

## Hindu texts as sources of wisdom and authority - their use in daily life

### Key concepts

- There are two types of Hindu texts: shruti and smitri. Shruti means 'that which is heard' referring to their status of not being human words but the words of the gods as heard by the rishis who had direct contact with them. Smriti are not regarded as being so sacred, but they are just as important. Smitri means 'that which is remembered; and refers to texts written by the rishis based on what had already been revealed in the Shrutis.
- The most important scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas which are generally regarded as the oldest scriptures in the world. Veda means knowledge, wisdom or vision and the laws of the Vedas regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs of the Hindu to the present day. There are four Vedas: the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda.
- The Ramayana is one of the two great Indian epics telling about life in India around 1000BCE and offering models in dharma. Rama, the hero of the epic, lived his whole life by the rules of dharma, and that is why Hindus regard him as a hero and teach their young people to 'be as Rama' or 'be as Sita.'
- The Ramayana is widely used to teach moral values and ethics. It shows the ideal relationship between brothers. It can also be used to show the importance of honouring a promise made. The Ramayana teaches the values of life and the ways to uphold them.
- The Mahabharata is the longest epic in world literature. It was composed by Vyasa, who told the story of the Great War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, cousins who both claimed to be the rightful rulers of a kingdom. One of the most important characters in the epic is Krishna.
- The Mahabharata is widely used in the teaching of moral and ethical values. The thread of dharma runs right through the epic teaching that dharma holds the cosmos together. Another issue is justice and fairness. It also raises the issues of the legitimate use of violence, honesty, and the abuse of women.
- It is also said that the Mahabharata contains all that a person should know to achieve the four human goals of dharma, arthava, karma and moksha.

### Key quotes

*"Since ancient times India has been famous for its wisdom and its thought."* (Professor Klaus K. Klostermaier)

*"I believe the Veda to be the foundation head of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism."* (Sri Aurobindo)

*"The Ramayana has been from time immemorial a source of guidance, instruction and solace to many Hindus in India and throughout the world...For countless centuries this epic has influenced Hindu religion and society and has inspired family and social life."* (Explaining the Hindu Dharma)

*"The Mahabharata is as important in the context of world civilization as the Bible the works of Shakespeare, the works of Homer, Greek drama, or the Qur'an."* (W. J. Johnson)

*"No ancient story, not even Homer's Iliad or Odyssey, has remained as popular through the course of time. The story of Rama appears as old as civilization and has a fresh appeal for every generation."* (David Frawley)

### Key words

shruti	smitri	rishis	Vedas
Rig Veda	Ramayana	Rama	Sita
dharma	Mahabharata	Krishna	Sama Veda
Yajur Veda	moksha	karma	Atharva Veda

### Issues for analysis and evaluation

#### Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that the Vedas are the most important Hindu texts. Others would argue for the Ramayana or Mahabharata as they are more accessible to the majority of Hindus. Some would argue that all the texts are equal in importance but have different roles to fulfil in the lives of Hindus.

#### Key questions

Which Hindu texts are the most important?  
 Are Hindu texts still relevant in the modern world?  
 Is celebrating mythological events meaningful in the modern world?