

Curriculum Visions

# Hindu

## faith and practice



# Teacher's Guide

in PDF format for printing

Lisa Magloff

# Curriculum Visions

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# Unit 1: What it means to be a Hindu

Of all the religions we study, this may be the most difficult for children to understand. If you have Hindu children in your class, you may like to begin your study of Hinduism by having a Hindu child, or family member, give a short talk on what Hinduism means to them.

There is a huge variety of belief and practice in Hinduism. Hinduism shares some beliefs with Buddhism and Sikhism, for example, the belief in reincarnation and karma (what we do in this life will affect the next).

However, many people may be surprised to learn that Hindus also believe in one God. Hindus worship many different gods and goddesses, so the fact that they also believe in one Supreme God may be hard for some children to understand. However, you may like to explain this by telling the children that Hindus believe God is all around us, so that worshipping a god or goddess is the same thing as worshipping God. For Hindus, the entire universe is part of God, and so God is present in everything. Hindus believe that each soul is an individual, and yet is also a part of God.

Because most Hindus are of Indian background, it can be easy to confuse Indian cultural customs and Hindu belief. For example, the caste system is not part of the Hindu religion, but part of Indian culture (although it is officially abolished now). Similarly, curry is a type of food eaten in India, not a specifically Hindu type of food. You may need to keep these distinctions in mind as you study Hinduism in class.



Many Hindu teachings can be very esoteric and difficult to understand. In this book, we have tried to keep everything as simple and general as possible. You may find Hindu students who have different beliefs than those described here, but this can be an opportunity for you to point out again the variety of belief within Hinduism.

## Origins of Hinduism

Hinduism is also unique because it does not have a single founder or date of origin. You can contrast this with the Jewish patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); Mohammed in Islam; the Buddha; Jesus (Christianity); and Guru Nanak (Sikhism).

There is no agreement among scholars on exactly how, where or why Hinduism developed. It is commonly believed that Hinduism as we know it today evolved over thousands of years. There is archaeological evidence that people living in the Indus Valley (often called Dravidian culture) practised some elements of the Hindu faith from at least 3000 BCE. However, sometime in the second millennium BCE a new people, the Aryans, arrived in northwest India.

The Aryans (the word Aryan means noble) were a nomadic people who may have come to India from the areas around southern Russia and the Baltic. Other scholars believe they were a group of indigenous Indus Valley people who emerged as leaders in this time. Either way, they became the leaders of India and either brought with them or developed a new culture (called Vedic culture) that included a new language (Sanskrit), new technology (chariots and other technological advances), the caste system and new religious traditions. While the Dravidian culture had regarded rivers and water as sacred and gathered at rivers for religious ceremonies honouring gods and goddesses, the Aryan gods and goddesses represented forces of nature, such as the Sun, Moon, fire, storms, etc. The Vedic religious rituals often involved honouring the gods with fire.

Over time, the different religious practices were blended together so that people in India began worshipping all the different gods, Dravidian and Vedic, as well as gods that combined elements from each culture. Worship began to include ceremonies that involved both fire and water, as we shall see later.

It is important to keep in mind while discussing Hinduism that there are many different ways to worship and many different stories told about each god and goddess. Some children may be familiar with stories about the gods and worship rituals that are different from those in the student book.



# Unit 2: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

The Hindu name for the one Supreme God is Brahman. All the Hindu gods and goddesses are forms of Brahman. The three most important of these are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Together, they represent the forces that keep the universe running. These three gods, in turn, each have many different forms, which are also worshipped.

Each Hindu god has a consort, or wife. These goddesses are not actually wives in the physical sense of the word, but they represent the female half of the god.

Each god and goddess is associated with various attributes or characteristics, various symbols and at least one vehicle. The vehicle is usually an animal attendant that represents a characteristic of the god. We do not discuss vehicles and attributes in great detail in the student book, but we will give some additional information here.

## Brahma

Brahma is the creator. According to Hindu scripture, he came into being by emerging from a lotus that grew from the navel of Vishnu at the beginning of the universe. He is the husband of Sarasvati, who is the Possessor of Ultimate Knowledge. His vehicle is a swan that is known for its ability to judge between good and bad.

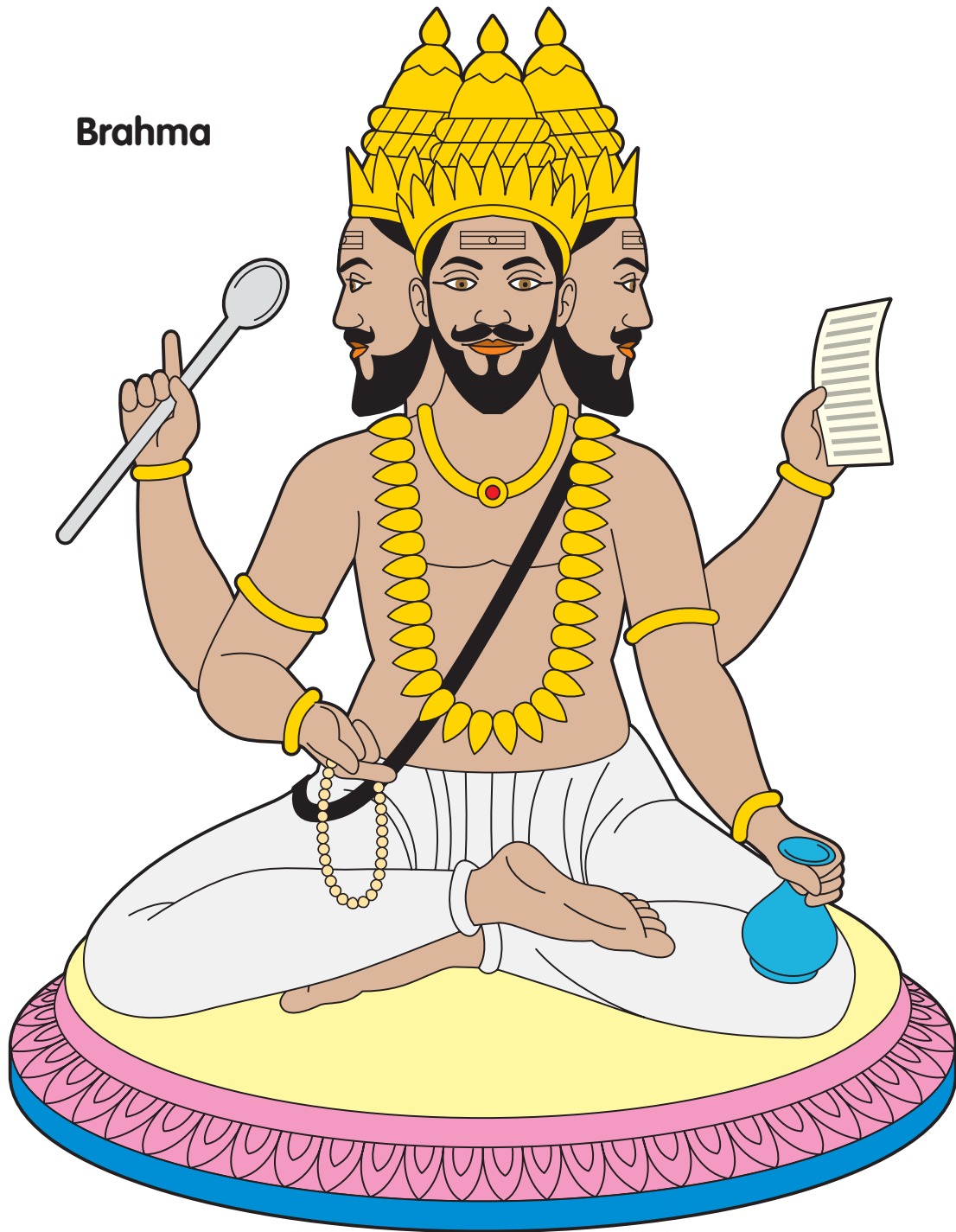
Brahma only occasionally interferes in the affairs of the gods, and even more rarely in mortal affairs.

There are almost no temples for Brahma and he is rarely worshipped. This is because his job of creation is finished, so he plays no part in the world. According to mythology, he is supposed to have been cursed by Shiva that he would go without worship. However, in many temples dedicated to Shiva or Vishnu, there may also be an image of Lord Brahma.

Brahma is traditionally depicted with four heads, four faces and four arms. Each head recites one of the four Vedas (holy scripture). The hands are often shown holding a water-pot used in creating life, a string of beads used to keep track of the Universe's time, the text of the Vedas, and a lotus flower.

A story is told of how Brahma acquired his four heads and of why people no longer worship him: When Brahma was creating the universe, he made

Brahma



a goddess called Shatarupa ('one with a hundred beautiful forms') and was immediately infatuated with her. Shatarupa moved in various directions to avoid the gaze of Brahma. But wherever she went, Brahma developed a head. Thus, Brahma developed five heads, one on each side and one above the others. In order to control Brahma, Shiva cut off the top head. Also, Shiva felt that Shatarupa was Brahma's daughter, being created by him. Therefore, Shiva determined, it was wrong for Brahma to become obsessed with her. He directed that there be no proper worship in India for the "unholy" Brahma.

## Shiva

Shiva is one of the most important Hindu gods and most Hindus regularly worship him in some form. Shiva is both creator and destroyer. You can think of Shiva the same way as reincarnation. Each time a soul is reincarnated, it has an opportunity to become closer to God, until it is reunited with God. However, a soul cannot be reincarnated unless the body dies first. So, death is both an ending and a chance at a new beginning. In the same way, Shiva destroys so that rebirth can take place. It is important to emphasise that although Shiva is called the destroyer, he is not a force of evil.

Shiva is also called the Lord of the Dance. This refers to the way that nature is kept in balance by divine force – a dance of life.

Shiva's consort, Parvati, is the part of Shiva that is the source of all knowledge. Images of Shiva in his physical form often show him as a soothing meditative figure surrounded by snowy mountain ranges. He may be shown with a necklace made of skulls, signifying his role as destructor. He smears his body with ashes and wears a tiger skin and elephant skin. He has a third eye on his forehead, which is the source of knowledge and wisdom. His vehicle is a bull (symbol of happiness and strength) named Nandi.

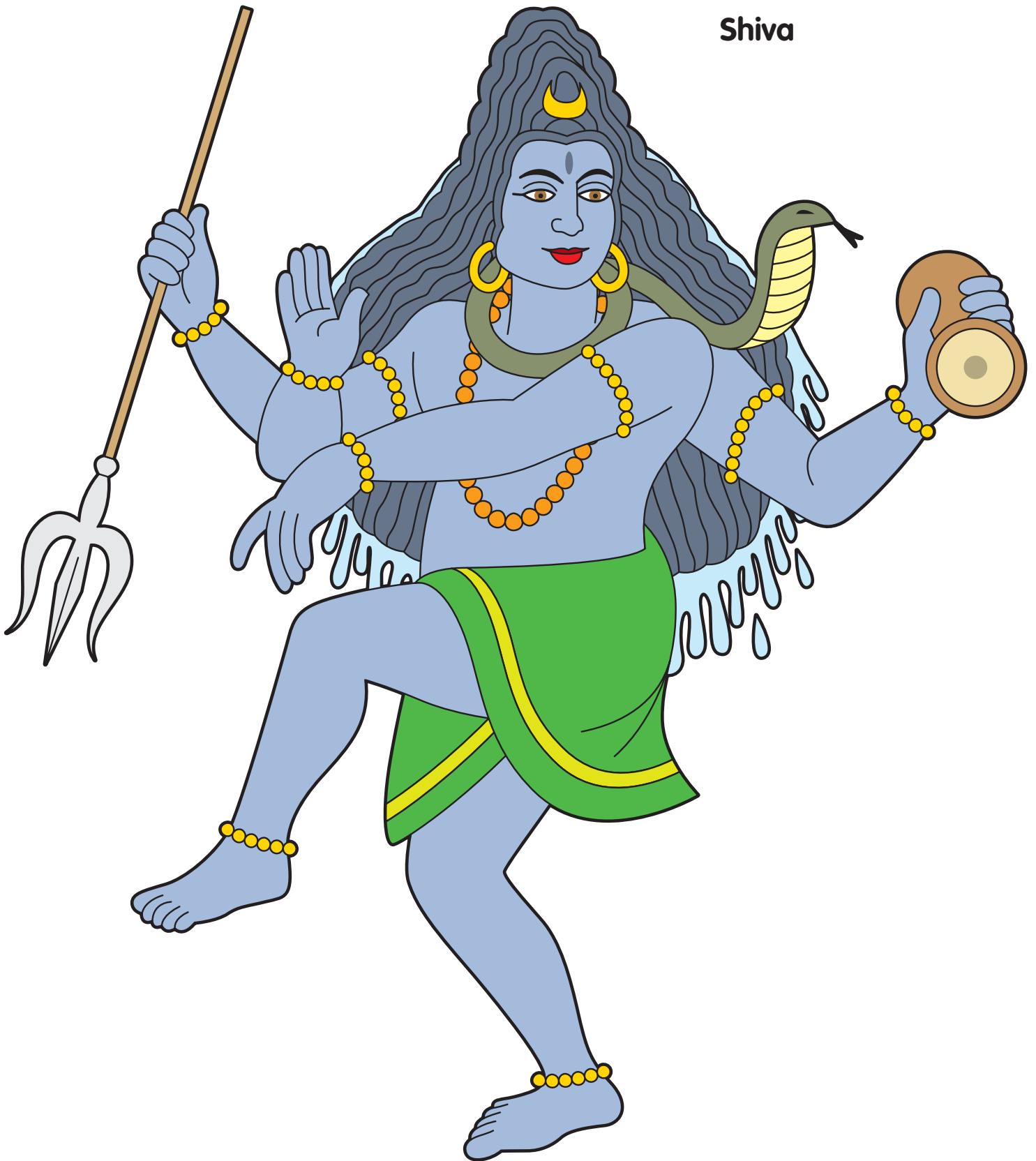
Shiva is often worshipped in an abstract manner, as God without form, in the form of a linga. The linga is also a symbol of fertility and the creative energy of sex (which creates life). This aspect of Shiva is not discussed in the student book, for obvious reasons. Parvati, the female half of this abstract form, is represented by the yoni. The linga and yoni are very common in temples.

According to Hindu scriptures, Shiva appeared from the forehead of Lord Brahma. When Lord Brahma asked his sons to go forth and create children of their own they refused. This angered Lord Brahma and in his anger a crying child appeared from his forehead.

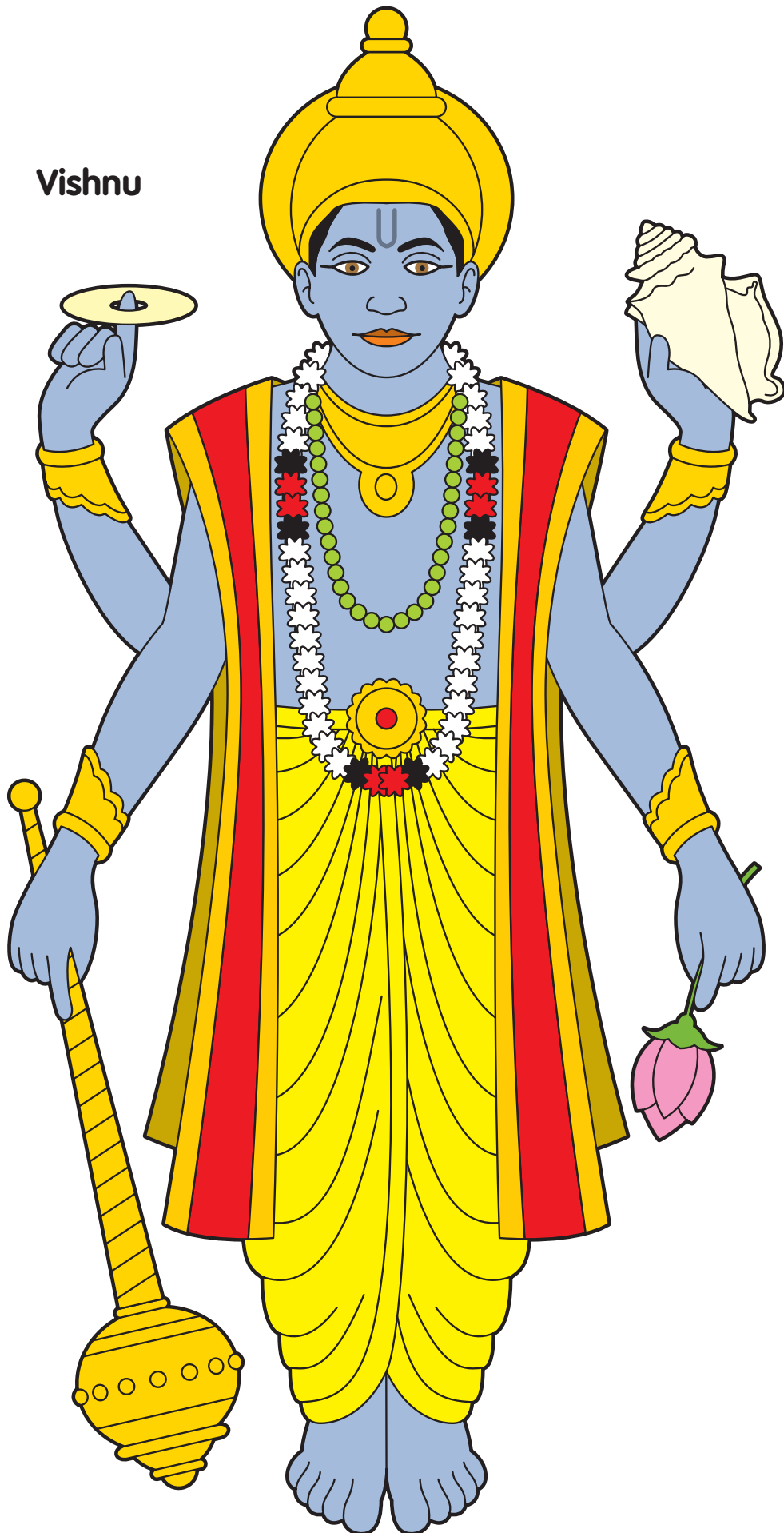
Shiva and Parvati are also the parents of Kartikeya (also known as Murugan in South India) and Ganesha (also known as Vinayaka, or Vinayagar in South India), the elephant-headed God of wisdom.



Shiva



Vishnu



## Vishnu

Vishnu is the Lord of protection, sustenance and maintenance of life. His consort Lakshmi is the possessor of wealth, which is a necessity for maintenance. The goddess Lakshmi represents not only material wealth, but also the wealth of courage, valour, offspring, and eternal bliss. Together, Vishnu and Lakshmi protect and help the souls introduced into the life cycle by Brahma to survive in the cycle of life.

His vehicle is the swift-flying bird Garuda that can spread knowledge with great courage. Vishnu is often shown resting on the bed of the powerful, coiled serpent, Seshanag, who represents the sleeping universe.

Vishnu has many different forms, called avatars. These come to earth whenever there is trouble, and put things right. Many of the great Hindu epic stories, such as the Ramayana, actually tell the stories of the avatars of Vishnu. Vishnu has appeared in nine different forms, that is, he has come to earth as nine different avatars. According to Hindu belief, he will come once more.

The ten avatars of Vishnu are:

- ▶ Matsyavatara (Vishnu as a fish)
- ▶ Kurmavatara (Vishnu as a tortoise)
- ▶ Varahavatar (Vishnu as a boar)
- ▶ Narasimhavatara (the lion-man)
- ▶ Vamanavatara (the dwarf)
- ▶ Parasurama (Rama with an axe)
- ▶ Rama (the prince of Ayodhya)
- ▶ Krishna (the tribal leader)
- ▶ Buddha (the completely enlightened one)
- ▶ Kalki (the incarnation to come)

# Unit 3: Mahadevi and the goddesses

## Mahadevi

Mahadevi (also called Devi) has a huge variety of forms with many different attributes. These can be broken into two types of form: gentle and angry. In her gentle form she is Parvati (the mountain girl), Uma (the light), Gauri (the yellow-complexioned beauty), Himavati (daughter of Himalaya), Jagatama (mother of the world) and Bhavani (the goddess of the universe); in her angry form she is Durga (the inaccessible), Kali (the black complexioned), Chandika or Chandi (the fearful one) and Bhairavi (the terrible).

## Lakshmi

The following is a prayer to Lakshmi that describes her. It is composed of eight words, which are chanted during puja.

Hiranyanyavarnam (Lakshmi is of the colour of gold)  
Padmavarnam (she is the colour of a lotus)  
Adityavarne (Lakshmi is brilliant like the sun)  
Padmavarne (her face is beautiful like a lotus)  
Padmadalayatakshi (her eyes are broad and beautiful as petals of a lotus)  
Padmamalineem (one wearing a garland of lotus flowers)  
Sarasihanilaye (one residing on a lotus flower)  
Sarasijahaste (one holding a lotus in her hand)

One legend of Lakshmi's 'birth' tells how, with great efforts, Vishnu churned the ocean in order to make it give up all its treasures and benefits to the world. One of these was Lakshmi. Whenever Vishnu comes to earth as an avatar, Lakshmi also appears as his wife in some form.

## Saraswati

Saraswati, the goddess of learning and knowledge, is the wife of Brahma, the creator of the world. She is represented as an extremely beautiful woman with milk-white complexion, sitting or standing on a water lily and playing on a lute.

She presides over and protects arts and is credited with the invention of writing. Instead of a statue, she is sometimes worshipped by placing a pen, an inkstand and a book on a shrine.

Saraswati is also the goddess of speech, the power through which knowledge expresses itself in action. She has four hands that represent four aspects of human personality in learning: mind, intellect, alertness and ego. She has sacred scriptures in one hand and a lotus (a symbol of true knowledge) in the second. With her other two hands she plays the music of love and life on an instrument (often the violin). She is dressed in white (a sign of purity) and her vehicle is a white goose or swan.

**Lakshmi**

## Durga

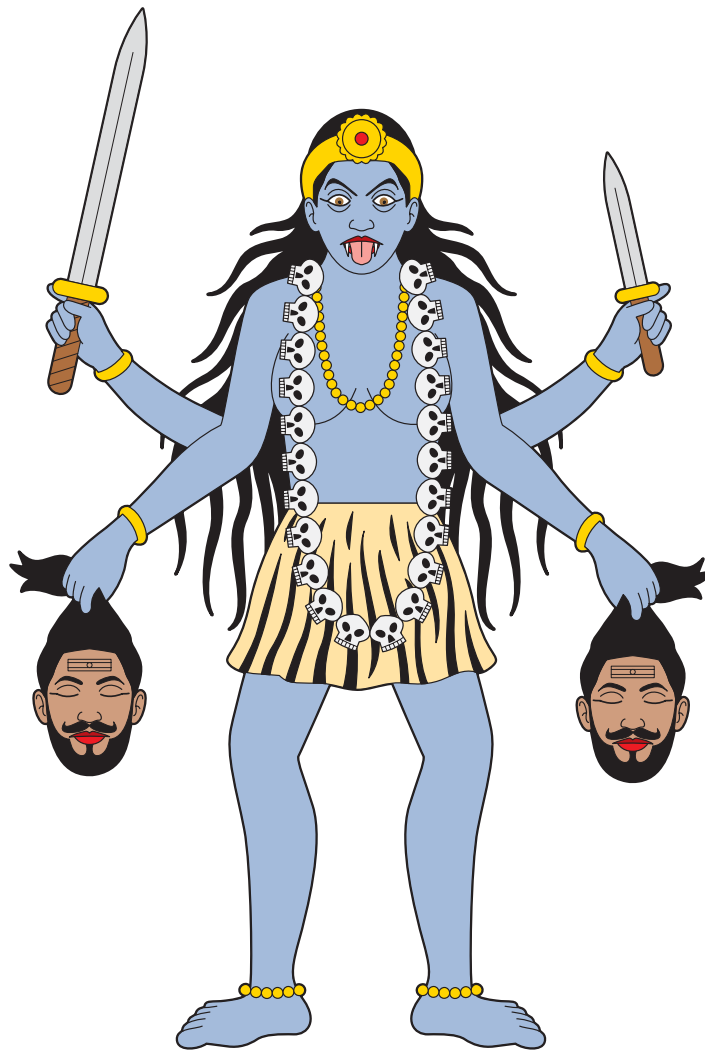
According to myth, the form of Durga was created as a warrior goddess to fight the demon Mahisashur, who could not be defeated by any god or man due to a gift he received after intense prayers to Brahma. By virtue of this power, he invaded the gods, who went for help to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, but Mahisashur defeated all of them and unleashed a reign of terror on earth, heaven and the nether worlds. Eventually, since only a woman could kill him, all the gods got together and created a dazzling beam of energy out of which Durga was born. Her form was blindingly beautiful, with a face sculpted by Shiva, torso by Indra, breasts by Chandra (the Moon), teeth by Brahma, bottom by the earth, thighs and knees by Varuna (wind), and her three eyes by Agni (fire). Each god also gave her their own most powerful weapons – Shiva's trident, Vishnu's discus, Indra's thunderbolt, etc. Durga herself has both gentle and fierce forms.

Durga





Kali



## Kali

Kali is the ferocious aspect of Durga (remember: Durga is a form of Mahadevi, and Kali is a form of Durga). The common image of Kali may come from a story told about a battle between Durga and the demons Sambhu and Nishambhu. After her victory over these demons Durga was so overjoyed that she started the dance of death. In her great ecstasy she became Kali and began destroying others. As the prayers of all gods could not calm her, Lord Shiva had to intervene. Seeing no other way of dissuading her, Shiva threw himself among the bodies of slain demons. When Durga saw that she was dancing over the body of her husband, she put her tongue out of her mouth in sorrow and surprise. She remained stunned in this posture and this is how Kali is shown in images, with a red tongue protruding from her mouth.

Kali also has many forms. Some of these are Shamshan Kali, the goddesses of cremation grounds and Sheetla, the goddess of smallpox. Some people worship Kali to protect their children from dreaded diseases and their homes from ill omens.

# Unit 4: Avatars of Vishnu and Ganesha

These gods are grouped together for the sake of space, and not because they are related.

Many of the stories of the avatars of Vishnu are told in the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as in Hindu scriptures such as the Bhagvad Gita. Because the avatars come onto earth in order to set things right, they are seen as great heroes and saviours. They are often depicted as demonstrating the proper way for people to behave.

## Krishna

Krishna is the eighth avatar of Vishnu. Krishna is the embodiment of love and divine joy that destroys all pain and sin. Krishna is also the protector of sacred utterances and of cows. Krishna is a trickster but is also associated with love – both love of God and earthly love.

Krishna was born as the 8th child of Devaki, sister of the cruel demon king Kamsa. The sage Narada had predicted that Kamsa would be killed by his nephew, so the king killed Devaki's first six children. The 7th, Balarama, escaped and the 8th, Krishna, was secretly exchanged for a cowherd's daughter. So, Krishna was brought up in a cowherd's family.

Later Krishna loved to play the flute and to seduce the village girls. He became king after killing Kamsa.

## Ganesha

In addition to the story of Ganesha's birth and how he got his elephant head, the most commonly told story about Ganesha is of how he became the Lord of all existing beings. One story says that this came as a result of winning a contest with his brother Karttikeya. The two brothers made a bet to see who could be the first to circumnavigate the universe. Karttikeya set out on foot to circle the earth but Ganesha simply walked around Shiva and Parvati, his father and mother, as the source of all existence. Another version says that Ganesha stayed at home reading scripture, and thus 'walked' around the universe of knowledge while never leaving his chair.

Krishna







# Unit 5: Murtis and shrines

Murtis are statues or images used during worship as points of devotional and meditation focus. They are representations of forms of God like Shiva, Ganesha, Rama, Krishna, Parvati, etc. Hindus believe that the mind is in turbulence and incapable of focusing on God as a formless, abstract concept. Instead, it is easier for people to worship God in a recognisable form, such as an image of a human or animal. A murti can be a statue, a painting, drawing or even an abstract object.

Many people mistakenly think of murtis as idols and see Hindus as idol worshippers. But Hindus do not worship the murti itself; they worship the part of God that the murti represents. You can compare this to Christian veneration of icons and statues of Jesus. When Christians pray in front of an icon or a statue of Jesus they are not praying to the painting or statue itself, but to the person who is depicted in the painting or statue.

You may like to introduce this topic by discussing how we treat objects that mean a lot to us. For example, many people keep photographs of their family on their desk or table, so they can look at them frequently. Other people have special objects in frames or on shelves, such as trophies, that remind them of important events in their lives. Murtis and shrines are similar to these.

Because Hinduism is a very personal religion, many Hindus keep shrines in their homes. You can compare this to Buddhists, who often keep statues of the Buddha on a small shrine at home; or to Christians, who keep pictures of Jesus at home as a reminder of what Jesus means to them.



# Unit 6: Puja

Just as there are hundreds of gods and goddesses, there are hundreds of ways to worship them. In the student book we have given a general description of puja, but you should stress that this is just one type of puja.

The heart of any type of puja is darshan or 'seeing the god'. Hindus believe that during worship, the spirit of the god or goddess enters the murti and is present with the worshippers. So, darshan does not mean merely looking at the murti, but actually being in the presence of the god, and thus of God.

Puja may occur in the temple, at home or in an outdoor shrine (common in India, but uncommon in the UK). Any god or goddess may be worshipped during puja. Most temples have murtis of many gods and goddesses and any one or all of these may be worshipped during puja. At home, Hindus choose which gods and goddesses they worship. Most Hindu families have one or two gods or goddesses that they feel a personal connection with and worship regularly. This is similar to the idea of patron saints in Christianity.

Hindus believe that if proper care is not taken of a temple or home's murtis, then the gods will abandon the temple or home. Hence priests reside at the temple and take care of the gods' needs (in the UK the priests may live nearby and not in the temple). Priests perform puja at sunrise, noon, sunset, and midnight. For worshippers, however, visiting a temple every day or even regularly is not mandatory. The important aspect of puja is not congregational worship but an individual's offering to a deity.

Wherever puja is performed it includes three important components: the seeing of the deity; puja, or worship, which includes offering flowers, fruits, and foods; and retrieving the blessed food and consuming it. By performing these sacred acts the worshipper creates a relationship with the divine through his or her emotions and senses.

During a puja, the worshippers offer the god or goddess a seat, wash the feet of the murti and give it water. The murti may be symbolically bathed, clothed in new garments and embellished with ornaments. Perfumes and ointments may be applied, and flowers and garlands may be placed before it. Incense is burned, and a lighted lamp is waved in front of the deity. Foods such as cooked rice, fruit, butter and sugar are offered. Family members bow before the image, sip the water they have given the god, and receive a portion of cooked food.



You may like to emphasise the way that the puja ceremony is designed to stimulate all of the senses: incense and flowers for smell; candles and lamps for light; bathing the murti in milk and water for touch; sharing the blessed food for taste; chanting and prayer for hearing. In this way, worshippers experience God with all of their senses. You may want to compare the way that senses are used in worship in different religions. You could have children make a list of the things that happen in Hindu worship, and in other religions, and write whether these things have to do with taste, touch, hearing, sight or smell.



# Unit 7: Aarti

The word aarti refers both to the worship ceremony of offering fire, or light, to the gods, and also to the devotional songs or prayers that are sung during the ceremony.

Aarti is usually performed at the end of puja, although it is a separate ceremony and can be performed alone. For some worshippers, the spirit of the gods and goddesses bless the flames. So, by waving their hands over the flames and then over their heads, worshippers are sharing the blessings of the gods.

Fire and light play a role in many religious ceremonies. In Christianity, for example, candles are often lit during worship. These stand for the light of God and the light of worship. In Buddhism candles are lit as offerings to the Buddha. They stand for the light of the Buddha's teachings, which can dispel the darkness of ignorance. In Judaism, candles are lit on the Shabbat as a reminder of the menorah in the Temple in ancient Jerusalem. Also, a lamp, called the ner tamid, is kept lit in the synagogue, as a reminder of God's covenant with the Israelites and God's instruction to be "a light among nations".

Aarti may be performed at home or in the mandir. In the mandir it is performed by the priest, usually at least two or three times a day. Just like there are many different ways to perform puja, there are many ways to perform aarti. Here is a description of a common way of performing aarti in the mandir:

The priest performing aarti first washes his hands. He then sprinkles three spoonfuls of water over a conch shell, and blows it three times. He then lights an odd number of incense sticks (usually three) from a ghee lamp standing beside the altar. While ringing a small bell, he waves it seven times around the deities, and then he waves it once to the worshippers.

The priest next lights a five-wick ghee lamp from the large lamp and offers it; four circles to the feet of the murti, two to the navel, three to the face, and then he waves it seven times around the whole murti. He then gives the lamp to another worshipper, who presents the lamp to each person in the temple room. When offered the ghee lamp, worshippers wave their hands over the flame, and then touch their hands to their foreheads.

The priest then takes a smaller conch shell and fills it with water. He offers it by waving it three times around the head of the murti and seven times around its body. He then pours the water into a shaker, which another



worshipper takes and walks around the temple room shaking, ensuring that everyone has been touched by the water.

The next item offered is a cloth, offered by waving it seven times around the murti. After the cloth has been offered, the priest takes a plate with flowers on it and offers it seven times around the murti. The plate is then offered to the rest of the worshippers, who each sniff the flowers.

During the ceremony, worshippers sing various types of chants or hymns, called kirtana and bhajans. Here is a sample chant:

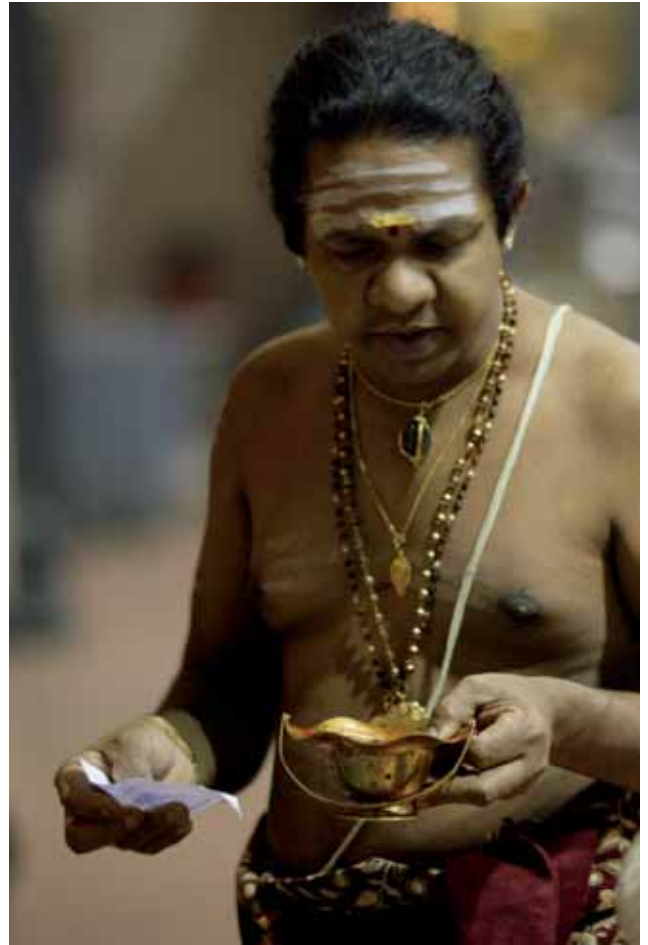
**Supreme teacher is Brahma (creator), Supreme teacher is Vishnu (protector/preserver), Supreme teacher is Maheshwara (Siva, destroyer/transformer), Supreme teacher is the Source (God). I offer all of my efforts to that great teacher.**



# Unit 8: Sacred texts

As discussed earlier, many Hindu sacred texts can be very esoteric and difficult to understand, even for Hindu scholars. The most popular Hindu holy books are those that include mythical stories, such as the Puranas and the Mahabharata. These stories are used to teach not only the stories of the gods and goddesses, but also contain morals and lessons which guide people and show them how to live life according to Hindu ideals.

In the late 1980s the Mahabharata was filmed and shown on India's national TV as a long series. It was so popular that streets were deserted when it was telecast and even cabinet meetings were re-scheduled so that ministers could watch it. The series is very long, but you may like to rent a video of one episode so children can get an idea of how the stories are presented. They are available at all Indian video stores and from Amazon (make sure you get a version with an English voice-over or subtitles). The epic was also the basis for the 1989 film, *The Mahabharata*, directed by Peter Brook, which is available in English and which you may like to show a part of. You will need to vet any video shown for appropriate content – there are scenes of violence and sexual content.



You can find an English translation of many Hindu (and other) holy texts, including the Ramayana and Mahabharata, online at: **[www.sacred-texts.com](http://www.sacred-texts.com)**. You can find more information on comparing sacred texts of different religions in the *Jewish*, *Christian* and *Muslim faith and practice* sections of this CD. Here is a prayer from the Rig Veda you may wish to use as an example (some words have been changed to make them easier to understand):

O come ye here and sit down: to Indra sing your song  
Companions, bring hymns of praise to him, the richest of the rich,  
the Lord of treasures, excellent Indra, and pour the holy nectar.  
May he stand by us in our need:  
May he come to us with his strength.  
Whose pair of tawny horses yoked in battles foes challenge not:  
To him, to Indra, sing your song.  
O Indra, lover of the song, may these quick prayers enter thee:  
May they bring bliss to thee.  
Our chants of praise have strengthened thee, and our praises  
So strengthen thee the songs we sing.  
Indra, whose comfort never fails, accept these offerings  
thousandfold.  
O Indra, thou who loves song, let no man hurt our bodies, keep  
death far from us, for thou can.

# Unit 9: A Hindu way of life

Just as there are many ways of practising the Hindu faith, there are many ways to apply it to everyday life. We have given a few examples in the student book, but Hindu ideals and practices permeate through every part of life, particularly in India. It is important, however, to understand that many Hindus of Indian origin who live in the UK have adopted different customs and practices to those in India. It is important to avoid painting a picture of all Hindus as Indian peasants. So, you may wish to show students some photos of Hindus in the UK, or to invite someone in to give a talk on how they incorporate Hinduism into everyday life. You may also like your students to make a small shrine for the classroom. This can include non-denominational objects – such as a book, a school crest or a football – which stand for things that are important to the students.

## Bindi and tilaka

These marks have many different meanings, both secular and religious. Both are worn on the forehead because Hinduism teaches that the forehead is the location of the ‘third eye’ of spiritual sight. It is the place from which we can experience the world of the gods and goddesses.

Generally, the bindi is a secular, or cultural, mark, but it may also have religious meaning. For some it is a symbol of being Hindu, for others it is purely a decoration. Traditionally both men and women wore bindi, but today they are worn only by women.





Traditionally a red bindi was a sign of marriage while a black bindi was often worn before marriage to ward off the evil eye.

The tilaka, in contrast, generally has religious meaning. The shape of the tilaka and the material it is made from show which god a person worships. For example, Hindus who worship Vishnu wear a V-shaped tilaka made of white clay. Those who worship Shiva wear a tilaka of three stripes and a dot, while those who follow Krishna may wear a “u” shaped mark surrounding the dot. Tilaka are put on at the end of worship, either at home or in the temple, using materials blessed by the god during the worship service.

You may like to compare the wearing of tilaka and bindi with the wearing of other religious symbols. For example, Sikhs wear turbans and the five Ks as symbols of their faith; Muslim women often wear headscarves called hijab; Jewish men may wear a head covering called a kippah, yamulke or skullcap; Christians often wear a cross or St Christopher medal on a chain. These are all visible symbols of faith.

The shape of the bindi can also have meaning. Here are some examples:

- ▶ Teardrop or circle: blessing from the deities.
- ▶ Swan: ancient symbol for beauty, family, and communal values; also a symbol for Vishnu.
- ▶ Flame: intensity; also Shiva.
- ▶ Snake: fertility, cunning/intelligence
- ▶ Elephant trunk: Ganesha, wisdom, strength.
- ▶ Small mirrors: Protection from the evil eye, a reminder that everything you do comes back to you (karma).
- ▶ Hollow teardrop or eye shape: the Yoni, womanhood.
- ▶ Trident: a weapon of Shiva, symbolising creation, destruction and regeneration.

# Unit 10: Hindu celebrations

As you can imagine in a religion with hundreds of different gods and goddesses, there are hundreds of different ways to honour them with festivals and holy days. Hindu festivals are held to celebrate events such as the birth of gods, death of demons, victory of the gods, marriage of the gods, the New Year, new months, Full Moons and New Moons. Of course, not everyone celebrates all the festivals. Some, like Diwali and Holi, are celebrated by most Hindus around the world. While other holidays are celebrated only by worshippers of certain gods and goddesses, or only by people from a certain region in India.

For example, worship of Karttikeya (as during the festival of Skanda Shashti) is predominant in Tamil Nadu, where the god is considered a patron of the region. The festival of Onam is a harvest festival celebrated in Kerala with boat races, elephant processions and community singing. In Gujarat the festival of Makar sankranti celebrates the day when (according to the Hindu astronomy) the sun enters the zodiac of Capricorn. This is celebrated with kite flying contests. The Teej festival, observed in parts of Rajasthan, celebrates the arrival of the monsoon rains in June–July. Murtis of the goddess Parvati are decorated and paraded in the streets accompanied by singing, music and dancing. The festival glorifies a married woman coming home to visit her parents, and many women visit their parents on the occasion of this festival.

You can find photos of many festivals being celebrated in India on

<http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/festive/index.htm>





