

Key concepts

- Very few Hindus refer to their religion as being Hinduism, preferring the term Sanatana Dharma. Many are more likely to refer to themselves as Vaishnavas or Shaivas to refer to their preferred tradition of worship. Using the term ‘Hinduism’ is to define a collection of varied religious beliefs and traditions.
- Hindu migration into the UK over the past 70 years has been for various reasons and from several different countries such as India, Uganda and Sri Lanka. Although there are several different Hindu sampradaya (traditions) in Britain, they do share core beliefs, practices and festivals.
- One of the issues that has emerged for second generation Hindus in the UK is about the clarity of their identity – are they Hindu, British Hindus 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.
- 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, and others see God as Saguna Brahman. However, there is real concern that assimilation into British culture is challenging for Hindus who want to retain their religion and culture in terms of belief, practice, lifestyle, worship and conduct.
- There is a possible conflict of traditional Hinduism with popular culture. 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. Racism is an issue that often raises its head in the UK. Some British Hindus are concerned that they do not receive equal treatment when compared to Muslims. A further cause of conflict has been over the culture gap between British born, second and third generation Hindus and their first-generation parents. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction over the way in which Hinduism is being taught in British schools. Another often-repeated concern was the incorrect stereotyping in television.
- There are a number of difficulties in practising Hinduism in a non-Hindu society – lack of temples; issue of caste; practicality of concepts such as ahimsa and funeral rites such as open-air cremation.

Key quotes

*“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.**

*“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.**

Key words

Saguna	Sanatana Dharma	Vaishnavas	Brahman	identity
Nirguna	Shaivas	caste	sampradaya	traditional
ahimsa	stereotyping	funeral rites	culture gap	cremation

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that Hinduism has assimilated well into British society.  
Others would argue that Hinduism has lost its identity in the process.  
Some would argue that the assimilation has only been partly successful.

Key questions

Is it possible for Hindus in Britain to assimilate into a secular society?  
Is there a Hindu identity in Britain?  
Is it difficult for Hindus to practice their religion in the UK?