

## MEETING IN THE CITY

Hindus started to settle in Birmingham after the Second World War and their numbers grew considerably during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first temple (*mandir*) was the Sri Geeta Bhavan Mandir in Handsworth, which opened in the mid-1960s. In the south of the city there are now the Shri Laxmi Narayan Mandir in Tyseley, the Krishna Temple and the Sri Ram Mandir in Sparkbrook, and the Shri Swami Narayan Mandir in Hall Green. There is also an active Hare Krishna community that meets regularly at a small temple in Edgbaston. In addition, the Arya Samaj on Erskine Street in Nechells has a library dedicated to Vedic literature.

Hindus in the area originate from many Indian states. In addition, there are some who have their origins in Africa and Bangladesh. Originally they settled in the north of the city but large numbers also went to live in Sandwell, where there are several other temples.

Set up in 1986, the Hindu Council of Birmingham is the principal body that represents Hindus in the city and in Solihull. It represents Hindu temples and charities at a city wide level, co-ordinating interfaith work, community cohesion events and political representation.

For further information, contact the Hindu Council of Birmingham on [info@hcb.org.uk](mailto:info@hcb.org.uk), or visit the website at [www.hcb.org.uk](http://www.hcb.org.uk)

# B C F

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Originally founded in 1974, Birmingham Council of Faiths' objective is to promote knowledge and mutual understanding of the beliefs and practices of the city's many religious faiths.

Its belief is that through greater understanding of each other, a more harmonious and cohesive society can be created.

An additional strategy is to act as an interfaith hub, networking between the diverse faith organisations in the city and to serve as a focal point for information about their activities.

This brochure is one of ten covering the Council's affiliated faiths, which currently include Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Confucians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians

# *Hindus*



one of  
Birmingham's  
faith  
communities

## HINDU BASICS

Hinduism is not based on a single scripture or a single founder. Although scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gita are revered, Hinduism allows a great deal of freedom of thought, faith and worship. It is a religion that evolves constantly over time. This enables it to confront successfully the many challenges that modernity poses for all faiths.

Whilst Hinduism may appear to be polytheistic, the fundamental concept in Hinduism is that God, or the Universal Soul (Brahman), is essentially one but has many attributes and functions and these can be referred to by different names. Hinduism gives one the flexibility to approach God in His formless aspect, and also allows Him to be worshipped in His divine forms, such as Krishna, Shiva and the Goddess Durga.

Every living being has an eternal soul (*atman*) which is distinct from the body that is made of inert matter. Hindus accept the doctrine of reincarnation, whereby the soul transmigrates through different species, passing from one body to another, as part of the cycle of rebirth, called *samsara*. The soul reincarnates through many births until all desires and *karmas* (reactions from material activities) have been resolved, and liberation from materiality is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny. Compassion is an important feature of Hinduism, holding that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered.

The sacred syllable Om serves as religious symbol. It represents the Divine vibration, the first sound of creation from which life emerged.

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Hinduism is a religion rich in rituals. Many Hindus have shrines in their homes but the temple is considered the earthly home of God. When Hindus first settled in the UK, they converted disused buildings. More recently, they have built new temples, such as the Balaji Temple in Tividale, that adhere to scriptural injunctions and are similar in architectural design and construction to temples in India.

Deities in the temple and on shrines represent God, and to have sight of the Deity is a blessing. In Deity worship, the presence of God is invoked into the sacred image. This image is therefore not an ordinary icon; it is the sanctified channel through which the devotee can enter into direct communion with God.

Despite having a profound and comprehensive philosophy, Hinduism gives validity to rituals, such as prayers and temple worship, that remind us of God on a daily basis. Others, such as fasting or meditation, are a way of disciplining our lives for spiritual progress. Therefore the celebration of festivals such as Diwali, or pilgrimages, become important events that help us focus our minds on religious aspirations and are a means of obtaining spiritual blessings.

The main Hindu festivals either celebrate different gods, as in Maha Shivratri (Shiva), Ramnavami (Rama) and Janmashtami (Vishnu), or auspicious times of the year such as the autumnal Navratri and Diwali, during which Hindus flock to their temples.

## SOCIAL PRACTICE

A central philosophy of Hinduism is Devotion to God (*bhakti*), an extension of which in the social sphere is Service (*sewa*). This plays an important part in the religious lives of all Hindus, whether as individuals or communities. It involves performing selfless acts of kindness without expectation of reward and has led to the creation of National Sewa Day. Charities such as Sewa International UK ([www.sewauk.org](http://www.sewauk.org)) have their headquarters in Birmingham and most if not all Hindu Institutions are registered charities.

Hindus place great emphasis on family life since the family is considered to be the essential basis of society and of the entire nation. It is seen as an institution for mutual support and to pass on traditions and values. The concept embraces the joint or extended family, usually consisting of three or four generations living together. Hindu families demonstrate firm ties of interdependence, strikingly different from those in many Western families, providing shelter and support for the elderly, the disabled and the less well off. Marriage itself is a broad social and religious obligation, rather than just a relationship between partners, and involves family ties extending to the in-laws too.

Whilst the caste system is considered to be dying amongst Hindus in the UK., the Government still felt that it should be included in the Single Equality Bill [2010]. Traditional Hinduism is against the caste system, but culturally the ideas still persist. It is a delicate issue, often politicised and skewed for ulterior motives.

Many Hindus, seeing a continuity between all being, have no wish to harm living creatures and prefer to be vegetarian. Even those Hindus who are not vegetarian usually refrain from eating beef out of respect for the cow.