



# Questions

1. Questions (a)–(d) can be answered in a single word, phrase or sentence. Question (e) requires a longer answer.
- (a) What name is given to the Ultimate Reality (Supreme Being) worshipped by all Hindus? (1 mark)
  - (b) Which is the earliest of the Vedas? (1 mark)
  - (c) What special name is given to the ‘eternal self’ by Hindus? (1 mark)
  - (d) Name **two** avatars of Vishnu. (2 marks)
  - (e) Explain, using examples, the importance of symbols in Hindu worship. (5 marks)
- (Total 10 marks)

(SEG Paper 1480/1, Section A, 1998 Short Course Specimen Papers)

2. (a) What is a *samskar*? (2 marks)
- (b) What might a Hindu hope to gain by making a pilgrimage to Varanasi? (6 marks)
- (c) Explain why the final *samskar* (cremation) is important in the Hindu view of life. (8 marks)
- (d) ‘When you’re dead, you’re dead, and that is the end of you.’
- Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer showing you have considered another point of view. (4 marks)

(Total 20 marks)

(London)

3. (a) What is meant by ‘caste’? [2]
- (b) Describe the Hindu caste system. [6]
- (c) How might belief in *dharma* (religious duty) affect the life of a Hindu today? [7]
- (d) ‘Hindus in Britain cannot continue to live by the rules of the caste system.’
- Do you agree? Give reasons to support your answer and show that you have thought about different points of view. [5]

(MEG Sample Paper, Summer 1998)

4. (a) Describe how Hindus in India and in Britain celebrate the festival of **either**  
Diwali,  
**or**  
Holi. (7 marks)
- (b) What is the religious meaning of each of these festivals of Diwali and Holi? (7 marks)
- (c) 'Hindu festivals are social events rather than religious ones.'  
Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view. (Total 20 marks)

(NEAB SYL 2, Paper 3, Short Course, 3 June 1997)

5. 'My favourite god is Shiva because when we went to India my Mum bought me a necklace and Shiva was on it. I like him because at night when I have bad thoughts I think about him and they go away.' (Comment by a Hindu girl)
- (a) Describe the features and symbols which might show that the image on the necklace was Shiva. (7 marks)
- (b) Explain the importance of Shiva in Hinduism. (8 marks)
- (c) Do you think this girl's view of Shiva is childish? Give reasons in support of your view. (5 marks)

(Total 20 marks)

(SEG SYLA, Paper 2, June 1995)



# Hinduism: a glossary

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**Acharya (Acarya)**

Sanskrit: 'One who teaches by example'; a special spiritual teacher of the *Vedas*

**Advaita**

A term for non-duality from 'a' ('not'), and 'dvaita' ('duality'); the unity of *Brahman* (ultimate reality) and *Atman* (human soul)

**Agama**

A collection of authoritative scriptures

**Ahimsa (Ahinsa)**

Respect for life; not killing, non-violence

**Ananda**

A Sanskrit term for bliss; with *sat* and *cit*, it is one of the three attributes of *Brahman* in the Vedanta philosophy

**Anasakti**

The doctrine of 'selfless action'

**Anrta**

The Vedic concept of chaos

**Antaryamin**

The soul within the soul, the inner controller

**Aranyakas**

Lit: 'belonging to the forests': Hindu texts, attached to the *Brahmanas*, composed or studied in the forests of India

**Arjuna**

An epic hero, his dialogue with *Krishna* on the eve of battle forms the subject matter of the *Bhagavad Gita*

**Artha**

Economic development; the second human aim

**Arti (Arati)**

A welcoming ceremony in which auspicious articles such as lamps and incense are offered to the god or to saintly people

**Aryan**

From Sanskrit 'arya' meaning noble, applied to the Vedic Indians' tradition

**Ashram (Asram)**

A place set up for spiritual development

**Ashrama (Asrama)**

One of the four stages of life adopted according to material considerations, but ultimately as a means to attain spiritual realisation; also, a centre of religious teaching and spiritual living, a retreat for meditation and self-discipline

**Astika**

Orthodox Hindus who accept the Vedic revelation; they are divided into six schools of thought

**Asuras**

Lit: 'spiritual' or 'divine': originally used of the supreme gods of Hinduism; later applied to demons and anti-gods of the Vedic hymns, against whom the Aryan gods struggled

**Atharya Veda**

The fourth Veda

**Atman (Atta)**

Lit: 'self', the real self, the soul, the principle of life

**Avatar (Avatara, Avtara)**

Lit: 'a descent': the descent of a god/deity, usually *Vishnu*, who has 10 avatars

**Avidya (Avijja)**

Lit: 'not knowing' or 'ignorance': the condition of those involved in the cycle of rebirth

**Bhabhut**

The ashes from a fire offering, preserved by an Indian village worshipper

**Bhagat**

A devotee; one who practices *Bhakti*

**Bhagavad Gita**

'The Song of The Lord', spoken by *Krishna*; the most famous and popular scripture

**Bhagvan**

A name for the impersonal supreme Spirit, God

**Bhajan (Bhajana)**

A hymn

**Bhakti**

'Love' or 'devotion': loving adoration to God with ardent worship

**Bhakti yoga**

The path of loving devotion, aimed at developing pure love of God

**Bhedabhedavada**

The doctrine of identity-in-difference as found in the *Brahma Sutra*; *Brahman* seen as both identical with and different from *Atman*

**Bheru**

The ferocious aspect of the god *Shiva*

**Bhopa (Bhuvo)**

An Indian village priest, or servant of a local deity or god

**Bhutapati**

Shiva as father of demons

**Bhut**

Ghost

**Brahma**

The creator god, one of the *Trimurti* or triad with *Vishnu* and *Shiva*

**Brahmacharya (Brahmacharin)**

The first of the four *ashramas* or stages of life, the celibate student; this stage lasts for 12 years

**Brahmachari**

Someone in the first stage of life

**Brahm**

Brahman ghost

**Brahman**

The ultimate reality, the absolute or god, it has no attributes, and is indescribable

**Brahmanas**

Sacred texts of the Hindu priestly class, attached to the *Vedas*

**Brahma Samaj**

A reformed Hindu sect founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1827

**Brahma Sutra**

A collection of statements about *Brahman* which, with the *Upanishads*, forms the basis of Vedanta philosophy

**Brahmin (Brahman, Brahmana)**

First of the four *varnas*, the priestly class

**Buddha**

In Hm an avatar of Vishnu

**Caste**

Divisions or groups within Indian society, they are not the same as the four classes or *varnas*

**Chamar**

A member of a 'scheduled class' (untouchable or outcaste) whose traditional occupation is connected with tanning leather

**Chandala (Candala)**

General term for an untouchable or outcaste

**Chela**

A disciple of a guru; also an Indian village practitioner who seeks to overcome the effects of sorcery by exorcism and the use of *mantras*

**Chuhra**

An outcaste or untouchable who works as a sweeper

**Cit**

Consciousness, one of the three essential properties of the eternal self, with *ananda* and *sat*

**Curail**

Female ghost

**Darshanas**

The 6 philosophical schools

**Dakshina**

The fee paid to an Indian family priest, for the performance of a religious ceremony

**Devata**

A minor god

**Deva**

Superhuman, spiritual beings; the shining ones

**Dharma**

Lit; 'the quality of the self', 'that which sustains one's existence', generally, religious duty

**Dhatu**

The six sense objects (five sense organs plus *manas*)

**Dhoti**

A cotton garment worn over the lower body and legs by men

**Dhyana**

Meditation

**Digambara**

Shiva 'clothed in space' or 'sky dad'

**Divali (Diwali)**

'Row of lights': the festival of Lights ending one year and starting the next (also Dipavali/ Deepavali)

**Duhkha (Dukkha)**

Suffering

**Durga**

A goddess; one of the names of Devi, wife of Shiva

**Dussehra**

'Ten Days': the festival celebrating the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana (also called Vijaya Dashami)

**Dvija**

One who is 'twice born'; applied to the three upper classes

**Dwarka (Dvarka, Dvaraka, Dwaraka)**

A pilgrimage site on the west coast of India

**Gandhi**

Twentieth century spiritual and political leader

**Ganesha**

Elephant-headed Hindu god

**Ganga**

The River Ganges, the most sacred river of India

**Gayatri Mantra**

The most sacred Vedic verse or prayer

**Ghat**

A flight of steps leading to a river landing place; burning ghats or cremation places

**Ghi**

Clarified butter used in sacrifices and cremation

**Gram-devata**

Godlings in villages with limited local powers

**Grihastha (Gristhi, Grhastha)**

The second of the four stages of life: the householder

**Gunas**

Lit: 'rope or qualities': the three forces or qualities, through the interplay of which the Universe evolved

**Hari Hara**

A god joining Vishnu and Shiva; love and terror

**Harijans**

Lit: 'Sons of Hari': Gandhi's term for the untouchables or outcastes: The Indian constitution calls them the 'Scheduled class'. They call themselves *Dalith (Dalit)*, meaning oppressed

**Hanuman**

The monkey god who serves Rama and Sita

**Havan (Homa)**

The Fire ritual at weddings and other ceremonial occasions

**Havan kund**

The container in which the havan fire is burned

**Holi**

The Spring festival of *Krishna*

**Indra**

The most important Vedic god

**ISKON**

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a religious group of the Vaishnava tradition

**Isvara**

Sanskrit: Lord, Master, King, God: most often refers to *Shiva* as the Supreme being. In the Bhagavad Gita it is applied to *Krishna* as the Lord of Beings

**Jagat**

The cosmos of moving beings; that which can be felt, heard and smelt

**Japa**

The repetition of the name of God as a devotional exercise

**Jati**

Lit: 'birth': Occupational kinship group, another term for caste, also, family, lineage or rank

**Jenoi (Janeu)**

Sacred thread worn by males of the 'twice-born' castes

**Jnana**

Knowledge or wisdom coming from direct insight into the nature of ultimate reality; one of the ways to salvation

**Jnana-yoga**

The path of knowledge to liberation

**Kali**

Lit: 'black': she is Shiva's consort

**Kali Yuga**

The fourth of the ages; the iron age or age of quarrel or hypocrisy

**Kalkin**

Avatar of Vishnu as incarnation of the future appearing as a horse, horse-headed man, or a man on a white horse with a flaming sword

**Kalpas**

Alternate ages of activity and rest, through which the Universe has evolved

**Karah**

Sweet pudding used as an offering

**Kama**

The third of the four aims of life-regulated sense enjoyment

**Karma (Kamma)**

Lit: deeds, doing or action: these determine a person's destiny in a future life

**Karma-marga**

The path of action leading to salvation

**Karma-yoga**

The path of pious work aiming at enjoying this world, in this life and the next

**Katha**

The reading of scriptures by a *Brahman* priest, sponsored by a worshipper

**Khota**

The anger of an Indian village godling, seen as the cause of suffering among the community

**Kirtan**

‘Glorification’; usually performed with musical instruments

**Krishna**

Popular god, an *avatar* or incarnation of *Vishnu*

**Kshatriya (Khetri, Khatri)**

Second of the four *varnas* or divisions of Hindu society; the ruling or warrior division

**Kurma**

Tortoise avatar of Vishnu

**Lakshmi**

The goddess of fortune

**Lingam**

The symbol of the male sexual organ

**Mahabharata**

The longer of two Indian epic poems; the other is the *Ramayana*. It includes the *Bhagavad Gita*

**Mahatma**

‘Great soul’, a title given to leaders such as Gandhi

**Mahavakyas**

Great sayings in the Vedic scriptures

**Mala**

A circle of stringed beads used in meditation

**Manas**

A sixth sense which co-ordinates the perceptions of the other five

**Mandala (mandal)**

A circular sacred diagram, also an area or community/group

**Mandir**

Temple

**Mantra**

Lit: ‘that which delivers the mind’: a sacred prayer repeated often (In Vedic literature, a hymn or verse which aids meditation)

**Manu**

The ancestor of the human race who outlined the rules of conduct for Hinduism. Each age has its own manu: the present one is the seventh of fourteen

**Marg**

A path leading to salvation

**Marhais**

The smallest, local religious fairs

**Mata**

An independent female *devata*: *Matas* have specialist functions – for example, Sitalamata is the smallpox goddess, Hadakaimata, the goddess of rabies

**Mathura**

The birthplace of *Krishna*, a holy place

**Matsya**

Fish avatar of Vishnu

**Maya**

From the human point of view, it is the power to create illusions, and then illusion itself; from the divine point of view it is the power which creates the world

**Mayin**

A title for God as the wielder of **Maya**

**Mela**

A religious fair

**Metempsychosis**

The transfer of the soul from one body to another

**Mimamsa**

One of the six schools of philosophy

**Moksha (Moksa, Mukti)**

Liberation from the cycle of rebirth

**Mundan**

Head-shaving ceremony

**Murti**

‘Form’, the image used as a focus of worship

**Nandi**

Bull ridden by Shiva

**Narasimha**

Man-lion avatar of Vishnu

**Natavaja**

Shiva as Lord of the Dance

**Navaratri (Navaratra)**

Nine nights festival before *Dussehra*

**Nazar**

The Evil Eye

**Nastika**

Unorthodox schools of philosophy that do not accept the Vedic revelation

**Nirgunam Brahman**

Term for *Brahman* without *gunas* or qualities

**Nyaya**

One of the six orthodox schools of philosophy

**Om (Aum)**

The sacred symbol and sound representing the ultimate; the most sacred Hindu words

**Pancayat**

The caste assembly which enforces caste rules, and settles disputes between fellow caste members

**Pancgavya**

A mixture of the five products of the cow, consumed as a purifying agent: includes milk, curds, *ghi*, cow dung and urine

**Panchatantra**

Part of the supplementary Vedic scriptures (animal stories with a moral)

**Pap**

Sin

**Parashu Rama**

Rama of the Axe; an avatar of Vishnu

**Paratantra**

The doctrine that all worldly things depend for their activity on God

**Parvati**

The goddess of the Himalayas; one of the names of the consort of *Shiva*

**Pashupa**

Shiva as protector of cattle

**Prahlada**

A devotee of *Vishnu* connected with the *Holi* festival

**Prakrti**

Sanskrit: ‘making before’, used in the *sankhya* school of philosophy for Nature or Primordial Matter, eternal and self-existing

**Pranam**

Greeting involving bowing with hands together before the deity, or bowing down to touch the feet of the deity or a guru

**Prashad**

Sanctified food at a sacrifice, eaten by those present at the end of worship

**Prasada**

‘Grace’, the gift of *Krishna*, used in the Gita

**Pravachan**

A lecture based on scripture

**Pret**

‘Lingering shade’ the state of the soul between death and the completion of funeral ceremonies

**Puja**

‘Worship’: usually the raising of hands, palms together

**Pujari**

Village priest

**Punya**

A meritorious act that brings a reward in this life or the next – for example, meditation and generosity

**Puranas**

‘Ancient’, part of the *smṛti* scriptures

**Purohit**

A family priest

**Purusha**

The soul as distinct from material nature: in the *Rig Veda* it is used for Cosmic Man

**Rajas**

One of the *gunas* or qualities, translated as ‘energy’, ‘passion’, or ‘force’

**Raksha Bandhan**

The festival when women tie a decorative bracelet on their brothers’ wrists

**Rama**

One of the ten *avatars* of *Vishnu*, as king of Ayodhya, hero of the *Ramayana*

**Ramayana**

The story of *Rama*, an epic poem in *Sanskrit*

**Rig Veda**

Lit: ‘verse knowledge’ or ‘word knowledge’, the Royal Veda, the first and most sacred scripture

**Rishi (Rsi, risi)**

The seven seers who received the *Vedas* from the gods

**Rta**

The Vedic concept of cosmic law by which all things are maintained in existence

**Sadhana**

Regulated spiritual practices or discipline

**Sadharan dharma**

General code of ethics

**Sadhu (Saddhu)**

Holy man, ascetic (*Sanskrit*)

**Sagunam Brahman**

A term in the *Upanishads* for the Divine with *gunas* (qualities); this came about because of the difficulty of understanding *Brahman* without qualities or attributes

**Saiva**

A follower of the god *Shiva*

**Salagram**

An ammonite stone with spiral markings, one of the symbols of the god *Vishnu*

**Sama Veda**

The *Veda* of chanting; material mainly from the *Rig Veda* arranged for ritual chanting in sacrificial worship

**Samsara (Sangsara)**

‘Going through’ or transmigration or rebirth of the soul in different species

**Samskaras**

Rites of passage initiating new stages of life

**Sanatan Dharma**

The eternal, imperishable religion, preferred by some of the faithful to the word Hinduism

**Sangha**

An assembly of sages

**Sankhya**

One of the orthodox schools of philosophy

**Sannyasin (Samyasin, Samnyasin)**

Someone in the last of the four stages of life, having renounced worldly matters

**Sanskrit**

Sacred language of the scriptures

**Sarana**

A description of *Krishna*, as a refuge for his followers, used in the *Gita*

**Sat**

‘Being’ or ‘existence’ and hence ‘the good’ or ‘the true’; one of the three attributes of the divine principle, *Brahman*, with *ananda* and *cit*

**Sattva (Sattwa)**

One of the three *gunas* or qualities; ‘goodness’, sustaining and nourishing

**Satyagraha**

‘truth-force’ or non-violent action; Gandhi’s policy of non-co-operation with the British

**Seva (Sewa)**

Service, to the divine or to humanity

**Shaivism (Saivism)**

The religion of those who are the devotees of the god *Shiva*

**Shakti (Sakti)**

Energy and power, especially of a god

**Shiva (Siva)**

A god; the name means ‘kindly’ or ‘auspicious’

**Shivaratri (Sivaratri)**

Annual festival in honour of *Shiva* (also *Mahashivarti*)

**Shraddha (Sraddha)**

Ceremony in which sanctified food is offered to departed ancestors

**Shri (Sri)**

‘Fortune’: a title of respect; fem. *Shrimati*

**Shudra**

The fourth varna: artisans; they are of higher status than the outcastes or *untouchables*

**Sita (Seeta)**

Rama’s consort

**Smrti (Smirti, Smiriti)**

‘That which is remembered’: scriptures other than the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* (which are revealed) for example, the *Gita*

**Sruti (Srti, Shruti)**

‘What is heard’: the four *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* which were ‘heard’ by ancient seers

**Sudra**

The lowest of the four division of society

**Suttee**

When a wife was burned alive on her husband’s funeral pyre

**Svatantra**

A doctrine that God alone is autonomous; his activity and existence do not depend on anything else, but all other beings are dependent

**Svayambhu**

A descriptive name for God found in the *Upanishads*; from the root ‘sva’ self, literally meaning self-existent

**Swami (Svami)**

Lit: ‘controller’: one who can control his senses, this is an honorary title for religious teachers and holy men

**Swastika**

Sanskrit ‘well being’: a mark of good fortune

**Tamas**

Ignorance, dullness or denseness; the lowest of the three *gunas*

**Tantra**

Texts containing dialogues between *Shiva* and his spouse

**Totka**

A magic ritual carried out by a village priest

**Transcendental Complex**

The quest for liberation and salvation from *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth and continued existence

**Transmigration**

Belief that soul inhabits many bodies in successive rebirths

**Trinurti**

The three gods: *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*

**Tryambaka**

Shiva accompanied by 3 mother goddesses

**Tuna (Tona)**

Sorcery practiced by a villager to cause suffering or disaster

**Untouchable**

Those outside the caste system (outcastes)

**Upanaya**

Sacred thread-tying ceremony

**Upanishad (Upanisad)**

‘To sit down near’: a sacred text

**Vaikuntha**

The heavenly realm of *Vishnu*, where liberated souls live

**Vaiseshika**

One of the six schools of philosophy

**Vaishnavism (Vainavism)**

The religion of those who are devotees of *Vishnu*

**Vaishya (Vaisya)**

The third of the four *varnas* or social divisions (merchants and farmers)

**Vamana**

Dwarf avatar of Vishnu

**Vanaprasthi**

The third of the four stages of life (Lit: ‘forest dweller’)

**Varaha**

Boar avatar of Vishnu

**Varna**

‘Colour’: the four divisions of Hindu society

**Varnashrama dharma**

The system dividing society into four *varnas* (divisions) and life into four *ashramas* (stages)

**Varuna**

Vedic sky god

**Vayu**

Vedic god of wind or spirit

**Veda**

‘Knowledge’: the earliest Hindu scriptures

**Vedanta**

Lit: ‘end of the Veda’; one of the six philosophical schools

**Vidya**

‘Knowledge’, especially spiritual wisdom

**Vishnu (Visnu)**

One of the three gods of the *Trimurti*

**Vrat**

Vow

**Vrindavan (Brindavan, Vrindavana)**

The village connected with *Krishna* and the *gopis*

**Yajna**

A sacrifice to get extra merit

**Yajur Veda**

The sacrificial Veda: texts from the Veda with instructions for use in sacrificial worship

**Yama**

The god of death who punishes the wicked

**Yantra**

A mystical diagram, such as a mandala, used in ceremonies

**Yatra (Jatra)**

Pilgrimage

**Yoga**

'Communion'; the union of the soul with the Supreme; a method of discipline leading to salvation; one of the six philosophical schools

**Yogi**

A person who practices yoga (fem. *yogusi*)

**Yuga**

Age, or extended period of time; there are four