

Chapter 1 : Practices of HINDUISM

Important Festivals Hinduism almost certainly has a longer list of festivals than any other religious tradition, and there are considerable regional and denominational variations. Twelve of the more popular and widely celebrated events are listed below.

Bring fact-checked results to the top of your browser search. Sacred times and festivals Hindu festivals are combinations of religious ceremonies, semi-ritual spectacles, worship, prayer, lustrations, processions, music and dances, eating, drinking, lovemaking, licentiousness, feeding the poor, and other activities of a religious or traditional character. The original purpose of these activities was to purify, avert malicious influences, renew society, bridge over critical moments, and stimulate or resuscitate the vital powers of nature hence the term utsava, meaning both the generation of power and a festival. Because Hindu festivals relate to the cyclical life of nature, they are supposed to prevent it from stagnating. These cyclic festivals which may last for many days continue to be celebrated throughout India. Holi Children celebrating the festival of Holi, Kolkata Calcutta. There are also innumerable festivities in honour of specific gods, celebrated by individual temples, villages, and religious communities. An important festival, formerly celebrating Kama, the god of love, survives in the Holi, a festival connected with the spring equinox and in western India with the wheat harvest. Although commemorated primarily in northern India, the rituals associated with Holi vary regionally. Among the Marathas, a people who live along the west coast of India from Mumbai Bombay to Goa, the descendants of heroes who died on the battlefield perform a dance, sword in hand, in honour of their ancestors until they believe themselves possessed by the spirits of the heroes. In Bengal swings are made for Krishna; in other regions a bonfire is also essential. The bonfires are intended to commemorate this event or rather to reiterate the triumph of virtue and religion over evil and sacrilege. This explains why objects representing the sickness and impurities of the past year the new year begins immediately after Holi are thrown into the bonfire, and it is considered inauspicious not to look at it. Moreover, people pay or forgive debts, reconcile quarrels, and try to rid themselves of the evils, conflicts, and impurities they have accumulated during the preceding months, translating the central conception of the festival into a justification for dealing anew with continuing situations in their lives. Hindus celebrate a number of other important festivals, including Diwali, in which all classes of society participate. It takes place in October or November and features worship and ceremonial lights in honour of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune; fireworks to commemorate the victory of Krishna over Narakasura, the demon of hell; and gambling, an old ritual custom intended to secure luck for the coming year. Ritual and social status Social structure The caste system, which has organized Indian society for millennia, is thoroughly legitimated by and intertwined with Hindu religious doctrine and practice. Although primarily connected with the Hindu tradition, the caste system is also present in some measure among Jains, Sikhs, and Christians in South Asia. Four social classes, or varnas Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras provide the simplified structure for the enormously complicated system of thousands of castes and subcastes. According to a passage from the Purusha hymn Rigveda This depiction of the Purusha, or cosmic man, gives an idea of the functions and mutual relations of the four main social classes. The three main classes in the classic division of Indian society are the Brahmins, the warriors, and the commoners. The Brahmins, whatever their worldly avocations, claim to have by virtue of their birth the authority to teach the Veda, perform ritual sacrifices for others, and accept gifts and subsistence. The term alms is misleading; the dakshina offered at the end of a rite to a Brahmin officiant is not a fee but an oblation through which the rite is made complete. Brahmins are held to be the highest among the castes because of their sanctification through the samskaras rites of passage and their observance of restrictive rules. The main duty of the nobility the Kshatriyas is to protect the people and that of the commoners the Vaishyas is to tend cattle, to trade, and to cultivate land. Even if a king theoretically of Kshatriya descent was not of noble descent, he was still clothed with divine authority as an upholder of dharma. He was consecrated by means of a complex and highly significant ritual; he was Indra and other gods deva incarnate. The emblems or paraphernalia of his office represent sovereign authority: All three higher classes had to sacrifice and had to

study the Veda, although the responsibilities of the Vaishyas in sacred matters were less demanding. According to the texts on dharma, the duty of the fourth class the Shudras was to serve the others. According to Hindu tradition, the Veda should not be studied in the presence of Shudras, but they may listen to the recitation of epics and Puranas. They are permitted to perform the five main acts of worship without Vedic mantras and undertake observances, but even today they maintain various ceremonies of their own, carried out without Brahmanic assistance. Yet despite the statements in the texts on dharma, there was considerable fluidity in the status of the castes. Communities such as the Vellalas, for instance, are regarded as Shudras by Brahmans but as a high caste by other groups. Accordingly, a distinction is often made among Shudras. Some are considered to be purer and to have a more correct behaviour and way of living than others—the former tending to assimilate with higher castes and the latter to rank with the lowest in the social scale, who, often called Chandalas, were at an early date charged with sweeping, bearing corpses, and other impure occupations. On the other hand, in later times the trend of many communities has been toward integrating all Shudras into the Brahmanic system. The Brahmans, who have far into modern times remained a respected, traditional, and sometimes intellectual upper class, were much in demand because of their knowledge of rites and traditions. Although Kshatriya rank is claimed by many whose title is one of function or creation rather than of inheritance, this class is now rare in many regions. Moreover, for a considerable time none of the four varnas represented anything other than a series of hierarchically arranged groups of castes. The origin of the caste system is not known with certainty. Modern theorists, however, assume that castes arose from differences in family ritual practices, racial distinctions, and occupational differentiation and specialization. Scholars also doubt whether the simple varna system was ever more than a theoretical socioreligious ideal and have emphasized that the highly complex division of Hindu society into nearly 3,000 castes and subcastes was probably in place even in ancient times. In general, a caste is an endogamous hereditary group of families bearing a common name, often claiming a common descent, as a rule professing to follow the same hereditary calling, adhering to the same customs—especially regarding purity, meals, and marriages—and often further divided into smaller endogamous circles. Moreover, tribes, guilds, or religious communities characterized by particular customs—for example, the Lingayats—could easily be regarded as castes. The status of castes varies in different localities. Although social mobility is possible, the mutual relationship of castes is hierarchically determined: Among the Scheduled Castes, however, there are numerous subdivisions, each of which regards itself as superior to others. This, and the fact that some exterior group or other might rise in estimation and become an interior one or that individual outcastes might be well-to-do, does not alter the fact that there was social discrimination. The Scheduled Castes were subjected to various socioreligious disabilities before mitigating tendencies helped bring about reform. After independence, social discrimination was prohibited, and the practice of preventing access to religious, occupational, or civil rights on the grounds of untouchability was made a punishable offense. Despite these prohibitions, Scheduled Castes were sometimes barred from the use of temples and other religious institutions and from public schools. From the traditional Hindu point of view, this social system is the necessary complement of the principles of dharma, karma, and samsara. Corresponding to hells and heavenly regions in the hereafter, the castes are the mundane social frame within which karma is manifested and worked out. Social protest For many centuries certain Indian religious communities have been dedicated in whole or in part to the elimination of caste discrimination. Many have been guided by bhakti sentiments, including the Virashaivas, Sikhs, Kabir Panthis, Satnamis, and Ramnamis, all of whom bear a complicated relation to the greater Hindu fold. A major theme in bhakti poetry throughout India has been the ridicule of caste and the etiquette of ritual purity that relates to it. In North India this element is stronger among the bhakti poets who accept the concept of nirguna, which holds that brahman is to be characterized as without qualities, than among the poets who advocate the idea of saguna, which maintains that brahman possesses qualities. This tendency is not evident among bhakti poets of South India. Other religions have provided members of low-ranked castes with a further hope for escaping social hierarchies associated with Hindu practice. Sikhism has traditionally rejected caste, a position clearly emphasized in the gurdwaras, where access to sacred scripture, the Adi Granth, is granted without regard to caste and communal meals are served to all Sikhs. Nevertheless, some practices associated with the castes were retained.

Islam also offered hope to low-ranked castes in Kerala from the 8th century onward and elsewhere in India from the 12th century, but some convert groups retained their original caste organization even after embracing Islam. Christianity exercised a similar force, serving for centuries as a magnet for disadvantaged Hindus, but to a large extent converts continue to identify themselves in terms of their original Hindu castes. Ambedkar, the principal framer of the Indian constitution and a member of the scheduled Mahar caste, abandoned Hinduism for Buddhism, and millions of his lower-caste followers eventually also converted to Buddhism. Yet many Ambedkarite Dalits continue to venerate saints such as Kabir, Chokhamela, and Ravidas, who figure in the general lore of Hindu bhakti. Other Dalits, especially members of the Chamar caste traditionally leather workers, have gone further, identifying themselves explicitly as Ravidasis, creating a scripture that features his poetry and building temples that house his image. Renunciants and the rejection of social order Another means of rejecting the social order, which forms the background for significant portions of Hindu belief and practice, is renunciation self-denial and asceticism. Other rituals serve to induct the initiate into a new family—the alternative family provided by a celibate religious order, usually focused on a guru. In principle this family should not be structured along the lines of caste, and the initiate should pledge to renounce dietary restrictions. This follows a pattern that is loosely present everywhere. Householders and renunciants offer each other mutual benefits, with the former dispensing material substance to the theoretically propertyless holy men and women while the latter dispense religious merit and spiritual guidance in return. Such an enactment of the values of dharma and moksha is symbiotic to be sure, but that does not serve to domesticate renunciants entirely. Their existence questions the ultimacy of anything tied to caste, hierarchy, and bodily well-being. Initiation Hindus are free to join a religious order and must submit to its rites and way of living after joining it. Such religious groups integrate ancient, widespread ideas and customs of initiation into the framework of either the Vaishnava or Shaiva patterns of Hinduism. Vaishnavism emphasizes their character as an introduction to a life of devotion and as an entrance into closer contact with God, although happiness, knowledge, a long life, and a prospect of freedom from karma are also among the ideals to which they aspire. Shaivas are convinced of the absolute necessity of initiation for anyone desiring final liberation and require an initiation in accordance with their rituals. All communities agree that the authority to initiate belongs only to a qualified spiritual guide guru, usually a Brahman, who has previously received the special guru-diksha initiation as a teacher and is often regarded as representing God himself. The postulant is sometimes given instruction in the esoteric meaning of the scriptures. The initiate receives a devotional name and is given the sacred mantras of the community. There are many complicated forms of initiation: Yoga may be atheistic or theistic and may adopt various philosophical or religious principles. Every denomination attempted to implement Yogic practices on a theoretical basis derived from its own teachings. There are many different forms of Yoga, and the practices vary according to the stage of advancement of the adepts. All serious yogis, however, agree in disapproving the use of Yogic methods for worldly purposes. Sectarian symbols The typical Hindu ascetic sadhu usually wears a distinctive mark pundra on his forehead and often carries some symbol of his religion. A Shaiva might impersonate Shiva and carry a trident trishula, denoting empire and the irresistible force of transcendental reality; wear a small lingam; carry a human skull, showing that he is beyond the terror inspired by the transitoriness of the world; or smear his body with apotropaic supposed to avert evil and consecratory ashes. These emblems are sacred objects of worship because the divine presence, when invoked by mantras, is felt to be in them. Moreover, the art that emerged is highly symbolic. The much-developed ritual-religious symbolism presupposes the existence of a spiritual reality that may make its presence and influence felt in the material world and can also be approached through its representative symbols. The production of objects of symbolic value is therefore more than a technique. The artisan can begin work only after entering into a state of supranormal consciousness and must model a devotional image after the ideal prototype. After undergoing a process of spiritual transformation, the artisan is believed to transform the material used to create the image into a receptacle of divine power. Types of symbols If they know how to handle the symbols, the worshipers have at their disposal an instrument for utilizing the possibilities lying in the depths of their own subconscious as well as a key to the mysteries of the forces dominating the world. Any yantra represents some aspect of the divine and enables devotees to worship

it immediately within their hearts while identifying themselves with it. Except in its greater complexity, a mandala does not differ from a yantra, and both are drawn during a highly complex ritual in a purified and ritually consecrated place. The meaning and the use of both are similar, and they may be permanent or provisional.

Chapter 2 : What is Hindu Practices? - Definition from Yogapedia

Hindu Holidays and Festivals It has been said that Hindus have a holiday for every day of the year, but even that may be an understatement! Exactly how many Hindu festivals are celebrated is not known, but one scholar of Hinduism has listed more than a thousand different Hindu festivals. {1}.

Human civilization is incomplete without them. As Hinduism is the oldest religion on the earth, there are a lot of Hindu customs and traditions observed in India. Some customs are so important for the people that sometimes, they sacrifice their lives for them. Mainly, people living in villages in India are very conscious regarding these. It does not mean that people living in the cities do not observe them but they are not as staunch as the people in villages are. There are literally thousands of customs and traditions in Hinduism. They vary from region to region and caste to caste. Many of them are common in all parts of India. We would try to list down each and every Hindu custom and tradition here. Before the start of any good work and social and religious ceremonies, Hindus worship Lord Ganesha and chant mantra: Hindus do not wear footwear inside homes, temples, and other holy places. They apply a spot or standing line of kumkum between the eyebrows on the forehead at the time of worship. They do not eat nonvegetarian food on Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays, Chaturthis, Ekadashis, and many other festival days. Most of the marriages are of arranged type with the consent of bride and groom. Marrying outside the caste is considered as a bad practice. Arranged marriages generally take place within the respective castes only. Marriage is a big ceremony for them and they do not hesitate to take loan for that. It is like a prestige issue. They do not kill snakes on Mondays and on the festival day of Nagpanchami. Hindus pierce the ears of babies and put golden earrings in them. Hindu girls and women pierce their nose also. A married Hindu woman wears a Mangalsutra around her neck, bangles in her hand, and toe rings, which indicate that she is married. She also applies a Kumkum spot or sticks a bindi between her two eyebrows. Showing respect to elders is an integral part of Hindu culture. A son must take care of his parents in their old age. Younger people touch the feet of their elders to show respect and take blessings from them. Mother, Father, and Teacher are considered as next to god and are highly respected. Hindus worship many deities. It is believed that there are 33 crore deities in Hinduism. Many festivals are celebrated throughout the year. There are different festivals for different deities. Hindus believe that Lord Vishnu incarnates on the earth from time to time to restore Dharma. Lord Brahma is not worshiped separately as he is cursed. There is only one temple of Brahma in India which is in Pushkar, Rajasthan. Laxmi Pujan in Diwali is considered as the biggest festival of Hindus. On that day, they worship Goddess Laxmi, the goddess of money. Generally, Hindu women and girls wear clothes, which would cover all the body except face such as Sari, Lehengas, Salwar Kameez, Ghagra choli, etc. A married Hindu woman considers her husband as God and the husband considers her as his Ardhagini Half Body. Before going for a long travel, they put lemons under the wheels of vehicles. They believe that it would save them from perils. They also break coconut and light incense stick in front of the vehicle for the same purpose. Many people tie seven chillis and a lemon woven in a thread or wire to the vehicle as they believe it saves them from negative energies. They tie a black doll over the front door of the house to stop bad powers from entering the house. A ceremony called Vastushanti is performed before going to live in a new house. The yagya performed during the ceremony is supposed to wipe out ghosts and other types of negative energies from the house. You would find an altar in every house which contains miniature idols of many Hindu deities. They clean and worship them everyday. The idols or pictures of Hindu deities are kept in such a way that they do not face South. The practice is observed in temples as well as homes also. It is believed that hell is located at South and paradise at North.

Chapter 3 : Diwali - Wikipedia

Hindu Rituals & Practices The religious life of many Hindus is focused on devotion to God (perceived as Brahman, Shiva, Vishnu, or Shakti) or several gods. This devotion usually takes the form of rituals and practices associated with sculptures and images of gods in home shrines.

But because Hinduism is a mixture of different traditions and beliefs, its practices vary depending on the type of Hinduism. For example, some Hindus believe in many gods, while others worship just a few or a single supreme deity. Even the name by which they worship the supreme god varies – Brahma, Shiva or Vishnu, among others. Hinduism also includes practices for those traditions that ignore deities, instead seeking awareness of the higher Self through intense meditation. Yoga practice can be included in either of these forms of Hinduism and there are various types of yoga that are particularly sacred to Hindu tradition. Yogapedia explains Hindu Practices Hinduism accepts and even embraces its diverse paths and practices. Here are just a few of them: Rituals – Religious rituals vary greatly and they are not required, but devout Hindus practice some type of ritual at home and on special occasions. Such rituals include worshipping in the morning after bathing puja , reciting scriptures, singing hymns, meditating, chanting, practicing yoga asanas, etc. Yoga Practices – Bhakti yoga is a form of worship and devotion to God. As such, it is one of the paths to union with the Divine and moksha spiritual liberation. Other paths are Jnana yoga yoga of knowledge , Karma yoga yoga of selfless works and Raja yoga yoga of contemplation and meditation. Kundalini yoga is a Tantric school of yoga that is focused on prana and sending it through the seven chakras along the spine. Hatha yoga is the practice of meditative movement and poses that much of the West associates with yoga. Rites of Passage – Major rites of passage, such as births, graduations, weddings or deaths, are celebrated as sanskaras. The practices vary depending on the type of Hinduism, but could include fire ceremonies, chanting of hymns, simple private events or formal ceremonies. They may or may not include a religious official, such as a priest. Festivals – Hindus have many festivals, often coinciding with the full moon, new moon or seasons, that celebrate events from Hinduism or honor specific deities. Family gatherings, religious rituals, arts and feasts may be included. Pilgrimages – Many Hindus go on pilgrimages, although they are not mandatory as in some faiths. Among the most popular pilgrimage sites are old holy cities, religiously significant sites, the Ganges river, and major temples. Sadhu Life – Some Hindus choose to renounce possessions, leave home and dedicate themselves to spiritual disciplines. These holy persons are called sadhus.

Chapter 4 : Hinduism - Practice | www.nxgvision.com

Hinduism - Practice: The second strand in the fabric of Hinduism is practice. Many Hindus, in fact, would place this first. Despite India's enormous diversity, a common grammar of ritual behaviour connects various places, strata, and periods of Hindu life.

Bring fact-checked results to the top of your browser search. Practice The second strand in the fabric of Hinduism is practice. Many Hindus, in fact, would place this first. While it is true that various elements of Vedic ritual survive in modern practice and thereby serve a unifying function, much more influential commonalities appear in the worship of icons or images pratima, murti, or archa. It echoes conventions of hospitality that might be performed for an honoured guest, especially the giving and sharing of food. They are actually responding to the generosity that bore them into a world fecund with life and possibility. The divine personality installed as a home or temple image receives prasada, tasting it Hindus differ as to whether this is a real or symbolic act, gross or subtle and offering the remains to worshipers. Some Hindus also believe that prasada is infused with the grace of the deity to whom it is offered. Consuming these leftovers, worshipers accept their status as beings inferior to and dependent upon the divine. An element of tension arises because the logic of puja and prasada seems to accord all humans an equal status with respect to God, yet exclusionary rules have sometimes been sanctified rather than challenged by prasada-based ritual. Society The third strand that has served to organize Hindu life is society. This fact has much to do with an understanding of truth or reality as being similarly plural and multilayered—though it is not clear whether the influence has proceeded chiefly from religious doctrine to society or vice versa. Seeking its own answer to this conundrum, a well-known Vedic hymn Rigveda The social domain, like the realms of religious practice and doctrine, is marked by a characteristic tension. There is the view that each person or group approaches truth in a way that is necessarily distinct, reflecting its own perspective. Only by allowing each to speak and act in such terms can a society constitute itself as a proper representation of truth or reality. Yet this context-sensitive habit of thought can too easily be used to legitimate social systems based on privilege and prejudice. If it is believed that no standards apply universally, one group can too easily justify its dominance over another. Historically, therefore, certain Hindus, while espousing tolerance at the level of doctrine, have maintained caste distinctions in the social realm. Story Another dimension drawing Hindus into a single community of discourse is narrative. For at least two millennia, people in almost all corners of India—and now well beyond—have responded to stories of divine play and of interactions between gods and humans. These stories concern major figures in the Hindu pantheon: Krishna and his lover Radha, Rama and his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, Shiva and his consort Parvati or, in a different birth, Sati, and the Great Goddess Durga, or Devi, as a slayer of the buffalo demon Mahisasura. Often such narratives illustrate the interpenetration of the divine and human spheres, with deities such as Krishna and Rama entering entirely into the human drama. Many tales focus in different degrees on genealogies of human experience, forms of love, and the struggle between order and chaos or between duty and play. In generating, performing, and listening to these stories, Hindus have often experienced themselves as members of a single imagined family. Yet, simultaneously, these narratives serve to articulate tensions connected with righteous behaviour and social inequities. In north India lower-caste musicians present religious epics such as Alha or Dhola in terms that reflect their own experience of the world rather than the upper-caste milieu of the great Sanskrit religious epic the Mahabharata, which these epics nonetheless echo. To the broadly known, pan-Hindu, male-centred narrative traditions, these variants provide both resonance and challenge. Ravana, the headed demon king, detail from a Guler painting of the Ramayana, c. 1800 Devotion There is a fifth strand that contributes to the unity of Hindu experience through time: Devotional poems attributed to these inspired figures, who represent both genders and all social classes, have elaborated a store of images and moods to which access can be had in a score of languages. Bhakti verse first appeared in Tamil in south India and moved northward into other regions with different languages. Individual poems are sometimes strikingly similar from one language or century to another, without there being any trace of mediation through the pan-Indian, distinctly upper-caste language Sanskrit. Often, individual motifs in the

lives of bhakti poet-saints also bear strong family resemblances. With its central affirmation that religious faith is more fundamental than rigidities of practice or doctrine, bhakti provides a common challenge to other aspects of Hindu life. At the same time, it contributes to a common Hindu heritage— even a common heritage of protest. Yet certain expressions of bhakti are far more confrontational than others in their criticism of caste, image worship, and the performance of vows, pilgrimages, and acts of self-mortification. Central conceptions

In the following sections, various aspects of this complex whole will be addressed, relying primarily on a historical perspective of the development of the Hindu tradition. This approach has its costs, for it may seem to give priority to aspects of the tradition that appear in its earliest extant texts. These texts owe their preservation mainly to the labours of upper-caste men, especially Brahmans, and often reveal far too little about the perspectives of others. They should be read, therefore, both with and against the grain, with due attention paid to silences and absent rebuttals on behalf of women, regional communities, and people of low status—all of whom nowadays call themselves Hindus or identify with groups that can sensibly be placed within the broad Hindu span.

Veda, Brahmans, and issues of religious authority

For members of the upper castes, a principal characteristic of Hinduism has traditionally been a recognition of the Veda, the most ancient body of Indian religious literature, as an absolute authority revealing fundamental and unassailable truth. The Veda is also regarded as the basis of all the later shastra texts, which stress the religious merits of the Brahmans—including, for example, the medical corpus known as the Ayurveda. Parts of the Veda are quoted in essential Hindu rituals such as the wedding ceremony, and it is the source of many enduring patterns of Hindu thought, yet its contents are practically unknown to most Hindus. Most Hindus venerate it from a distance. In the past, groups who rejected its authority outright such as Buddhists and Jains were regarded by Hindus as heterodox, but now they are often considered to be part of a larger family of common Indic traditions.

Another characteristic of much Hindu thought is its special regard for Brahmans as a priestly class possessing spiritual supremacy by birth. As special manifestations of religious power and as bearers and teachers of the Veda, Brahmans have often been thought to represent an ideal of ritual purity and social prestige. Yet this has also been challenged, either by competing claims to religious authority—especially from kings and other rulers—or by the view that Brahmanhood is a status attained by depth of learning, not birth. Evidence of both these challenges can be found in Vedic literature itself, especially the Upanishad's speculative religious texts that provide commentary on the Vedas, and bhakti literature is full of vignettes in which the small-mindedness of Brahmans is contrasted with true depth of religious experience, as exemplified by poet-saints such as Kabir and Ravidas.

Doctrine of atman - brahman

Most Hindus believe in brahman, an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent, and all-embracing principle. Brahman contains in itself both being and nonbeing, and it is the sole reality—the ultimate cause, foundation, source, and goal of all existence. As the All, brahman either causes the universe and all beings to emanate from itself, transforms itself into the universe, or assumes the appearance of the universe. Brahman is in all things and is the self atman of all living beings. Brahman is the creator, preserver, or transformer and reabsorber of everything. Hindus differ, however, as to whether this ultimate reality is best conceived as lacking attributes and qualities—the impersonal brahman—or as a personal God, especially Vishnu, Shiva, or Shakti these being the preferences of adherents called Vaishnavas, Shaivas, and Shaktas, respectively.

Chapter 5 : Hindu Customs and Traditions | Hinduism Facts | Facts about Hindu Religion

This essential Hindu practice also demonstrates the profound importance of religious imagery to worship and ritual. While in most other religious traditions images are believed to represent or suggest divine or holy personages, or are altogether forbidden, in Hindu practice painted and sculpted images are believed to genuinely embody the divine.

For example, walking around with a white cap on your head has no meaning on its own. However, when you are in a Muslim neighborhood, it suddenly has a lot of meaning. In Hinduism, behaviors are the second most important component after community and before beliefs. Doing the right thing is more important than believing the right thing, because doing a particular action shows you are part of a particular group. For example, in a Hindu home, the mother is more concerned that her son visits a temple behavior than that he believes in the power of that deity. One unique thing about Hindu behaviors is their historic consistency. Around the start of the 19th century, Abbe J. He gave a description of the behaviors of Hindus, not based on scriptures, but on his own observations. Many scholars state that Dubois plagiarized the writings, but they are insightful nonetheless. In reading this book recently, I was shocked at how relevant so many of his observations still are today. While modernity has drastically altered the daily life of urban Indians, many of the traditional practices of Hinduism have remained relatively the same for centuries. However, it is just as impossible to write a definitive article on Hindu behaviors as it would be to write it on Hindu beliefs. Behaviors will vary drastically by region and community. Most Hindus will not know what to do during a puja if they are visiting a different community. Below are six essential behaviors of Hindus. These are not meant to be authoritative or exclusive. Here you can see what is appropriate for you to do as a non-Hindu. Nevil Zaveri via Flickr This is the easiest one to spot from the outside. If you see someone with special markings on their forehead, they are almost certainly Hindu. Some of the markings signify the kind of Hindu someone is. For example, three stripes across the forehead signifies that someone was at a Shiva temple that morning. Two vertical lines connected at the center of the eyebrows means they worshipped at a Vishnu temple. Generally only serious practitioners have these elaborate markings on their forehead. Other markings are simple displays of devotion. After the woman of the house performs her daily puja, she will go around to everyone in the house and apply a very small mark of ash or paste to the forehead. The small mark is a sign that the puja was done and the home has been blessed. It is very common for Hindu women to wear a bindi on their forehead. This has become more of a fashion accessory for women, and it is not uncommon to see it on women from other religions as well. However, it is traditionally the mark of a Hindu woman. In certain parts of India, there are particular marks that show if a woman is married or not, but these will vary from place to place. There is some religious significance to all these markings especially the more elaborate ones , but the beliefs are less important than the behavior. No one will think you have converted to Hinduism. Non-Indian women can wear a bindi when they are out especially if they are attending a function like a wedding , but it is best to only wear it with Indian clothes. Graham Mills via Flickr A puja is a worship event for Hindus. Pujas can be very short and simple, or extremely elaborate. The most simple is the daily puja that the woman of the house performs. It might be as quick as a few minutes, or it might go on for fifteen or more. More elaborate pujas, like dedicating a new home, involve calling in a priest. The exact elements of a puja will vary from community to community, but here are a few common elements: A lamp with oil.

Chapter 6 : List of Hindu festivals - Wikipedia

Practice: Kumbh Mela is the greatest riverside religious festival of Hindus that takes place once every three years. It attracts millions of devotees and visitors from all backgrounds. It attracts millions of devotees and visitors from all backgrounds.

Hinduism Concepts, Beliefs and Practices by Jayaram V "After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophical and none so spiritual than the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. It is also the largest, surviving religion from the pre-Christian era. Hinduism has no founder. It has no specific date of origin. It represents a set of beliefs and practices which originated in India at different times. Hinduism has many sects, sub-sects, schools of philosophy, rural and folk traditions. Some of them may be traced back to the Indus times or even prehistoric times BC. Hinduism developed entirely in the Indian subcontinent. Hence, it is deeply ingrained in the culture of India, which is also unique, despite that it is shaped by many ethnic groups and rural communities who practiced primitive faiths and local traditions, which are today integrated into Hinduism. Unlike other religions, its doctrine is not derived from a single scripture, teacher, messenger or single source. It has no central institution which controls its doctrine or practice. It has not core mission other than helping the people escape from suffering. Its core knowledge, which has survived the ravages of time, is believed to be eternal, existing forever in the highest heaven, and God is said to be its primary source. The diverse aspects of Hinduism which impart to its complex and composite character, share a common history, some differences and some similarities. Some which contributed to its growth in the past might have also disappeared. Hinduism is difficult to understand without practicing it. It is difficult to understand even for Hindus, unless they study it and practice it for several years Contemporary Hinduism or what people understand as popular Hinduism has a diverse range of beliefs and practices, sects and schools of philosophy, some of which may stand in their own right as religions themselves. Due to its peculiar history, unique features and absence of organized leadership, Hinduism acquired a distinct and exceptional character of its own. For the same reason, Hinduism is difficult to define and cannot be equated with other world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. Truly, Hinduism is a collection of faiths rather than a single faith. It has many layers, which cannot be easily understood unless one is conversant with its archaic expression and deeper symbolism. It is why many foreigners, who write about Hinduism without practicing it, often find themselves in deep controversy. Currently, main stream Hinduism consists of all the religious sects, traditions, philosophies, beliefs and practices that originated in India, except Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Although it is difficult to summarize essential Hinduism in brief essay, without compromising its true character, the following is an attempt to present the essential beliefs and practices of Hinduism. Brahman, God Hinduism is a theistic religion which believes in the existence of an eternal, formless, supreme, infinite, indestructible, indivisible, all-pervading supreme God. However, he also manifests in the worlds in association with Nature in diverse forms. The One becomes many as a part of creation, and they eventually return to him at the end of each time cycle. The one is hidden in all as their essential Self. He envelops them as well as pervades them. He also goes by many names and has many aspects, such as Isvara, Hiranyagarbha, Kala, Viraj, etc. While he is independent and eternal, his creation is diverse, dependent and destructible. Srishti, creation Unlike Buddhism and Jainism which do not believe in God, Hinduism believes that God is the creator and source of all. He creates the worlds either out of himself or by awakening Nature. Therefore, he is considered both the efficient and the material cause of creation. Creation in Hinduism is cyclical. Each cycle of creation has four epochs namely Satyug, Tretayug, Dwaparayug and Kaliyug. Starting with the first, Dharma and righteousness progressively decline while evil gradually gains upper hand to the point where life becomes extremely difficult for people of faith and devotion. At the end of the fourth epoch, God withdraws all the worlds and beings into himself and starts another cycle of creation after a period of rest. Atman, the individual Self Hinduism believes in the existence of an eternal, indestructible, infinite, pure, all knowing, indivisible and blissful soul as an aspect of God or as an eternally independent entity by itself. When a soul becomes associated with Nature, it

assumes a body, name and form and becomes bound. In its pure state, each soul is essentially the same as God in all aspects, or perhaps slightly different. The souls in all beings are the same. Since they are formless, infinite and without any qualities or attributes, each soul is usually called the Self rather than a soul. The souls take birth in different bodies according to their karma. The bodies are like clothes to them, which they discard at the time of death. Human birth is attained after countless births and deaths. It is a precious opportunity to work for liberation and escape from the cycle of births and deaths. Devas, gods and goddesses Hinduism not only believes in one, supreme God but also in numerous gods and goddesses who inhabit the higher worlds and play an important role in upholding Dharma and ensuring the order and regularity of the world. The gods are all not the same, since they occupy different sphere and possess different powers and qualities. However, they are neither separate nor different from the Supreme Being in their highest aspect. They partake his essential nature and have his duties and responsibilities to keep the worlds in control and free from chaos. Hindus revere them according to their knowledge, nature and aspiration. According to the scriptures, if they worship them as distinct gods, they go to them or their sphere at the time of death. However, if they worship them as aspects of the Supreme God, they go to him only. Dharma, Obligatory moral duty Dharma is central Hinduism. It is a complex word, with many meanings. In a simple sense, Dharma means moral duty or obligatory duty, which one has to perform to keep the world going. By honoring their duties and moral commitments, humans can establish a just world in which one can live happily and strive liberation. The duties of humans arise from God only. As the creator and preserver of the worlds, he performs many duties and enforces many laws, which are collectively known as Dharma. He delegates the same duties to humans in this world and to gods in heaven so that they can participate in his creation as his devotees Bhagavatas. Since upholding the Dharma of God in all aspects of life is central to Hinduism, it is called a way of life. Yajna, the sacrifice Hinduism views sacrifice as the basis for all existence. Hindus are expected to perform various sacrifices in their lives as part of their Dharma or religious duty. Certain sacrifices are obligatory. They constitute karma as well as Dharma. However, ritual sacrifices are just one outer aspect of the Sacrifice, which according to the Vedas is Brahman himself in his dynamic aspect. A sacrifice usually involves an offered or sacrificer the host, his offering or sacrifice hutam, ajyam or tarpanam and one or more recipients, who may gods or humans or both. Thus, each sacrifice facilitates the exchange, circulation or transfer of things from one entity to another or one world to another or one end to another. Thus, Hinduism envisions sacrifice in every action and movement. Actions such as creation, destruction, sleeping, eating, walking, birth, marriage, breathing, digestion, meditation, war, selling, buying, giving, taking, sexual intercourse and many other actions constitute sacrificial actions only. Belief in Samsara According to Hinduism, souls in the mortal world are caught in the cycle of births and deaths, which is called the Samsara. They cannot easily escape from it, since they are subject to desires, attraction and aversion, attachments, delusion, ignorance, egoism and other impurities. As they engage in desire-ridden, selfish actions, they attract sinful karma and remain bound. To escape from Samsara, they have to overcome the impurities, by cultivating purity, equanimity, detachment through renunciation and self-transformative practices such as jnana, karma, sanyasa yoga and devotion. Belief in karma Karma is one of the fundamental doctrines of Hinduism, according to which all actions produce positive or negative consequences, especially when they are performed with desires and attachments, and determine our fate and our future lives. While desire-ridden actions lead to bondage and suffering, actions, which are performed without desire and as an offering to God, do not bind us. One should therefore perform all actions selflessly without desire for their fruit and offer them to God as a sacrificial offering. Belief in Maya Hinduism considers the world in which we live is unreal and an illusion. It is unreal because it is a projection that lasts for the duration of a time cycle and disappears, just like a dream. Because of the desires, ignorance, and delusion, human beings mistakenly believe it to be true and become involved with it. The involvement is a trap, and until they realize what it is truly, they will remain bound to it and to mortality. The concept that the world is a projection, illusion, or idea, is known as Maya. Belief in rebirth Hinduism believes in the rebirth, reincarnation, or transmigration punarjanma of souls. Souls are born upon earth repeatedly until they achieve liberation. Death is a temporary phase, during which the souls travel to the ancestral heaven and stay there, until they exhaust their karma. Then they fall down to earth and take rebirth. One should therefore

not grieve for the dead. Instead, they should make them offerings and help them build their astral bodies in the ancestral heaven. What dies in death is the body not the soul. The body is like a garment, which is worn afresh by the soul, whenever it takes birth. The body is perishable, while the Self is imperishable. Therefore, human beings should cultivate a soul-centric attitude and live responsibly to liberate themselves from the mortal world. Belief in liberation According to Hinduism life in any of the world is temporary and fraught with suffering and innumerable risks. One may enjoy pleasures in the higher worlds or in the ancestral world but eventually they souls have to return to the earth to take another birth, having exhausted their karma. A householder may uphold Dharma and live righteously, fulfilling his obligatory duties, but it will not save him from rebirth. One can escape rebirth and worldly suffering only by attaining liberation or Moksha by renouncing the world and engaging in spiritual practice. Belief in the freedom of choice Hinduism acknowledges the diversity and inequality which characterizes creation. Although all beings possess the same souls, they are all not alike.

Chapter 7 : Hinduism: Rituals and Practices of Hinduism

Festivals are also very regional; very few festivals are celebrated all across India (Diwali being the most notable exception, though even the interpretation varies across regions). Festivals are primarily about being with family, eating specific food, and having a puja at home.

The great Hanuman is known for its great strength, power and his immortal devotion towards Lord Rama. He is considered to be a greatest follower of Lord Rama and played a crucial role in his life. He is considered to be as one of the most powerful Hindu gods in India. Celebrations on Hanuman Jayanti began early in the day with special puja being performed by devotees. Devotees perform holy Puja in temples dedicated to Sri Hanuman or at Home. People in India organize special prayers for Lord Hanuman to get rid of evil spirits. The God is known for its magical powers. Prayers and Hymns are sung all day long in various Hanuman temples dedicated to the lord. Hanuman is considered as a symbol of Power and great strength in Hindu mythology. This is considering being a ritual for good health and good luck. It is celebrated as a carnival, in which people and artists from different walks of life participate, making it more beautiful and bringing out the true colour of life. Pournima means " full moon. Bonalu Women with Bonam performing parikrama Bonalu is a festival celebrated for a Mother Goddess such as the goddesses Pochamma, Yellamma, etc. Women dancing around Bathukammas Bathukamma is a festival celebrated during the months of September and October in 10 districts of Telangana. It is the most important festival of Bengalis and Odias. Raja Doli khela, Oriya festival The second day Raja Shankranti signifies beginning of the solar month of Mithuna Raja Parba is a four-day-long festival. It inaugurates and welcomes the agricultural year all over Odisha. This was also the day when Vyasa , author of the Mahabharata was born. Mahalakshmi performing Mahalakshmi Mahalakshmi Vrata is a puja performed by married Hindu women to seek the blessings of Mahalakshmi , goddess of wealth and prosperity. Though Onam is traditionally a Hindu festival celebrated in Kerala, contemporarily Onam is celebrated by the Kerala diaspora across the globe. Onam commemorates the rule of Mahabali, an Asura demon king who loved his subjects. During his rule people were happy, honest and full of righteousness. Legend says Lord Vishnu took the incarnation of Vamana, a dwarf Brahmin who visited Mahabali seeking three steps of land for sitting in self denunciation. Cleverly Vamana defeated Mahabali and sent him to the netherworld. Onam is the annual homecoming of the legendary Emperor Mahabali. It falls during the month of Chingam Augustâ€”September and lasts for ten days. The festival is marked by various festivities, including intricate flower carpets, elaborate banquet lunches, snake boat races, Onappottan, Kaazhchakkula in Guruvayoor, Puli Kali, Kaikottikkali etc. These festivities make Onam a unique festival on the earth which is embellished by most number of cultural elements and it can be undoubtedly said that these elements constitute the colorfulness, diversity and richness that no other festival can claim. On Onam day people conduct special prayers in Hindu temples. Although Prayers in Hindu temples are important part of the festival, non-Hindus are not allowed to enter temples.. Rakhi is a special occasion to celebrate the chaste bond of love between a brother and a sister. On this day Sindhi ladies observe a day long fasting for longer life of their husbands. They take dinner after "Chandra Darshan" i. Govinda Pathaks forming human tower Eighth day of waning moon of Bhadrapad Hindu calendar Krishna Janmaashtami is the Hindu festival celebrating the birth of Krishna. It is actually called as Krishna Jayanthi. The date falls not only on the eighth day of the waning moon of Bhadrapad, but always on Rohini Nakshatra. Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna is celebrated with great devotion and enthusiasm in India in the month of July or August. According to the Hindu calendar this religious festival is celebrated on the Ashtami of Krishna Paksh or the 8th day of the dark fortnight in the month of Bhadon. Sri Krishna is considered as the one of the most powerful human incarnations of the Lord Vishnu. He was born around 5, years ago in Mathura. He played an important role in Mahabharata and propagated the theory of bhakti and good karma which are narrated deeply in the Bhagwat Geeta. Sri Krishna was born in a prison in the custody of Kansa. Vasudev, His father immediately thought of his friend Nand and decided to hand over his child to him to save Krishna from the clutch of Kansa. Krishna grew up in Gokul and finally killed his uncle, King Kansa. The actual celebration of Janmashtami takes place during the midnight as

Sri Krishna is believed to be born on a dark, stormy and windy night to end the rule and violence of his uncle, Kansa. All over India this day is celebrated with devotional songs and dances, pujas, arti, blowing of the Conch and rocking the cradle of baby Sri Krishna. The Janmashtami celebration of Mathura and Vrindavan, the places where Sri Krishna had spent his life, are very special. On this day temples and homes are wonderfully decorated and illuminated. Night long prayers are offered and religious mantras are sung in the temples. Gowri is worshipped for her ability to bestow courage to her devotees. Ganesh Visarjan in Mumbai Fourth day of the waxing moon of Bhadrapada Hindu calendar Ganesh Chaturthi is the celebrated as the arrival of Ganesh on the earth. It is very important festival in Maharashtra. Ganesh Festival celebrated in Pune in very traditional way. Nuakhai Fifth day of the waxing moon of Bhadrapada Hindu calendar Nuakhai is celebrated to welcome the new rice of the season. This is an agricultural festival mainly observed by people of western Odisha Kosal. Garba dance in Ahmedabad First nine nights of the waxing moon of Ashvin Navarathri is the Hindu festival of worship and dance. In Sanskrit the term literally means "nine nights". During this festival the forms of Shakti are worshiped. Although it has different names in different parts of India, Hindus from all regions celebrate it. From Kashmir in the North to Tamil Nadu in the South, and from Gujarat in the West to Sikkim in the East, it is celebrated with great enthusiasm as the conquest of good over evil. Every region has its own myths and reasons to explain this. The nine different aspects of Devi are worshipped over the nine days. Durga Puja celebration in Dhaka First ten nights of the waxing moon of Ashvin These are the most popular forms under which she is worshipped: Durga, goddess beyond reach; Kali, the auspicious power of time; Amba or Jagdamba, mother of the world; Annapurna, giver of food and plenty; Sarvamangala, auspicious goddess; Bhairavi, terrible, fearful, power of death; Chandika or Chandi, violent, wrathful, furious; Lalita, playful; Bhavani, giver of existence; Tara, giver of success in work.

Chapter 8 : Ganesh Chaturthi, or Vinayaka Chavithi

Video: Hindu Rituals, Ceremonies, and Festivals This lesson will explore the rituals and ceremonies of Hinduism. It will explain the concept of puja, while also highlighting upanayana, antyeshti.

Check new design of our homepage! Hinduism - Facts about Hindu Religion Hinduism is a complicated religion to understand, unless one has grown up being a Hindu. With so many deities and traditions forming part of it, it also makes for one of the most interesting religions in the world. SpiritualRay Staff Last Updated: May 31, "If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth Hinduism is the religion of truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of truth we have not known. Blossoming under the wings of Hinduism are numerous traditions, sects, and the faith of its more than a billion followers spread across several countries of the world. A simplified aspect on Hinduism, as a religion, has been presented in the following article. Origin of Hinduism Hinduism is one of the oldest living, and the third largest religion in the world. It has approximately one billion followers the world over, of which million live in India alone. The roots of this religion can be traced back to thousands of years. How did it originate? Well, Hinduism does not have a single religious founder or a specific date of origin. The blend of many customs, beliefs, philosophies, traditions, and the knowledge of its sacred texts and scriptures, define the path of this religion. According to historians, the name literally refers to the people who inhabited the banks of Indus in the 2nd millennium BCE. Hence, the name Hindu has many social, geographical, and political associations. This is precisely the reason why Hinduism has been able to assimilate all kinds of influences over the millennia, and has still managed to hold its own, unique identity. The Hindus believe in a variety of things. What is peculiar about Hinduism, however, is the fact that despite having a strict set of beliefs, it gives its followers a considerable liberty to practice the religion. There are no hard and fast rules, and interestingly, there are more than one ways to reach a particular goal, a privilege that provides the followers with choices to choose their own paths. However, the Hindu doctrine dwells on some basic tenets, which form a sort of an outline of the entire religious tradition. After the basic philosophical beliefs, are those pertaining to God. The Hindus believe that there are as many as million Gods, all of which are manifestations of the eternal Brahman. So, worshipping these deities was as sacred as worshipping the Universal Lord. Devotional Sects The Hindus refer to their gods and goddesses as devas and devis respectively. These four major sects are as under: The followers of this sect are known as Shaivas, and they worship Lord Shiva and all His incarnations. They believe Shiva to be the creator, sustainer, destroyer, revealer, and concealer of the universe. Shaivism itself also bears a number of sub-sects. The followers of Vaishnavism are known as Vaishnavas, and unlike the Shaivas, they worship Lord Vishnu, and believe Him to be the creator, sustainer, destroyer, revealer, and concealer of the universe. The Vaishnavas also worship the supposed ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, along with the Vishvarupa, His all-pervasive form. Vaishnavism also has several sub-sects. They believe that the goddess, Shakti, is the consort of Lord Shiva, and together, they control and preside over all the processes of the universe. This sect believes in the duality of the universe, and consider the masculine to be incomplete without the feminine. While the philosophy of this sect does not center much around idol worship, they worship only five divinities viz. Due to the presence of so many divinities and the differences in spiritual practices, it is thought that the religion is polytheistic in nature. However, this does not stand true. Karma is a literal Sanskrit term for deed or action, and according to this concept, every action leads to its corresponding effect. Ways to Unite with God The ancient Hindu scriptures have prescribed four major ways to unite with God or the so-called ultimate reality. They are as under: This is the easiest way for a layman to reach God as it does not involve any extensive yogic practices. Propounded by texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhakti yoga refers to the fostering love of, faith in, and complete surrender to God. Also prescribed by the Bhagavad Gita, this is a path to reach God by performing good and noble deeds. It refers to following the path of meditation in order to get acquainted with the ultimate reality. This refers to the path of knowledge and has been propounded by numerous ancient Hindu philosophical texts. Contrary to popular belief, these were not

exactly castes, but were rather ranks of people, which also determined their social status. The Brahmins enjoyed the topmost status in the ancient Hindu society, and formed the priestly and the scholarly class. The Kshatriyas were the second important rank that comprised the warrior class. It included rulers, warriors, soldiers, and even administrators. The Vaishyas, the third social rank, was actually the class of commoners. The fourth and the lowest rank was that of the Shudras. This included servants and laborers. This was also the most exploited rank in the ancient Hindu society. Stages of Life According to the ancient Hindu scriptures, there are four distinct stages of the life of every individual. At every stage, he has to strict adhere to a given set of rules and regulations, and fulfill certain vital duties. In Hinduism, they are performed for the benefit of an individual, for society, nature, and the environment too. This makes Hinduism a religion with the most number of rituals. These are as under:

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Sacred times and festivals. Hindu festivals are combinations of religious ceremonies, semi-ritual spectacles, worship, prayer, lustrations, processions, music and dances, eating, drinking, lovemaking, licentiousness, feeding the poor, and other activities of a religious or traditional character.

Ganesh Chaturthi, or Vinayaka Chavithi by Jayaram V This is a complete account of the Hindu festival of Ganesh Chaturthi, and how Ganesha is worshipped at home and in public on the occasion. You will also know the essential aspects of the Hindu domestic worship, Puja or pooja. Ganesh Chaturthi or Vinayaka Chaviti is celebrated in honor of Lord Ganesha, who is also known as Vinayaka, Vighnesvara, Ganapathi, and by numerous other names. The festival falls on the fourth day in the first half of the month of Bhadrapada according to the Hindu calendar, which approximately corresponds to the months of August or September. Being a popular festival, which heralds the festive season for the Hindus, it is celebrated throughout India, and abroad in several countries, where Hindus are present. History We do not know when, and how the tradition of worshipping Ganesha on Chaturthi began. Lord Ganesha was not a Vedic god although scholars draw a connection between him and the Vedic deity, Brihaspathi or Brahmanaspati, the teacher of Vedic gods. However, he is mentioned in the Mahabharata as the deity who transcribed the entire epic when Vyasa narrated it to him. He might have been a popular deity of the Agama and Tantra traditions of Shaivism or Shaktism or both. Yajnavalkya Smriti ascribes to him negative qualities. Some scholars suggest that prototypes of Ganesha were worshipped in prehistoric times even outside India. The tradition of worshipping an elephant headed deity might have been prevalent in the royal armies, where elephants played a prominent part in the battlefield as the destroyers of enemies. Alternatively, he might have been a deity of the rural and folk traditions in the areas where agricultural crops were exposed to frequent destruction by elephants and rats. Whatever may be the antecedents, Ganesha was a popular god of Hinduism by the medieval period. Images of Ganesha were unearthed from several sites, some of them as old as 7th Century AD. There was an ancient sect by the name Ganapathya sect 6th Century AD which worshipped him as Brahman himself. The popularity of Ganesha Chaturthi on a scale that we witness today is a recent phenomenon. Few decades ago, the festival was celebrated in public in certain important towns and cities only. Most people worshipped him at home, since it followed immediately the harvest season and heralded the beginning of new festive season for the Hindu year. For common people, it was an occasion to express gratitude to the deity and seek his help and protection in their personal lives. They prayed to him for success and prosperity in their lives and celebrated the festival with great enthusiasm. Nowadays, the social or communal aspect of the celebration is more striking as it is celebrated in public on a massive scale with great pomp and color almost in every village, town and city of India, and even abroad. The public celebration of the festival said to have begun in the Maratha kingdom, especially in Pune, during the time of Shivaji " AD , the great Maratha ruler and founder of the Maratha empire, which at its height covered vast tracts of central and southern India. The Peshwas, who were the royal administrators of the empire, continued the tradition. They worshipped Ganesha as their family deity Kula devata and built many temples in his honor. After the fall of the Maratha empire, the public celebration of the festival fell into disuse. In places like Goa, the public celebration of the festival was even prohibited. The celebration of the festival continued at several places in the erstwhile Maratha empire such as Gwalior, however on a very subdued scale. The tradition was again revived in Maharashtra in s by Bala Gangadhar Tilak, one of the well-known public personalities and freedom fighters of British India. In the public appeal of Ganesha and the festival, Tilak saw a huge opportunity to unite the native people against the British regime and inculcate in them feelings of unity and nationalism. It was under his initiative people began to install large public images of Ganesha in the pavilions during the festival and carry them in large processions through crowded streets for their submergence in the water bodies. In time, the festival became popular throughout India. Nowadays, people celebrate it as one of the major and popular Hindu festival. Because of the festival and the visual appeal of the deity, Ganesha is currently one of the most popular and celebrated deities of Hinduism. How the festival is celebrated? As stated before, the festival is celebrated by people both at homes

and in public according to convenience. Both are not mutually exclusive. People worship him both at home and in public if it suits them. Traditionally, it is celebrated from days according to convenience. Some do it for only one day, and by evening carry the statue to a water body and immerse it. Others do it for three days or seven days. The public celebrations usually continue from days. The first day is the most important, since it is the day on which the deity is invited to the place of worship through invocations and directly worshipped in living form. From then on until the day of immersion, he is worshipped with reverence and devotion. People from the neighborhood continue to visit the places where he is installed, offer their homage and participate in the celebrations. Although household celebrations are more common during the festival, public celebrations receive wider attention due to the festive atmosphere, community involvement and the intense business and commercial activity they generate. On the day of the festival, men and women wake up in the early morning. In the rural areas men go out, bathe in the public ponds or canals and go into the fields. They collect leaves, flowers and twigs for the worship and return home to make further arrangements. Women also wake up in the early morning and prepare various types of traditional foods and delicacies, which are known to be dearer to the god. In urban areas, people mostly buy food as well as ritual material from local vendors for the worship. The worship of Ganesha lasts for a few hours and is usually done in the early morning. It may be done by the devotees themselves, or with the help of priests. If the priest is involved, a day or two before the worship, he will give elaborate instructions as to what materials should be kept ready and what arrangements should be made. There is an advantage in engaging priests since they recite the mantras with accuracy and take care of the ritual observances, with which common people may not be familiar. However, since Ganesha is a Saiva deity, there are no caste restrictions on who should or should not worship him. People from all backgrounds have the permission to worship him directly. If there is any requirement, it is about cleanliness, commitment, devotion, and sincerity. Ganesha is a god of benevolence as well as destruction because of his association with the Tantras. Hence, no one should take liberties with him or invoke his wrath. The worship of Ganesha is an elaborate ritual. It is mostly based upon the smarta tradition, and follow the same pattern as in case of the worship of many other deities. The central idea is that you invite the deity, the way you will invite any guest who visits your house, and you will honor him with love and attention. To begin with, you give him water to wash his feet *padyam*, water to drink *achamaniyam*, and a comfortable seat *asanam* to sit and relax. Then, you make arrangements for his bath, give him refreshments, clothes and food and have a nice and pleasant conversation with him through numerous chants and prayers while he enjoys the food you serve and the love and attention you shower upon him. Finally, when all observances are done, he blesses you, grants your wishes and goes his way. The following is a traditional account of the worship of Ganesha. There can be local and regional variations, but this is the standard format. On the day of the worship, devotees should choose a place in the northeastern corner of the house to conduct the worship. They should clean it with water and decorate it with flowers and traditional floral designs. A wooden stool, not very low or high, should be placed at the center of it, which should be cleaned and decorated because it is the foundation for the whole ritual. A statue of Ganesha, made of clay or even rice paste, should be placed on it, and decorated with vermilion, turmeric, and sandal paste. A clean betel leaf should be placed on the stool, on a bed or rice, before or by the side of the Ganesha image. An image of the Ganesha should be made with turmeric paste and placed on it. Oil lamps should be placed in the corners and lighted. A few incense sticks should be lighted and placed in the stand before him to create an atmosphere of reverential solemnity. After these preliminary arrangements, family members should sit before the deity in a group and start the worship. The ritual worship should begin with the utterance of Aum or a prayer. Usually, the devotees begin it by chanting the names of Kesava *kesavanamas*. Then the worshipper should do self-cleansing *atma-shuddi* by sprinkling water on himself, followed by cleansing of the earth *bhu-shuddi*, uttering specific mantras for each cleansing ritual. The next step is reciting the Gayatri mantra, or any mantra traditionally used by the family or given by the guru, and making a declaration of intention *sankalpa*. In the *sankalpa*, worshippers have to specify clearly at what place, on what auspicious date, time, and moment, in which week, month, and season of the calendar year, which persons, belonging to which gotra and family, for what specific purpose health, wealth, etc. The wording is a standard format, which is used in almost every Hindu ritual worship. After that, they have to install the sacred

water pot kalasam by decorating it with turmeric, vermilion, flowers and coconut, chanting appropriate mantras. Next, they have to throw a few turmeric mixed rice grains akshatas on the image of Ganesha, touch it with their right hand, utter a few mantras to invoke the deity and install their own life breaths. This ritual is called Prana Pratishta. After the deity is firmly installed in the minds and hearts of the devotees, they have to proceed to worship him further in the following manner. Each of the below mentioned step involves an offering accompanied by a prayer or a mantra and the sequence is more or less the same. It is done according to the traditional, Hindu manners and etiquette, which are customarily extended to any guest who visits the house of a Hindu householder. A prayer is offered mentally or verbally to Ganesha, extolling him. Ganesha is invited along with his vehicle vahanam to the place of worship with a reverential mantra. Ganesha is offered a seat of honor, which is customary in Hindu tradition when a guest arrives. This is cleansing ritual in which water is sprinkled on the deity with a flower, along with a mantra and a salutation. This is an offering of water to Ganesha for the cleansing of his feet, and again it is part of an honor that is due to a guest who comes by walk from outside. It is an offering of water to the deity for drinking to quench his thirst since he has come from a long distance. This is an offering of sweet beverage made of curd, honey, Jaggery, or sugar for drinking. Any sweet drink will do. In this, the deity is offered the sacred mixture for ritual bathing, which is made of five types of substances namely cow milk, curd, ghee, honey, and sugar or sweet water. It is the offering of clean water gathered from various rivers for ablution or a clean bath.