is based upon memory. It is a sacred literature that is intellectual in origin and meant for the purpose of human welfare.

Strictly speaking all scriptures which are not shruti or divine in origin come under this classification. However, standard classification includes only those works that are based upon the knowledge contained in the Vedas. These are the law books

known as dharma shastras. They deal with various aspects of human life and social organization. They instruct how an individual should conduct himself or herself in society in the light of the caste to which the individual belongs. They define the rules and roles for various groups of individuals in the society. The topics range from such issues as the status, duties and responsibilities prescribed for the four main castes, remedies against possible transgression of the prescribed laws and also remedies for divine retribution.

Among the available **dharma-shastras** four are considered to be very important: They are the works **Manu, Yagnavalkya, Sankha, and Parasara**. Of these the first one known as **Manusmriti** is the most popular. Known as Manavadharma shastra, or the scripture of human laws, Manusmriti was considered in ancient Hindu society as the ultimate guide book for human conduct and social and religious behavior. It provided guidelines for the Hindus to conduct themselves in line with their social order and religious duties. It is also said that these four works were supposed to provide guidance to people during the four great ages called the Mahayugas: the **Manusmriti** for the first great age called Satyug, the **Yagnavalkya-smriti** for the second great age called Tretayug, the **Sankha-smriti** for the third great epoch called Dvaparyug and the **Parasara-smriti** for the present and the last great epoch called Kaliyug.

What is the difference between the Shruti and the Smriti?

Smritis means written scriptures, which can be read and remembered while Shrutis are heard or from the word of mouth. Smritis are written mostly in Sanskrit language. Sruti means a note of sound. Since the Vedas are received through the act of hearing they are called Srutis.

What are the six Shastras/ Vedaangs?

They are: Shikha, Kalpa, Vyakaran, Nirukta, Chhanda, and Jyotish

What are the six Darshans?

They are: Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisheshik, Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Vedanta

What are the Itihasas?

Itihas means history. Generally the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are included in this category. The Ramayana is the story of Rama and his battle against the evil forces unleashed by Ravana, the arch villain with a mixture of both good and bad qualities arising out of egoism, who abducts Sita, wife of Rama and faces the inevitable. In end Rama kills Ravana and rescues his wife.

The Mahabharata is the story of two brothers, Pandu and Dhritarashtra, their children, namely Pandavas and the Kauravas and the recalcitrant attitude between them for political power which leads to a Great War and mighty destruction of both families, resulting in the victory of the righteous Pandavas. Lord Krishna gives his support to the Pandavas and helps them defeat and destroy the Kauravas and their great army.

The Bhagavad gita is the message of Sri Krishna not just to Arjuna on the battle field but to the entire humanity who have to fight many battles both internally and externally while they live on earth. The book contains great spiritual truths which are relevant even today.

What are the Puranas?

The Puranas describe the religious events that happened in the remote past, sometimes starting with the story of creation itself. They basically deal with the incarnations of God and the deeds of God in various forms. In many ways they resemble the epics in describing events. But there is one basic difference. The epics deal with the history of mankind and the events that happened on the earthly plane in the past, while the Puranas

deal with divine characters, and events associated with them on different planes, not just on earth. The Puranas and the Itihasas are jointly referred as the Panchama Veda or the fifth Veda. The Puranas have played a very significant role in the past in keeping the religious fervor of the people high. The sustained practical application of the Vedas is purified and crystallised through the study of the puranas – that which makes it complete or *purna* and using in guiding ones life.

While as books of great antiquity they may not they may not throw much light on the ancient history of Hinduism, it is difficult to ignore their contribution to the gradual evolution of Hinduism into of the most popular religions of the world. Without them and the two great epics, Hinduism would not have attained this status. They instilled faith in the masses and brought them into the fold of Hinduism.

How many Puranas are there and what are they?

There are 18 main (maha) Puranas and 18 secondary (upa) Puranas are accounted. The Mahapuranas are (1) Brahmapurana, (2) Padmapurana, (3) Vishnupurana, (4) Sivapurana, (5) Bhagavatapurana, (6) Naradapurana, (7) Markendeyapurana, (8) Agnipurana, (9) Bhavishyapurana, (10) Brahmavaivartapurana, (11) Lingapurana, (12) Varahapurana, (13) Skandapurana, (14) Vamanapurana, (15) Kurmapurana, (16) Matsyapurana, (17) Garudapurana and (18) Brahmandapurana. Of these the most popular are the Bhagavatapurana, the Sivapurana and Brahmapurana.

What are the Agamas?

In Sanskrit 'agama' means acquisition of knowledge. In terms of religious significance, the Agamas are as important as the Vedas. They are also not derived from the Vedas. The Agamas are manuals of divine worship. They deal with such topics as the codes of temple building, image making, and the modes of worship. Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism have their own respective Agamas.

There are five types of Agamas namely:- Sakta Agamas, Soura Agamas, Ganapatya Agamas, Saiva Agamas and Vaikhanasa Agamas

What are the Darsanas?

The Darsanas deal with the various schools of philosophical thought that prevailed in ancient India. Darsana means vision or perception. There are six darsanas grouped into three pairs based upon their approach to the concept of the existence or non existence of Absolute God.

These are : 1. Nyaya and the Vaisheshika 2. The Sankhya and the Yoga 3. The Mimansa and the Vedanta

These six darsanas actually represent six different streams of philosophical thought that prevailed in ancient India. Each school had its own founder and a principal scripture as its original source. Thus the Nyaya Sutras were written by Gautama, the Vaisheshika Sutras by Kanada, the Sankhya Karika by Iswara Krishna, the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, Mimamsa Sutras by Jaimini and Vedanta Sutras by Badarayana. In course of time a great deal of literature gathered around these six schools of thought, much of which was in the form of commentaries (bhashyas) of the original six works.

What is Puja and why do we do it?

In Hinduism, Puja is essentially a ritual suggestive of symbolic offering of our lives and activities to God and enjoying whatever that comes out of it as a gift from Him. In Hinduism Puja is the most popular form of divine worship. Hindus can worship at home or at Mandir (Hindu Temple), commonly Hindus worship at a shrine by praying or performing Puja or Aarti (forms of worship), Hindus also worship the gods with music (Bhajans) or offerings (Prasad).

The way a Puja is conducted in Hindu households is akin to the way a guest is invited into the house and treated with utmost respect. The Hindu tradition equates a guest with God with this simple expression, "Athidi devobhava", which means a guest is verily God Himself.

The word "puja" consists of two letters, "pa" and "ja". "Pa" means "parayana" or continuous repetition of the names of God and "ja" means "japa" or continuous mental recitation of the names of God. So according to this interpretation "puja" is essentially a kind of worship in which both parayanam and japam are practised by the devotees. Devotees and priests worship using mantras, slokas, sathaka, suttees, bhajans and kirtans.

What is Purna Kumbha or Purna Kalasa ? (The sacred vessel):

It is generally placed as the chief deity or by the side of the chief deity before starting the Puja. Symbolically it stands for mother goddess in general or goddess Lakshmi in particular. It consists of an earthen or a metal pot with either water or rice in it, with leaves (of generally five specific species) in its mouth and a bowl of rice, flowers and coconut at its top. The pot represents mother earth, the flowers represent the ornamentation, the rice in the bowl represents either the material wealth or the powers of the goddess or both and the coconut represents the divine consciousness. Water represents Sagar or oceans, mango leaves represent wealth, Lakshmi and prosperity. Kalsa is placed on astha dal kamal, which is designed and decorated eight-petal lotus flower with ornamental rice or wheat. Priests chant mantras to invoke the Trimurti i.e. Bramha, Vishnu and Mahesh. All the four Vedas are also commissioned at these auspicious occasions

What is the Trimurti/ Trinity?

The Hindu trinity is as follows:

Brahma – The creator (manifestation of) god – Brahma creates new things - Brahma has four heads to show his mind thinks of all things.

Vishnu – The preserver (manifestation of) god – Vishnu preserves things and keeps the word going.

Shiva – The destructive (manifestation of) god – Shiva destroys worn out things in order to make space for new creations.

Does Hinduism prescribe a dress code?

No. However many Hindus prefer to wear traditional attire when visiting a temple, performing or attending a religious ceremony. Clothing should suit the occasion.

Is there an authority in India to whom all world Hindu temples are accountable?

Every Hindu religious organisation is accountable to God and every **Samapradya** has head of the organisation who is known as Acharya or Jagat Gurus.

Hindu temples are independent and community based. They are built with public donations and are run by democratically elected management bodies. However there is central Hindu religious bodies in most Hindu practicing countries where religious issues are clarified and discussed with its head of the organisation or Acharya.

What is Sanskrit language?

This is also known as **Dev Bhasha**, (*the language of gods*). This is world's original, oldest and most profound language. This language was created by sounds and vibrations

of Lord Shiva's damru, which was later, translated into alphabets by Lord Ganesha. Sanskrit language has 52 alphabets. The grammarian *Panini Rishi* later codified this language and is referred to 'classic Sanskrit' and is now used in most parts of the world today. The language used in the Vedas is normally called 'Vedic Sanskrit' Hindi language is a daughter of Sanskrit language.

Who are the 7 or Sapt- Rishis?

They are :- Kashyap, Atri, Vashistha, Vishwamitra, Jamdaagani, Bharadwaaj and Gautam

What is the meaning of Dharma?

Dharma comes from the Sanskrit word "*Dhr*" which literally means to hold or to sustain. Virtues, beliefs, moral obligations, ethical laws, codes of behaviour, traditions and righteous actions that sustain human life in peace and harmony are all called aspects of Dharma. Although it is translated as religion in English language, there is no single word which describes the true and complete meaning of Dharma. The frame of reference is 'how am I live in a sustainable way and in harmony'.

Who is the Hindu God?

Supreme Brahman is responsible for the existence of the universe. Hindus call the ONE God by countless male and female names, for example Ishwar, Parmatama, Bhagwan, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Prabhu, Parmeshwar and Shakti. Hindus also believe that people from other cultures and languages understand this one God in their own way, each religion has its own path to this one God. Hindus consider Rama and Krishna as Avatars (the reincarnations of God) who destroyed wickedness, and re-established righteousness by exemplifying ideal human behaviour. Hinduism pre-existed Rama and Krishna.

If Hindus believe in one god, then why do Hindus worship many Gods?

God has endless attributes and aspects. Although God is formless, to make worshiping more tangible and focused for ordinary Hindus, many forms and names were given to

each of God's major attributes and aspects. For example God creates, sustains and dissolves this world. Each of these three aspects is represented in a beautiful image as Brahma, (generator) Vishnu (preserver) and Shiva (destroyer or regenerator) The Bhagwatam (school of thought) teaches that there are different divine beings or demigods who live-in unseen worlds and serve god. Hindus have male and female names and images for these demigods whose worship is recommended for specific benedictions. Other major religions have emulated this belief and call these demigods as *The Guiding Angels*

For those who know chemistry will write H₂O (water molecule). Is this moisture, water, ice, hailstone or snow? One who knows will say off course that's H₂O. Others will argue that all these are different. So to with God and the multiple forms.

Why do Hindu Gods have more than one head and more than two arms?

People will generally question how Hindus can believe in the existence of something with more than one head or more than two arms. Generally Hindus believe these deities had no physical existence but were visualized in different forms and shapes by our great sages and rishis. The number of arms and heads symbolizes the powers the deities possess. For example by having four hands **Saraswati** can perform four different activities at once. **Bhrama** can see in all four directions at the same time because he has four heads. Hindus believe that god can appear in any shape or form, at any time and at any place according to the needs.

What is the Mantra, which is called as Ekakshara Mantra?

Mantra is a medium of concentration which protects us and controls our senses. By chanting mantras divine vibes are produced which ultimately leads us towards God. The Ekashara mantra is known as AUM – The Pranava

What is the presiding deity of the Gayathri Mantra?

Savitha Devi – the creative power of Sun God

Who gave the world the Gayathri Mantra?

Sage Vishwamitra

How many aksharas or letters are there in the Gayathri Mantra?

Twenty-four (24)

Do Hindus have sacraments and rituals like other religions?

Yes, of course they do. Hindus call them *Sanskaras*, which means *actions that purify, refine or reform*. Sanskaras help Hindus in their spiritual evolution. Like traffic signs,

Frequently asked questions about Hinduism part 1

they give directions to human beings at every crucial stage of development. Sixteen ceremonies are prescribed for Hindus starting at conception and ending at death.

What are the sixteen Sanskaras or Sacraments?

Garbhaabhaan	- Prayer for conceiving baby.
Punsawan	- Prayer once conceived
Seemantonnayan-	End of the pregnancy period
Jaatkaram	- Prayer immediately after baby born
Naamakaran	- Name giving ceremony

Nishkraman	- First long journey of the baby from home
Annapraashan	- Rice feeding ceremony
Choodaakaran	- Shaving the head for the first time after birth
Karnavedh,	- Ear Piercing ceremony
Yagnopaveet	- Taking holy thread
Vedaarambh	- Begin study of holy Granthas and Scriptures
Samaavartan	- Graduation in Scriptures
Vivaah	- Wedding ceremony
Vaanprasth	- Taking up the path of devotion and retire from worldly desires
Sanyaas	- Totally detached from worldly desires and renouncing oneself to God
Anteshthi	- Funeral ceremony with the final rituals and rites

What is Pitra Pooja or Pitra Yagn, and why should we do it?

(Prayer for ancestors /family heritage)

In this pooja three generations from the paternal and maternal family is worshiped. While we are grateful to them for bringing us to life, we are indeed grateful to them for who we are and what we are through their hard work, efforts and sacrifice. This is a very powerful pooja to seek blessings from their spirits to guide us ahead so that we can breed healthy and strong future generations. Pitra Pooja is observed and performed every year in the month of Ashween, Krishna Pakch. This is a great opportunity for us to offer gratitude to our ancestors. However, those families who do not perform yearly Pitra Pooja, perform it a day before wedding ceremonies of their children. Pitra Pooja is called Nandi Mukh Shraad (also known as Mantri pooja) where we commission all the deities including Pitra Devta to seek blessing and to ensure that wedding is successful and obstacle free.

How does Hinduism define soul?

The soul is the innermost essence, the true existence and identity of a being. Hindus call this subtle, conscious, invisible life force *Aatma*. The soul is not to be confused with body or mind. Life starts when a soul enters the body. The human body perishes but the soul is immortal.

Do Hindus have moral codes or commandments?

The word *Dharma* itself includes moral obligation and righteous behaviour. The basic virtues Hindus are prescribed to cultivate and practise are: **Humbleness, Honesty, Patience, Forgiveness, Self Control, Cleanliness, Control of the Senses, Wisdom, and Love**. Without these qualities, humans are like beasts.

Is it mandatory for Hindus to be vegetarians?

The concept of *Ahimsa*, non-violence encourages Hindus to refrain from eating meat. It is believed that you are what you eat and the type of food you eat shapes the quality of your character. While some Hindus eat meat, there are considerable vegetarians among Hindus compared to some other religious groups.

What is the status of women in Hinduism?

Hindu scripture accord women a place of equality, honour and dignity. Hindus conceive God in both male and female deities. No Hindu ceremony or sacrament is complete unless a wife and husband perform it together. A wife is regarded as the *Lakshmi* of the house.

How can a non- Hindu become a Hindu?

Any person who voluntarily accepts Hindu beliefs and philosophy of life can consider himself or herself a Hindu. There is no mandatory initiation or baptism in Hinduism because it is believed that everyone is a born Hindu. You do not have to adopt a Hindu name or become a member of a Hindu temple.

People in Western world hear a lot about the Hindu caste system. What is it?

When the Western world was in the primary stage of socio-economic development, the Hindus in Indian sub-continent had evolved into a highly civilized society. In order to ensure social order, the ancient scientists (Rishis) classified humans into four occupational groups; those who were intellectuals and imparted knowledge and perused religious and intellectual work were *Brahmans*, rulers, administrators and soldiers were called *Kshatriyas*, merchants, farmers and industrialists were called *Vaishyas* and labors

and non skilled were called **Shudras**. This social framework is called *Varan Vyavastha*. God describes his body form in the following way: Brahmins as the brain, Kshatriyas as hands, Vaishyas as lower part of body and Shudras as legs. As such, in this complete body, every part has important function and role and is equally respected. According to Hindu scriptures, all four **Varans** are equal and must work in unison for the welfare of the whole society.

Who are Hindu Priests?

Hindu priests come from the Brahmin caste. They are known as Purohit, Pundit Ji, Pujari, Acharya and Brahman.

What is the source or origin of the soul?

God is also called the Supreme Soul, is the source and origin of the soul. If the soul is the energy that runs the body, God is the total sum of that energy. If God is fire, an individual soul is its tiny spark. Since the soul is a fraction of God, all living beings are His manifestations. That is why Hindus see divinity in every living thing and person.

What is Karma?

In Hinduism, Karma refers to God's cosmic law of *cause and effect*; every action has its opposite and equal reaction. Any deed or any thought that causes an effect is called Karma. According to the Law of Karma, every individual is responsible and accountable for his/her own actions.

What is the Hindu concept of reincarnation?

The word reincarnation means *transmigration of souls*. Hindus believe the soul is immortal and when a person dies, his/her soul re-enters a new body according to its good or bad deeds or Karma.

What is Moksha (salvation) and how can it be attained?

When a soul is released from the cycle of rebirth, and merges back into its original source, the Supreme Soul, it is called Moksha or Mukti or Nirvana. Hindus call it the state of liberation. The four paths to Moksha according to Hinduism are: Karma (Path of action), Dhyana, (Path of meditation) Jnana yoga (Path of spiritual Insight) and Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion)

What is Upasana and Sadhana?

Hinduism seems to be primarily concerned with God, the soul, the next life and liberation. What about the life on this earth? To say that Hinduism is concerned only with life hereafter is a fallacy. Hinduism is a religion for worldly people. It has plenty to say about life in this world; that is why **Hinduism is called a way of life**. One can pursue the ultimate goal of **Moksha** while living a normal life. To achieve Moksha, one has to follow three other goals as a necessary process: **Dharma** (Religious and moral activities), **Artha** (Economic activities), **Kama** (Worldly desires). While participating in economic activities and satisfying human desires, one must be virtuous, live righteously and discharge all moral obligations.

Do Hindus believe in Heaven and Hell?

Yes, they do. The concept of heaven and hell is entirely different from the Judeo-Christian belief. According to Hinduism, there are two concepts of heaven which is a physical place where a person goes after death to enjoy pleasures as a reward for living a virtuous life on earth or it may not be.

Heaven is called **Swarga**; it is a super consciousness blessedness and bliss that exists within the human body. It can be experienced by a spiritually matured person during the heightened intensity of meditation.

Heaven is also an invisible to normal senses, subtle world where a soul rests and learns between births. The soul acquires a different body and not the physical earthly body to enjoy or rest in heaven. A soul that has attained Moksha merges with its source of origin, the Supreme Soul. A number of heavens are described where, depending on the evolution of the soul, the soul gains an appropriate body to enjoy the rewards.

In Hinduism, hell is a place where a sinner's acquires an appropriate body to cleanse its sins through punishment often described as torture and burned by the eternal fire. In the end this body is discarded and the soul continues the path of evolution and eventually joining God.

Also Hindus believe hell is called **Narak**, is an unhappy, tormented and distressful state of mind experienced during physical existence on earth. This state of consciousness can also be experienced by a soul after death and before taking next birth. Hindus consider hell a temporary condition of one's own creation. One can reverse this situation by following a spiritual path and attaining good Karma and paying for past bad deeds.

Hindus believe that world is an illusion. Isn't this absurd?

It is not an absurd idea. One should understand the correct meaning of the Sanskrit word *Maya*, which means *illusion*. The confusion in comprehending the Hindu's doctrine of Maya stems from thinking illusion means the same thing as hallucination or delusion. Hindus use the word illusion in the same sense as defined in any dictionary: a mistaken perception of reality. When Hindus speak of this material world being an illusion, they are not saying that this world does not exist. Instead, they refer to the mistaken perception of the world, that is, thinking the material world is separate from God.

What are the four Purusharthas or goals of our life?

Dharma	- Religious activities and moral obligations
Artha	- Earning wealth righteously for economic activities
Kama	- Fulfilment of worldly desires
Moksha	- Salvation or liberation from the cycle of birth and death

What are the six internal enemies or Shad ripus with their meanings?

The are :- **Kama** – Lust **Krodha** – Anger **Lobha** – Greed **Moha** – Attachment **Mada**- Arrogance **Matsarya** – Envy

What do we mean by “Yagna” and “Moksha”?

Yagna –means regular attachment with God through sacrifice mostly performed which involves mind by reciting Mantras and via Havan offering natural ingredients involving action.

Moksha – Moha means attachment with worldly desires and Kshaya is full detachment from worldly desires and considerations.

What are the three Gunas or Qualities and their meanings?

Satwa	- means the quality of purity
Raajas	- the quality of passion
Taamas	- the quality of inertia.

What are the Pancha bootaas or the five elements in our bodies.

They are: earth, water, fire, air and sky.

What are the eight Sidhis?

They are :- Anima, Mahima, Garima, Laghima, Prapti, Prakamya, Ishtwa and Vashitwa.

What are the three types of Samirs (Breeze)?

They are :- Sheetal, Mand, Sugandh.

What are the five types of wind?

They are :- Praan, Apan, Udaan, Vyaan, Samaan.

What are the six Ripus (enemies)?

They are:-Kaam, Krodh , Lobh , Moh , Madh , Maatsrya.

What are the six tastes?

They are :- Madhur, Amal, Lawan, Katu, Kashya, Tikta

What are the five Mahayagn?

They are :- Brahamaygn , Deoyagn, Bhutyagn, Pitrayagn and Atithiyagn.

What are the eight Yogas?

They are :- Yum , Niyum, Aasan, Pranayam, Pratyahar, Dhyan, Dharan, Samadhi.

What are the Saptdweeps (seven continents)?

They are :- Jambu, Shaat, Kush, Chauk, Pushkar, Shaalmali, Gomedh.

Why is India called Bharat?

Bha means knowledge and *rath* means attachment. The nation deeply attached in true knowledge. The word *Bha* also means the sun, truth and clear reality and *ratha* - chariot. So wherever the sun rises and shines (where the sun's chariot moves) is called *Bharat* ie the world. Hence every living being has a role as the sun commences its journey every day to move towards divinity or true knowledge.

Can a Non-Hindu enter a Temple?

Yes. A Non-Hindu may enter a Hindu temple. Hindu temples are open to people of all religions. However, devotees and guests are required to follow and abide by the rules of the temple.

What is Teertha (Pilgrimage)and why do people visit them?

To achieve salvation and liberation so that people are able to understand the true meaning of life.

Many Hindus visit this Holy River to purify themselves?

Ganga or Ganges River

What are the seven holy Rivers?

They are :- Ganga, Yamuna, Gundagai, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri.

What are the four Yugas or period of times?

They are :- Satyayug, Tretayug, Dwaparyug, and Kaliyug.

What is a kalp?

A kalp is when all the four yugas have been completed a thousand times

In which Yuga temple worship came into existence?

Treta Yuga

What are the major Hindu festivals?

Some of the major Hindu social and religious festivals are::

Diwali,- The festival of lights. This festival leads us into truth and light and teaches us to abolish ignorance, Lakshmi is usually worshipped on this day

Holi – On this day people throw coloured powder at each other called gulal. On this day the triumph of good over evil is celebrated.

Mahashivarati – On this day people fast to show their devotion and thanks to Lord Shiva.

Ram Naumi – Lord Rama's birth celebration.

Krishna Janmastami – Lord Krishna's birth celebration.

Raksha Bandhan – a celebration when sisters tie a holy thread on their brother's wrists.

Ganesh Chaturthi – Ganesh's birthday which falls on the fourth day of the lunar month.

Dushera- a celebration of victory over evil by divine powers of God.

Which common deities do Hindu pray?

There are many deities in the Hindu tradition, millions in fact. Individuals pray their favourite deities. Some of the most commonly noticed ones are: (for further information please refer to page no...)

Brahma – The creator god – Brahma creates (new) things.

Vishnu – The preserver god – Vishnu preserves things and keeps the world going. There are many avatars of Vishnu. (Of the ten universally recognized avatars, nine have already manifested whereas the tenth is yet to appear).

Shiva/Mahesh – The god of destruction – Shiva destroys worn out things in order to make space for new creations.

Ganesh – The remover of obstacles, his wives are Riddhi and Siddhi.

Krishna – The god of love - A human avatar of Lord Vishnu

Radha – The consort of Krishna.

Rama – An incarnation of Vishnu.

Sita – The consort of Rama.

Laxman – The brother of Rama.

Kalki- Man on the white horse – This form/incarnation of Vishnu will come when it is time to destroy the world, he will do so by fire and blood.

Lakshmi – Goddess of beauty and wealth - The consort of Vishnu.

Buddha – The enlightened one - Another human incarnation of Vishnu.

Agni – The god of fire.

Indra – The god of weather.

Hanuman - The monkey god of service, also looked up to as the ideal devotee, as he was a devotee to Rama.

Saraswati - The goddess of knowledge - Also the consort of Brahma.

Parvati - The consort of Shiva.

Durga - The goddess which was created by the anger of the trinity Gods, also the token of shakti (energy), she is a form of Parvati.

Kali - The black goddess of destruction, a form of Durga.

Gayatri - Goddess Gayatri has five heads, each one representing the four Vedas and the fifth representing God, she is also another consort of Brahma.

Datta/Dattatrieya - Lord Datta is the three trinity deities merged into one form (Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu).

Narasimha - Half man, half lion incarnation of Vishnu.

Matsya - Fish incarnation of Vishnu.

Murugan/Kartikeya/Skanda - Son of Shiva and Parvati, brother of Ganesh, sometimes

seen with six heads, he is the master of creations, he has two wives: Valli (who is sometimes green) and Devasena, he practised lifelong celibacy.

What is the red dot on the fore head of a Hindu woman?

The 'dot' on the head is not a tattoo like many think, it is made out of a powder, generally kum-kum. It is worn between the eyebrows (on the brow chakra) and represents God in oneself. Bindi can be worn by man or women. A Hindu lady will usually wear a bindi as a sign of marriage, the main way to tell married women from unmarried is putting kum-kum in the parting of the hair. Forehead markings for men are called Tilak. These are applied on auspicious occasions. Forehead markings are usually applied using the middle finger on the right hand as this is considered auspicious.

Quiz on Hindu gods and goddess

What is the vehicle of the God of Love (Kama)?

Parrot

What is the vehicle of Goddess Laxmi?

Owl and Lotus flower

What is the vehicle of Goddess Durga?

Lion

What is the vehicle of Kartika the Son of Lord Shiva?

Peacock.

What is the vehicle of Ganesha, the son of Lord Shiva ?

Mouse

What is the vehicle of Indra ?

Aravat (An Elephant with eight trunks)

What is the vehicle of Lord Shiva ?

Ox (Known as Nandhi)

Who is said to be the creator of universe in Hindu Mythology?

Brahma

Who is the operator of the universe according Hindu mythology?

Lord Vishnu

Who is the destroyer of the universe according Hindu mythology?

Lord Shiva

Who is the king of the gods?

Indra

Who is the God of Death?

Yama

How Many Incarnations of Vishnu are assumed to be present?

Twenty four in total , ten of which in human form

What is the abode (Lok) of Vishnu?

Vaikuntha

What is the abode of Shiva?

Kailash

What is the abode of Brahma?

Brahma lok

Quiz on Lord Shiva

What is the meaning of the word Shiva?

Mangalam or Auspiciousness

Shiva is also known as?

Lord Mahesh, Umapati , Sadashiv, Shivashakti , Lingeshwar and 1008 other names

Which Hindu God is also worshiped in Lingam form?

Lord Shiva

While meditating what does Shiva sit on?

Tiger skin mat

What does Shiva wear on his neck?

Shiva wears a necklace of skulls Mund Mala, garland of Rudra Mala and live Snake

Who is Lord Shiva's consort?

Satti ,who was later born as Parvati , also known as Uma

What weapon does Shiva carry with him?

A trident or Trishul

What colour is Shiva's throat and why?

Blue as a result of drinking poison while the ocean was being churned

How many sons does Shiva have and who are they?

Two sons- Lord Kartikeya and Lord Ganesh

When is Maha Shiv Ratri observed and celebrated?

Falgun Maas, Krishna Pakch, Chaturdasi tithi (February/ March)

Who is the destroyer of the universe according Hindu mythology?

Lord Shiva

What is the abode of Shiva?

Kailash

What is the vehicle of Lord Shiva?

Nandi bull

Which Hindu Scripture delivers discourse on Lord Shiva?

Shiva Purana

What is offered on Shiva Lingam?

Bel Patra and Milk

Why is Shiu Ratri celebrated?

Some of the reasons are:

1. On this night Lord Shiva appeared in Lingam form to resolve the dispute between Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu

2. On this night Lord Shiva swallowed the deadly poison that emanated from the churning of the ocean of milk, which would have killed the other Gods
3. On this night at the time of the deluge [Pralaya] the whole world was covered with utter darkness and the Divine Mother restored light to the world by offering prayer to Shiva
4. On this night Lord Shiva performed the most gracious and magnificent dance –Taandov niryta

What does Lord Shiva say about Shiva Ratri?

In Shiva Purana Shiva says to His consort Parvati, that no festival other than Shiva Ratri, observed by his devotees gives Him so much pleasure and satisfaction.

What are the 12 Jyotirlingas?

They are:- (1) Vishwanaath ,(2) Vaidhnaath ,(3) Rameshwar ,(4) Malikarjun ,(5) Grisneshwar ,(6) Bhimshankar ,(7) Triambkeshwar ,(8) Onkareshwar ,(9) Mahakaaleshwar ,(10) Somnaath ,(11) Kedarnaath ,(12) Ghushmeshwar.

Quiz on Ramayana

Name the Yug in which Rama was born?

Tretha

Who were the twin brothers among the four sons of Dashratha?

Laxman and Shatrughan

Name the country and capital of Dashratha?

Kaushal and Ayodhya

Which rishi performed the Yagya for Dashratha to be blessed with sons?

Rishi Shringi

Name the sons of the female demon Tarika?

Marich and Subahu

Name the mother and father of Ravana the king of Lanka?

Kakasiwas is the mother and Vishsesawa was the father

Name the wife of Ravana?

Mandodri

How long it took to construct bridge to reach Lanka?

5 Days

Which country was ruled by King Janak the father of Sita?

Mithila

What was the real name of Valmiki who composed Ramayana?

Ratnakar

Who got Lanka constructed and for whom?

Shiva for his wife Parvati

Name the king and the minister in Ramayana who were married at same hours, same place and same date?

King Dashrath and Sumanta

Name the sister of Rama?

Shanta

Name the son of Hanumana?

Makardhwaj

Name the architect that constructed bridge on sea?

Nal and neel

Quiz on Mahabharata

Who killed king of Madra Shalya?

Yudhistar

How many days Dronacharya was chief of army in the battle of Mahabharata?

4 Days

How many days king of Madra, Shalya was chief of army of Kauravas?

1 Day

Who cut the string of the bow of Abhimanyu in Chakravyahu?

Karana

Which God /Goddess was worshiped by Gandhari wife of Dhritrashtra?

Mahadev

Suggest any three name of Draupadi?

Panchali, Vaishali, Drupada suta, Krishna,

While preaching Geeta name at least four adjectives used for Arjun by Lord Krishna?

Kauntey, Kurunandan, Gudaksh, Vijay, **Prasarth?**, Dhananjay, Anansuya, Parth

Bhagwat Geeta is a part of which religious Epic?

Mahabharata

Name the Rishi who cursed Dharamraj to be born as Vidur?

Mandav Rishi

The only warrior of Mahabharata who is known as terrorist?

Ashvathama

Name the warrior of Mahabharata who tried to kill Parikshit in his mother womb?

Ashvathama

Who recited the last Shaloka of Geeta?

Sanjay

Name the parents of Dhritrashtra?

Ambika and Vichitarveera

Request

Frequently Asked Questions about Hinduism part 2

Hindu Heritage Society is willing to publish part 2 of this much loved FAQ in Hinduism with more advance levels of questions and answers. If you have any questions which you believe may be useful for our readers please forward them to us.

Please forward any suggestions/ feedback to improve our publication in future.

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