

GCE A LEVEL



WJEC A-LEVEL
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

A photograph of a white Hindu temple with multiple domes and intricate carvings. In the foreground, there is a stone fountain with water spraying upwards. The sky is clear and blue.

**Theme 3B:
The impact of migration on Hindu identity
and the challenges of being a religious
and ethnic minority in Britain**

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Glossary Key Terms

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) – Hindu Vaishnava movement, founded in the USA in 1965 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. It follows the tradition of Caitanya, and aims for the state of permanent Krishna consciousness. Dancing and chanting the maha-mantra are important features of worship. It welcomes non-Indians who are willing to commit to its stringent rule and regulations.

Ramakrishna Mission – A volunteer organisation founded by Vivekananda. It is involved in a number of areas such as health care, disaster relief and rural management and bases its work on the principles of karma yoga

Santana Dharma – Eternal law; understanding of Hinduism as a universal principle that all should obey.

Other useful terms

Sampradaya – a tradition within Hinduism following the teachings of a specific teacher or guru e.g. Swaminarayan

The meaning of Hindu identity in terms of belief, practice, lifestyle, worship and conduct

The term 'Hindu' was first used by Persians to denote the people living beyond the river Sindhu (Indus), so the term was purely to identify Indians and not their religion. Following the Muslim Mughal invasion in the sixteenth century, however, Indians themselves began to use the term 'Hindu' to identify themselves as being different to the Muslims. The word 'Hinduism' is an 'umbrella' term, introduced by the British during its rule in India during the C19th, to identify the cultural practices native to the people of India, regardless of their differing traditions.

Today few Hindus will refer to their religion as being Hinduism, preferring the term Sanatana Dharma instead. They are more likely to refer to themselves as Vaishnavas or Shaivas to refer to their preferred tradition of worship, using the term 'Hinduism' to define a collection of varied religious beliefs and traditions.

The Hindu Community in the UK

Hindu migration into the UK over the past 70 years has been for various reasons and from several different countries. Many Hindus living in India moved to the UK following Independence from British rule because of the effects of Partition in 1947. In the 1960s the British government actively recruited many doctors from India. Others arrived following expulsion from African countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania in the 1970s, followed by refugees of the civil war in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. All have been able to make their home in the UK, although not always without problems.

Although the Hindu community has settled well in Britain, the community is less known than the Muslim community, for example, and British people do find it difficult to understand some Hindu practices. However, some Hindu festivals such as Diwali are now celebrated through the media (CBBC, for example) - even by the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, and there is a lot of respect for Hindu values such as their strong family units, emphasis on educational achievement and hard work.

Although there are several different Hindu sampradaya (traditions) in Britain they do share core beliefs, practices and festivals. Some of the different Hindu denominations in Britain include the Swaminarayan Movement (BAPS), the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Ramakrishna Mission and the Chinmaya Mission.

There are several organisations in the UK which have been established to represent the Hindu community and preserve their cultural heritage. The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) is the oldest of these having been established in 1965 "to promote, preserve, practice and protect Hindu Dharma (Religion), Hindu ideals and Hindu way of life in the British multicultural environment." In 1978 the National Council of Hindu Temples UK was established and today serves to link over 200 Hindu Temples and Faith Organisations in the country and work with them for the benefit of the Hindu community across the UK. Another similar organisation is the Hindu Council, founded in 1994 with the intention of representing all British Hindus, regardless of their tradition. As such it represents the diversity within UK

Hinduism and acts to give British Hindus an effective voice on policy matters with the Government.

Identity

The most recent figures on the number of Hindus living in the UK come from the 2011 Census, which shows that there were around 835,394 people who identified themselves as Hindus in the United Kingdom, approximately 1.3% of the total population of the UK at that time. These figures include Hindus born abroad who are now living in the UK and those who were born in the UK. Most Hindus now living in the UK are from Gujerat in India (approximately 70%).

One of the issues that has emerged for second generation Hindus in the UK is the lack of clarity about their identity - are they Hindu, British Hindu or simply British? Some Hindus have raised concerns in identifying as Hindu because it challenges the pluralism of belief and philosophy that are part of the religion. An example of this might be followers of a guru-led tradition, such as ISKCON who will tend to identify as followers of Swami Prabhupada, or as Krishna devotees. Likewise, members of the Swaminarayan sampradaya will identify as Swaminarayan followers rather than as Hindus, representing the practice of Hinduism they observe.

Unsurprisingly most British Hindus identify strongly with India, due to the geographical foundation of Hinduism and the family links that many still have with India. This is also true of those who can trace their heritage to the Caribbean, Sri Lanka, or East Africa. For further information see:
<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/hinduism-in-the-uk/>

Beliefs, practice, lifestyle, worship and conduct – how do they inform Hindu identity in the UK?

In 2006 the Runnymede Trust was commissioned by the Hindu Forum of Britain to research the aspirations, contributions and the social issues faced by Hindus living in Britain today. The 'Connecting British Hindus' report which was produced has served to give a wealth of information on the lives, thoughts and disadvantages experienced by British Hindus in the twenty-first century. (<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>)

Beliefs

Hindu texts and the philosophical teachings contained within them can be open to interpretation. The belief that one's actions (karma) determine the progression into the next life (samsara) and ultimate release of one's soul (moksha) is one that is common to all Hindus. However, beliefs about God amongst British Hindus can vary just as they do in India, according to the tradition or Sampradaya – some see God as Nirguna Brahman, other Saguna Brahman (see Themes 1A and 4 B)

Practice

Irrespective of whether they follow an orthodox or more liberal practice, most Hindus observe the key rites of passage called samskaras, such as a baby's head shaving ceremony, naming ceremony, marriage), and funeral. Whilst there are 16 samskaras in total only the most orthodox British Hindus will observe ceremonies for each stage.

Worship

Hinduism is a pluralistic faith with many denominations, each with varying festivals and customs. The main denominations are Shaivite (followers of Shiva), Vaishnavite (followers of Vishnu and/or his avatars) and Shaktas (followers of Shakti or the goddess). There are several different traditions within the British Hindu community ranging from the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and the Ramakrishna Mission to the more recent International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Although ways of worship, deities, festivals and dress may differ according to the branch of Hinduism they all share basic beliefs and religious texts.

Amongst the many Hindu temples in the UK it is the Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, which is the most astounding. Money was raised to fund its construction amongst the local community who were originally from the state of Gujarat. It was built by thousands of volunteers with materials from Bulgaria, Italy and India. It was carved in India according to traditional Vedic design and craftsmanship before being shipped back to the UK and built – there were 26,300 pieces! Today the temple is used by followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the British branch of a devotional order in Gujarat whose origins date back to the 18th century. (For more information on the Neasden Temple and the Swaminarayan Movement see <http://londonmandir.baps.org/>)

Festivals

British Hindus will always celebrate their major festivals including, Diwali and Holi and for ISKCON, the Ratha Yatra. The major festivals are celebrated both at home and in the temples and if possible at an outdoor festival such as the large Diwali celebrations annually held in Leicester. The Leicester celebrations which also brings together Jains, Sikhs and non-Hindus lasts for two weeks. The lights on the Golden Mile (a stretch of Belgrave Road at the heart of Leicester's Indian community) are switched on about 10 days before Diwali, and on Diwali day itself there is huge street party with music, dancing, food and a huge public firework display. It is estimated that at least 35,000 people attend both events every year. (see <https://www.visitleicester.info/whats-on/diwali-p704841>). London has also held a Diwali celebration in Trafalgar Square since 2001, which is open to all and which has grown in size and numbers ever since.

Lifestyle and conduct

The Hindu family has always been recognised as valuable, which is why the second ashrama (grihasta) makes the role of a householder with the associated requirements of marriage and having a family as being vital. British Hindu parents work hard to ensure their children receive a good education and gain the skills they need to be successful in business and employment.

British Hindus contribute substantially to the generation of wealth for the UK, with many in management or the professions. In 2018 The Sunday Times 'Rich List' showed that the Hinduja brothers were the second richest in the country due to their contribution to industry and finance in the UK. British male Hindus are more likely than the general population in the UK to be entrepreneurs and both men and women from Hindu families are more likely to have a university degree. There are many Hindus in professions such as medicine, accountancy and the law.

Key Quote

“Drawn mainly from India and East Africa, British Hindus quietly concentrated on building their careers, holding their families together, forging communal ties based on traditional institutions, and giving their children the best education, they could afford. Over the course of the last fifty years and three generations, they have come to occupy important positions in professional, managerial, commercial and other areas of life, and have a larger middle class than any other community except the Jews. They have also built up a reputation as a peaceful and hardworking community. Since they made few noises even when confronted with injustices, they remain the politically most invisible community.” (Lord Bhikhu Parekh, Member of the House of Lords)

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>

The 2011 Census figures also showed that British Hindus had the highest rate of economic activity at the time of the survey. Other surveys have shown that British Hindus have the third lowest rates of poverty and the second lowest rates of arrest or imprisonment (2% of the prison population) in comparison to other ethnic minority groups.

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/hinduism-in-the-uk/>

Culturally there have been some changes for British Hindus, so whereas the older generation women may still wear traditional saris, younger second-generation women have adopted western styles of dress and listen to western music.

Possible conflict of traditional Hinduism with popular culture

One of the areas that the Runnymede Trust discussed with its focus groups followed an on-line survey question relating to whether Hindus felt they were well integrated into British society. The majority (89%) stated that they were but there was some debate about what being 'well integrated' meant amongst the focus groups who were interviewed. Some referred to their self-sufficiency as a strength in assimilation, whilst others thought it was a weakness which would lead to a loss of identity. Indeed, there was real concern that assimilation into British culture would be challenging for Hindus who wanted to retain their religion and culture. It was felt by some that the typical western culture was not always one that Hindus should want to assimilate into, although they valued British education, individuality and freedom. One of the participants made this clear in the following statement, *"As far as I understand, integration and assimilation are two different things. Assimilation means losing your own identity and integration means mixing together socially and not losing your identity. So most of the Indians do prefer integration. We would like to mix socially and all that, but we don't want to be assimilated so that we lose our own identity as well."* Another respondent however, noted that Hindu values were similar to British ones, which made it easier to practice their faith in the UK, stating *"So if you look at assimilation from the cultural point of view, the wider perspective, then the Hindu community is very much in tune with the Western societies, Western cultures."*

(<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>)

Although British Hindus have an identity, in recent years there have been objections to the use of the term 'Asian' by the British media as they believe it deprives Hindus of their real identity in the UK. Using such a term can cause confusion as it covers many different peoples, religions and cultures from across the vast continent of Asia. Also, whilst Hinduism is geographically associated with India, there are also significant numbers of Hindus from the Caribbean, Fiji, Sri Lanka and East Africa. The Hindu Council in the UK has therefore proposed that Hindus living in the UK should be referred to as British Hindus. One Hindu in the Runnymede Report stated, *"The Asian word is abused, and I totally disagree with that. I would rather somebody called me 'Indian', 'Hindu' - but to be called Asian is a violation. Russians are Asians. Half of Russia is Asian, but they are never called 'Asian'. Chinese are Asians and they're never called 'Asians'. They're called 'Chinese'. But Indians, somehow, become 'Asians' as though they own the whole of the continent of Asia."*

(<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>)

Unfortunately, racism is an issue that often raises its head in the UK. However, Hindus who took part in the Runnymede Trust's survey did not on the whole feel discriminated against because of their faith. However, half of the people who responded to the survey stated that they had been discriminated against because they are Asian. It was clear to them that racist incidents that they had experienced were simply down to the colour of their skin, not because they were Hindu.

Some British Hindus are concerned that they do not receive equal treatment when compared to Muslims. From the Hindu perspective there appears to have been little attempt to engage Hindu communities in activities to promote community cohesion or interfaith activities in the same way as that offered to Muslims. Many Hindus feel left out of community and sports programme which may be put on to bring about cohesion between Muslim and Christian youths. Some Hindus felt victimised or ignored particularly when they saw Muslims being given funding, building permits and even their own cemeteries. (see notes on the dispute over open-air cremations below)

A further cause of conflict has been over the culture gap between British born second and third generation Hindus and their first-generation parents. It is difficult for the younger generation to fully appreciate and understand the experiences of their parents. For the older generation they see their children forgetting the values of their faith and their parental language and succumbing to the lifestyle of 21st century Western youth. Naturally the older generation are concerned that knowledge of Hindu culture and religious practices will weaken as a result. Interestingly, Hindus who were born in the UK and now have children of their own, are beginning to voice their concerns about teaching the religion and culture to their children. Because of these concerns some Hindu community groups are offering classes to children, either in local community buildings or the temples. One of the largest of these groups is Hindu Youth UK which organises popular events such as festivals for older children and young people across the UK, as well as provide a platform for young Hindus to discuss social and moral issues in Britain.

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>

Key Quote

"Hindu communities should be supported in playing a fuller role in society through improved capacity for leadership, community engagement and better understanding of Hindu beliefs, cultures and perspectives," (*Runnymede Trust Report - Connecting British Hindus*

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>

The Runnymede Trust Report noted the important role schools in the UK have in creating understanding about cultures such as Hinduism. However, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction over the way in which Hinduism is being taught in British schools. Compared to other religions, Hinduism is being taught far too briefly and with the focus on weddings, Diwali and little else, leading to a confused and basic introduction to the religion.

Another often-repeated concern was the incorrect stereotyping in television programmes with an on-line survey showing that 80% of respondents were unhappy with the way in which Hindus were portrayed. Programmes such as 'Goodness Gracious Me' and the 'Kumars at No 42', both comedies shown on the BBC were particularly highlighted. "*I think you mentioned the Kumars [at No.42]? Now, one episode there - I don't know whether you have heard of it - they were doing yagya - fire sacrifice - and they were throwing meat . . . Now, that was*

absolutely abhorrent. Nobody ever thought of that. We protested to them... It was not taken notice of at all. So there are some very derogatory things being shown on the television about Hindus which nobody does [anything about]. . .It's not a Hindu practice to throw meat.” (Manchester focus group participant) Other complaints focussed on the incorrect and disrespectful use of imagery involving Hindu deities on items of clothing, bottles of whisky and Royal Mail stamps. On the other hand, many Hindus were proud that large scale events such as Diwali, and more recently Holi, have been shown on in the media.

“The media plays an important role in reflecting the lives of British people. The lack of presence in the mainstream media in a way that Hindus were comfortable with is of concern since media provide opportunities to share information and knowledge about Hindu experiences with other communities....While public expressions of Hinduism are confined to festivals the understanding of Hindu communities for other groups will remain limited.”

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>

Difficulties of practising Hinduism in a non-Hindu society.

When Hindus first began arriving in the UK there were no temples, so buildings had to be adapted and new ones built. Hindu families wanted to preserve their heritage so that their children didn't forget their cultural roots. Newly established temples and religious groups ensured that young Hindus were able to attend classes in the languages spoken by their parents and learn their scriptures.

The issue of caste has been one that British Hindus have struggled to reconcile and there have been some reports on caste discrimination in the UK. In 2010 the House of Lords discussed making caste discrimination illegal, proposing a clause in the Equality Act to that end. However, British Hindus have not been in favour of this, believing that to bring the issue to the fore will only serve to increase hostility towards Hindus. *"There has been this assumption that Hindus are casteist and I have recently heard what I think is an outrageously prejudicial term, where groups who are not dalits are now being referred to as 'caste supremacists'."* (Satish Sharma, General Secretary of the National Council of Hindu Temples - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-38663143>)

Conflicts have arisen for British Hindus more recently in the UK over several issues:

In 2016 when the Bank of England issued a new £5 note there was a good deal of concern over the material it was made of. It contains a small tiny amount of tallow which comes from animal fat which meant that it broke the Hindu laws of ahimsa towards animals. It led to a petition against the £5 note, stating that tallow was *"unacceptable to millions of vegans, vegetarians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and others in the UK"*. A number of Hindus have also called for the notes to be banned from temples, where meat products are forbidden. The Bank of England has stated that the amount of tallow in the new polymer £5 and £10 notes is too small to be concerned about and they remain in circulation. As a result some Hindu temples in the UK have banned donations of money containing the new notes. *"The £5 note becomes a medium for communicating pain and suffering and we would not want to come into contact with it."* (Satish Sharma - National Council of Hindu Temples (UK))

Another cause of conflict has been over the issue of cremation. In India Hindu cremations take place outside as it is believed that open-air cremation helps release the atman from the body. As a result, some Hindus in the UK have been requesting the right to have open-air cremations as a human right. Others, however, have argued that it is better to obey the laws of the country in which they live, and that what happens after death is not of any real concern as the atman will have already moved on from the body. Current practice in the UK for Hindus is to their funerals in a crematorium, whilst aiming to observe as many traditional customs as possible such as watching the body being committed and collecting the ashes afterwards to scatter on running water. However, many feel that this is not enough to fully comply with Hindu traditions. *"One of the cultural things we have in the community is to pay respects to the dead person . . . Our rituals take 2 hours and crematoria do not have the time, facilities or space for these rituals and we are restricted. We are trying to build a crematorium but the*

planning permission needs to be given.” (London focus group participant in the Runnymede Trust Report)

<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/ConnectingBritishHindus-2006.pdf>

A notable case came to light in Newcastle in 2010 when an elderly Hindu holy man, Davender Kumar Ghai fought an expensive legal battle against the City Council over his request for an open-air cremation for his funeral. Following a four-year legal wrangle and investigation it was discovered that there were no laws against an open-air cremation in the UK. Consequently, they granted Mr Ghai’s wishes to burn on a pyre enclosed within a large structure but open to the elements. (see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7205737/Hindu-wins-right-to-traditional-cremation.html>)

Despite concerns regarding the lack of facilities for Hindu funeral, recently a crematorium in Leicestershire has installed the first outdoor shrine especially for Hindus living in the UK. A statue of Shiva has been mounted in the grounds of Great Glen Crematorium, having been donated by a local care home owner so that mourners can now make outdoor offerings to the deity.

(https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-47087804?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c2rndjildzyt/hinduism&link_location=live-reporting-story)

Issues for discussion

How important is it to maintain a religious identity when living in a secular country?

Have Hindus been successful in maintaining their identity in the UK?

Is it difficult for Hindus to practice their religion in the UK?

How often do we see positive media attention about Hindus?

Useful Resources

<https://resources.wjec.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rId=2941> -
WJEC Unit 3E: Scheme of Work

Websites

https://spaces.hightail.com/space/FKlmsenU9E/files/fi-a462987d-8b4b-4fff-8d84-de44f377aca3/fv-716f28ee-09b7-4b65-bec1-1bc0d6472fda/Questions_Hindus_a_view_from_inside_Hinduism.pdf

A useful RE Today article from 2010 "A View from Inside Hinduism."

<https://spaces.hightail.com/space/FKlmsenU9E/files/fi-21ba4765-6803-4f29-bba1-4cd795131923/fv-c7e5f58a-6093-4cda-9f7c-5062b0e7bbb0/A%20Level%20Theme%203B%20%20BBC%20%20A%20Tale%20of%20Five%20Temples%20-%20The%20Story%20of%20Hinduism%20in%20Britain.mp4>

A very useful introduction to how and why Hindus have settled in the UK over the last 70 years with information on the early Hindu temples in the UK.

<http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/reportda.pdf>

The Runnymede Report Connecting British Hindus

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5167332.stm>

BBC News article on a survey by the Runnymede Trust on Hindu appeals for recognition in 2006

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FOQIXCvsqk>

Accompanying BBC News Report

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-hosts-2016-diwali-reception-at-downing-street>

Diwali celebrations at 10 Downing Street with video clip

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-38663143>

BBC News article on caste issues in the UK

<https://www.visitleicester.info/whats-on/diwali-p704841>

Leicester Diwali celebrations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8rQAR1C-8c> or

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/6643729.stm

The issue relating to Shambo the bull at the Skanda Vale temple in Carmarthen

The Swaminarayan ethical code, the Shikshapatri could be seen to conflict with some practices in Britain such as food, drink, medicine, alcohol and gambling. An English version of the Shikshapatri can be found here

<http://www.swaminarayan.nu/sampraday/shiksha.shtml>

<http://hssuk.org/identity-and-integration-hindu-perspective/>

Article by Dr. G L Bahn on 'Identity and Integration - Hindu Perspective' from the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh UK website.

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/SN04334.pdf> - PDF UK Prison Population Statistics 2018.

<http://nchtuk.org/>

The website for the National Council of Hindu Temples.

<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/hinduism-in-the-uk/>

Information on Hinduism taken on the Religion Media Centre website.

<https://www.visitleicester.info/whats-on/diwali-p704841>

Information on the annual celebration of Diwali in Leicester from Visitleicester.info.