# Sanatan Dharma (Hinduism)

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| **General** | **Core Belief**  To learn how to be reunited with God – of whom all living beings are eternally part – and to learn through this study, devotion, prayer and service to others.  **‘Rules’ of Life**  One of the Hindu sacred texts, ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’, suggests ‘Three Pathways (Yoga paths)’ which are: to cultivate knowledge by studying the ancient texts (the ‘Way of Knowledge’): to be conscious of one’s daily actions, understanding there are consequences of both good and bad actions. There are also exercises for the mind, body and soul which help one towards a deeper and better state of meditation (the ’Way of Action’): and to maintain devotion by developing and expressing love for God through prayer and service (the ‘Way of Devotion’).  In practice, most Hindus would believe in the sanctity of life, adopt vegetarianism, and support the concept of acceptance/tolerance towards those of others races and religions.  **Scripture**  The Hindu ancient scriptures are called ‘The Vedas’, and contain, amongst other texts ‘The Upanishads’ (philosophical works discussing the purpose of life) and ‘The Brahmanas’ (advice on ritual).  The popular Hindu epics deal mainly with questions of morality, guidance on spiritual upliftment and are ‘The Ramayana’ and ‘The Mahabharata’ (from which ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’ is taken).  **Daily Acts of Faith**  Hindus would generally perform a daily act of personal devotion at home, either alone or with others.  **Major Annual Events**  Amongst the widely celebrated Hindu festivals are:  Holi - to celebrate the festival of love and joy as done by Lord Krishna when He appeared on earth 5000 years ago. A joyous festival marked with the throwing of coloured dyes.  Rama Navami - to celebrate the birth of Rama, seventh incarnation of the deity, Vishnu: at which festival the epic of Rama, ‘The Ramayana’, is often recited.    Janamashtami - to celebrate the birth of Krishna, eighth incarnation of the deity, Vishnu: at which festival there is fasting until midnight, when a symbolic image of Krishna is welcomed into the temple with flowers and great rejoicing.  Divali - to honour the deity, Lakshmi, and celebrate the symbolic reunion of Rama and his wife, Sita: at which festival Divali lamps and candles are lit to fill homes with light, and Divali cards are exchanged to wish people a ‘Happy Divali’.  Shivaratri - in honour of the deity, Shiva: a night spent in prayer, fasting and meditation.  **Births**  The birth of a baby is always a cause for celebration, with many rituals held to bless the mother and the newborn child.  As soon as possible after the birth, prayers are whispered in the child’s ear and honey is put on the tongue.  **Names**  Members of Hindu families may have three or four names, depending upon cultural background and tradition. It is quite usual to have: a given, or personal name, complimentary names/s (a father’s given name or the name of a deity, for example) and a family name (which may or may not indicate social grouping).  **Diet**  Hindus in general do not eat beef. Orthodox Hindus are strictly vegetarians, eating no meat, no eggs and nothing that is produced from animals (such as cheese made with rennet) use of animal products such as leather are also avoided. Many may prefer also to refrain from alcohol, from onions and from garlic.  **Language**  Members of Hindu families in UK may speak several languages other than English, including Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali.  The language in which the major Hindu sacred texts are written is Sanskrit.  **Dress**  In general, both men and women are expected to dress moderately with legs and arms being covered to a reasonable level. Many temples around the world offer wraps to cover oneself in case one is not covered appropriately.  Traditional wear for females is the wearing of a ‘sari’ (6 metres of material draped beautifully in various ways) for ladies and for girls a kurta top with over loose trousers.  For men a kurta top with a dhoti (4.5 metres of material draped around the waist) or with loose trousers.  **Places of Worship**  Although worship does take place at the home shrine, the ‘mandir’ (temple), is the place at which most festivals are celebrated and teaching takes place.  Inside the mandir is the shrine where ‘murtis’ (representations of the deities) stand. There may also be a decorated seat for the ‘swami’, who may lead the worship.  Offerings of flowers, fruits, nuts, traditional sweets or money are customarily taken to the mandir to be presented on arrival.  Visitors are expected to dress modestly, with a head covering for women needed. Seating is in the floor, sometimes with men and boys on one side and women and girls on the other. It is usual to sit during the ceremony, with legs crossed or to the side: it is considered disrespectful to sit with feet pointing towards the sacred area at the front of the temple. Sometime standing is appropriate during the ‘arti’ (ceremony).  After food has been blessed during the ceremony, it is distributed, and visitors will be expected to partake, accepting the food in cupped hands, with the right hand uppermost.  **The Home**  A Hindu home will usually have a household shrine. This is the place where ‘puja’ (worship) is performed, with prayers, bells and incense. | |
| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do attempt to introduce pupils to the Hindu idea of one God, Brahman, the Supreme Soul.  Do be selective when using photographs of ascetics and holy men (Sadhu) and attempt to prepare the pupils before disclosing such material.  Do use the spelling Rama rather than Ram when talking about the incarnation of the God Vishnu (the SCAA Glossary of terms says ‘for obvious reasons’) presumably because of possible association with a male sheep. | Don’t suggest that all Hindus are polytheists believing in many Gods.  Don’t trivialise the concept of Samsara (reincarnation) by suggesting that in one’s next life one may be reincarnated as a species other than human e.g. a spider, and or fly. Although theoretically possible to leap from human to another species Hinduism emphasises that the process is a slow one taking place over hundreds of incarnations.  Do not use the term ‘caste’ as this was introduced by the colonial British. It is not part of the Hindu tradition or suggested in Hindu scriptures.    It is the understanding of Varnasrama that individuals in society have different skill sets and they work in harmony and interdependence on one another.  Don’t describe the images and paintings of gods and goddesses as idols as this suggests idolatry as if Hindus literally worship the statue or painting or a spirit inside the statue. Hindus use images to aid and focus worship.  Don’t refer to the trimurti in Hinduism of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as being ‘the Trinity’. The role of these three gods in Hinduism bears no resemblance to the place of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit in Christianity.  Don’t assume that epics like Mahabharath and Ramayan did not happen. Many Hindus point to archaeological evidence for their historical basis. Relating the history of mythology emerged during colonial rule over India. |
| **Visits** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Visitors will be required to remove shoes on entry. Head coverings are not usually required. Please ensure pupils act respectfully with regard to the deities (murtis) and remind pupils not to disturb worshippers. Make pupils aware that they may be offered sweets or fruit on leaving the mandir and it is considered polite to accept. |  |