

Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Keynote 8

Indian Religions: Hinduism

The following information is also relevant to Keynote 8:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from [Racism No Way](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html) (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism

Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians

Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam

Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia

Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism (this document)

Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism

Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism

Keynote 11 – Bahá'í Faith

You can also download a full version of *Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools*, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the [Keynotes Explained](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm>) web page on the [Multicultural Education](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm>) site.

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Introduction

Hinduism, the third largest world religion after Christianity and Islam is one of the oldest religions. Hinduism has incorporated a wide variety of religious beliefs and modes of worship over thousands of years of its development and has adapted to the influences of other religions. Hinduism is not confined to one book or one prophet. Various sages, saints and social reformers have influenced its development from ancient to modern times.

Eighty percent of more than a billion Indians are Hindus. India is a multicultural and multilingual society and has achieved 'unity in diversity' through the common thread of Hindu culture. The basic principle of equality of all religions has been manifested in the presence in India for centuries of all religions and creeds.

Nepal and Bali are the only other predominantly Hindu communities, but in ancient and modern times Hindus have migrated to other parts of the world, including Sri Lanka, Africa and Malaysia. There are about 94,000 Hindus in Australasia.

Origins and historical background

The name 'Hindu' is derived from the name of a river in north India – Sindhu or Indus. It was first used by Zoroastrians and later popularised by Persian Muslims. The roots of Hinduism, however, stretch back 5,000 years to the religious practices of the Dravidian people of the Indus Valley, which is now part of Pakistan.

Archeological findings indicate the worship of female goddesses as symbols of fertility and rebirth, the image of the bull as a symbol of strength and virility, the depiction of gods and goddesses in ceramic figurines and the importance of ritual bathing – all of which are still relevant to Hinduism today.

New cultural and religious traditions blended with old when Aryan tribes from Persia, migrated to north-west India sometime between 1000–2000 BCE bringing with them the bedrock of the Hindu belief system: hymns and scriptures called *Veda* or 'the Knowledge'. Aryan gods were male, and they had a system of social order which placed priests (*Brahmin/Brahman*) at the top.

By the 7th century BCE, Aryans and indigenous Dravidian people from The Indus Valley had migrated across India to the Ganges valley. Questioning of the Brahmin's spiritual authority, which excluded lower classes from religious rituals led to the beginnings of a more individualised form of religious life of meditation and self sacrifice, the way of the **ascetic**.

Between 800 and 400 BCE, philosophical texts known as the *Upanishads*, the last book of the *Veda* (the Hindu Scriptures) were written by the ascetics. The *Upanishads* are largely dialogues with a spiritual master or guru.

From the 12th to 19th centuries CE, Hinduism was influenced by the arrival of first, Islam, and then British colonial rule. "Revivalist and reformist movements

within Hinduism appeared and Hindus themselves travelled more and travelled further than at any time in the past” (Australian Broadcasting Commission, “Religion and Ethics, Hinduism”).

Settlement and history in Australia

Small numbers of Indians came to Australia during the 19th century.

Indian crews from the Bay of Bengal came to Australia on trading ships soon after 1788 and others came later as labourers in convict ships. A few Hindus came to live and work in Australia under the system of recruiting indentured labour in the 1830s; some came as camel drivers and some as itinerant merchants or hawkers. There were very few women or children among the immigrants and many men travelled back and forth to their original homelands, some returning permanently. By 1896 a firm of merchants from Hyderabad in India had branches in Melbourne. In 1898 about thirty merchants from Sindh settled in Melbourne, including Mr. Pamammull. He began as an opal polisher and established an opal trading enterprise which is continued today by his third and fourth generation descendants. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

By 1911 there were an estimated 1,000 Hindus in Australia (Racism. No Way!). The imposition of the “White Australia Policy” in 1901, however, meant there was very little immigration from Asia until the policy was rescinded in the mid-1960s.

The more relaxed immigration policy in Australia... facilitated the arrival of professionals, such as doctors, engineers, and technicians. Teachers also arrived to set up retreat centres, organise networks and make converts. Their arrival was part of a renewed interest in Indian religion among the people of the west. (Christian Research Association, “Hindus change over time”)

Immigration of Hindus to Australia further increased in the 1980s after two military style coups in Fiji and political upheavals in Sri Lanka and some African states increased the number of South Asians and people of Indian descent seeking to leave their homes. Hindus represented 0.14 percent of the population in 1986 and 0.26 percent in 1991 (Christian Research Association from ABS data).

Throughout the 1990s, Hinduism became one of Australia’s fastest-growing religious groups. Between 1991 and 1996 an additional 34,687 people migrated from southern Asia and Hindus represented 0.38 percent of the Australian population.

The first Hindu temple was established in an old church in Auburn in Sydney in 1979. “Hinduism in an organised sense, however, did not take real root in Australia until the opening of the first authentic Hindu temple at Helensburgh south of Sydney in 1985” (Cahill, p.48).

Other groups associated with Hinduism in Australia have included:

- the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda (Vedanta) Mission and Order, and the Transcendental Meditation movement, both beginning in 1964
- the Hare Krishna movement
- the Siddha Yoga movement, which established ashrams around Australia
- the Divine Light Mission
- the Rajneeshis. (Cahill, p.48)

There has also been a growth in a number of different schools of yoga that focus on meditation and spiritual development.

Beliefs

Within Hinduism there are many variations in both beliefs and ways of life. The following beliefs form the foundation of Hinduism.

Dharma, the Sanskrit equivalent of 'religion', means duty and pervades all aspects of life. Hindus believe that every person has their own dharma or duty according to their background and caste which includes worshipping God, working hard and not hurting other people and animals.

Karma represents the theory of cause and effect. If an individual disturbs the natural order of things through wrongdoing they will reap the consequences in this and later lives.

Samsara is commonly known as reincarnation. Hindus believe that human life is cyclic. After death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in the body of another person, animal, or mineral. Samsara represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth which is affected by a person's karma. Hindus believe that the souls of plants, animals and people are all the same, hence their respect for all life.

Moksha (salvation) Hindus strive for the state of moksha which means release from the cycles of birth and rebirth. Pursuing spiritual realisation or "reaching the God within you" through meditation and renunciation is the ultimate goal of life. There are four yogas or paths people may take to achieve moksha. They are the paths of knowledge, meditation, devotion and good works. The paths are interdependent and mingle throughout a person's life. Self-realisation can also be reached while performing one's duties towards family and society.

Hindus believe that no single religion offers the only way to salvation. All are equal as paths to oneness with the Supreme Being.

Three main gods

Hindus believe that there may be many manifestations of the one universal God.

Though there are many gods in Hinduism, Hindus believe there is one Supreme Being, Brahman, who is the source of all existence. There is some difference within Hinduism, however, about the nature of that Supreme Being. Most Hindus say that God is beyond name and form, but that God can be worshipped through a variety of forms. They see all the numerous gods and goddesses of Hinduism as many different manifestations of the one God. Other Hindus believe that the one God is really Lord Shiva and that other gods are lesser divinities. Still others believe that Lord Vishnu is the one true God and all others are demigods. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

There are three main gods in Hinduism today:

- *Brahma* (the creator)
- *Lord Vishnu* (the preserver)
- *Lord Shiva* (the destroyer).

Vishnu is said to have had 10 incarnations including Rama and Krishna, the 7th and 8th incarnations, and Gautama, or Buddha (the founder of Buddhism), who is venerated as the 9th incarnation.

Lord Vishnu's wife is *Lakshmi*, the goddess of beauty and prosperity. Lord Shiva's wife is *Parvati* who represents his power or *shakti*. She is the Mother Goddess and is further manifested as *Durga* who destroys evil and as *Kali* who calms fears.

Shiva and *Parvati's* son is the much loved *Ganesha* who represents wisdom and freedom from obstacles.

Four stages of life

There are four stages of life as a Hindu:

- as a student
- as a family person
- as a semi-retired or detached person
- as one who has renounced everything for the service of society.

The role as a family person or a householder is the main period of life for the fulfilment of personal and social responsibilities.

Sacred Texts

The Vedas

The *Vedas* are the oldest of the Hindu holy books. The *Vedas* go back to 1200 BCE but were not written down until about 1400 CE. They were written in Sanskrit and are believed to be among the oldest texts. Hindus believe the revelations came from God and are the basic truths which never change.

The basic principles in the *Vedas* are:

- God is one, the wise call Him by different names.
- The whole world is, or should be, a family.
- Religion is for the happiness of many and welfare of all.
- The soul is immortal and man is divine.
- Man is never satisfied by wealth. Spiritual or self-realisation should be the aim of life.

Laws of Manu

Instructions about how Hindus should live their lives are contained in 2685 verses in the books of the Laws of Manu which were written down before 300CE. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Philosophy and literature

Important texts for Hindus include:

- *Bhagavad-Gita* (the Song of the Lord), 700 verses explaining the essential philosophy and practice of Hinduism
- Various commentaries on the Vedic literatures called *smritis* and the mythological stories called *puranas* form the continuous source of Hindu philosophy and practice
- *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the two main epics that have influenced the life of Hindus and which form the basis of beliefs and ideas.

The caste system

Hinduism divided society into four *varnas* or groups:

- *Brahmins* (priests)
- *Kshatriyas* (soldiers and rulers)
- *Vaishyas* (shopkeepers, traders and farmers)
- *Shudras* (servants for the other three).

People outside the *varnas* were called the *Dalit*, considered outcasts and performed the lowest tasks.

The *varna* a person is born into, is the result of good and bad deeds or karma in previous lives.

This caste system was outlawed in India in 1949 but it remains a significant force.

(Adapted from [Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). “An introduction to Hinduism in Australia” (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Religious Observances

Hindu priests are traditionally members of the Brahmin caste. However, the caste system was outlawed in India in 1949 and recent court decisions have confirmed that members of any caste who have received the appropriate training are entitled to be priests.

There are three types of priests – temple priests, family priests and preachers or lecturers. The family priests visit individual families on demand and conduct various ceremonies from birth to death.

Worship

Daily prayer and occasional fasting are a part of Hindu ritual, but vary according to one's personal belief and ability.

Hindu temples are called **mandir**. Although Hindu temples are built to honour a specific god or goddess, there are shrines to other deities in each temple. The temple of Radha-Krishna in St Kilda, built by the Hare Krishnas, is visited by all Hindus on important occasions. The Hindu Society of Victoria built a temple in Carrum Downs for the two main gods Shiva and Vishnu.

Visits to a temple are not obligatory, but Hindus do visit a temple on special occasions. Pilgrimage is part of religious life and Hindus visit temples of all gods and goddesses as a family tradition, irrespective of their personal deity.

Most Hindus have small personal shrines at home with images of their chosen gods and goddesses. The daily worship procedure, called *puja*, consists of treating these images like specially invited guests, bathing them, offering them cloth, incense, flowers and food.

The symbol used for Hinduism is the Sanskrit letters for the sound Aum (pronounced Ah-oo-m) which represents God. Aum begins and ends all prayers, chants and hymns.

Rites of passages

There are 16 rites or *samskars* that must take place in the life of a Hindu from conception to death. These include the naming ceremony, investiture of the sacred thread, marriage and death. Most of the rituals are in the Sanskrit language and require the services of a priest.

Naming of the child

This ceremony, performed by a priest, may be done 10 or 11 days after birth, though some families defer it.

The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread (Upanayana)

This example marks the passage into adolescence and the religious community for a male Hindu. Only males from the three upper castes participate.

Vivaha

Wedding celebrations in Hindu tradition are elaborate events, involving considerable preparation. The ceremony and the celebrations may last up to three days. Marriage is a match between families, as well as between bride and groom. They are frequently arranged.

Antyes ti (funeral rites)

Cremation is the traditional form of funeral.

Tarpan

In the two-week period preceding the Navarathri festival, men honour their deceased ancestors with offerings of water with sesame seeds.

Festivals

Hindu calendar

The Hindu calendar is basically lunar. The new year begins in March or April when the moon enters the first house. Each month starts on the first day after the no-moon day. An additional calendar month is observed to bring it in line with the more scientific solar calendar.

Diwali is the most important Hindu festival. It celebrates the return of *Rama* and *Sita* from exile and also the day Mother Goddess destroyed the demon *Mahisha*. It is a time for honouring the goddess *Lakshmi*, settling accounts and making up quarrels and arguments. Houses are cleaned and decorated with rows of little lamps called *divas*. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Other festivals include:

- *Shivarati* or the night of the Lord Shiva (February)
- *Holi*, celebrating the arrival of spring in India, but in Australia the time of harvest with bonfires and feasts. (March)
- *Ramanavmi*, the birthday of Rama (March/April),
- *Janamasthami*, the birth of Krishna (August/September),
- The Ganesh Festival (September),
- The Victory of Goddess Durga over the evil Vijayadashami (October)
- *Navatri*, celebrating the worship of the Mother Goddess and her victory over evil
- *Purnima*, honouring the teachers
- *Raksha Bandhan*, honouring the relationship between brothers and sisters.

Customs

Food

Many Hindus are vegetarian. Cows are sacred to Hindus because they represent the earth which is said to be a goddess and, like the earth, the cow takes little, just grass, and gives much in return. ([Racism. No Way!](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html). "An introduction to Hinduism in Australia" (<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html>)).

Hindu names

There can be up to four parts to Hindu names as follows:

- first or personal name, for example Lalita (female) or Naresh (male) which is used by family and friends
- complimentary name, for example Devi (female) or Lal (male) used only in a polite form of address and never on its own
- father's personal name, for example Jayendra or Mohan, to differentiate between large numbers of people who may share a family or caste name
- family or caste name, for example Sharma or Patel, used as a surname and taken by women on marriage and by children.

Population data: Hindus in Australia

In the 2001 census, 95,473 recorded Hinduism as their religion. While still representing only 0.51 percent of the total population, Hinduism is one of the fastest growing religions in Australia with a 41.9 percent increase between the 1996 census and the 2001 census (ABS). Of those, the majority (51 460) lived in New South Wales.

Major birthplaces for Australian Hindus

As can be seen from the tables below, the majority of Hindus come from India and Fiji with significant numbers from Sri Lanka. There is also a growing number of Australian-born people identifying themselves as Hindu.

Table 8.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Hindus

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
India	31,398	33.5
Fiji	19,748	20.7
Australia	16,570	17.4
Sri Lanka	10,206	10.7
Malaysia	2251	2.4
South Africa	2241	2.3
Nepal	1717	1.8
Singapore	1303	1.4
United Kingdom	1095	1.1
New Zealand	1024	1.1
Other	7369	7.7
Total	95,462	100

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia*. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.

Major birthplaces for Victorian Hindus

The Victorian population follows a similar pattern for the whole of Australia in relation to birthplaces of its Hindu population.

Table 8.2 Major birthplaces for Victorian Hindus

Birthplace	Number	% of Religion
India	9628	39.0
Australia	4165	17.0
Fiji	3438	14.0
Sri Lanka	3270	13.0
Malaysia	622	2.5
South Africa	479	1.9
Singapore	309	1.3
New Zealand	237	0.9
United Kingdom	232	0.9
Other	2004	7.7
Total	24,383	100

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

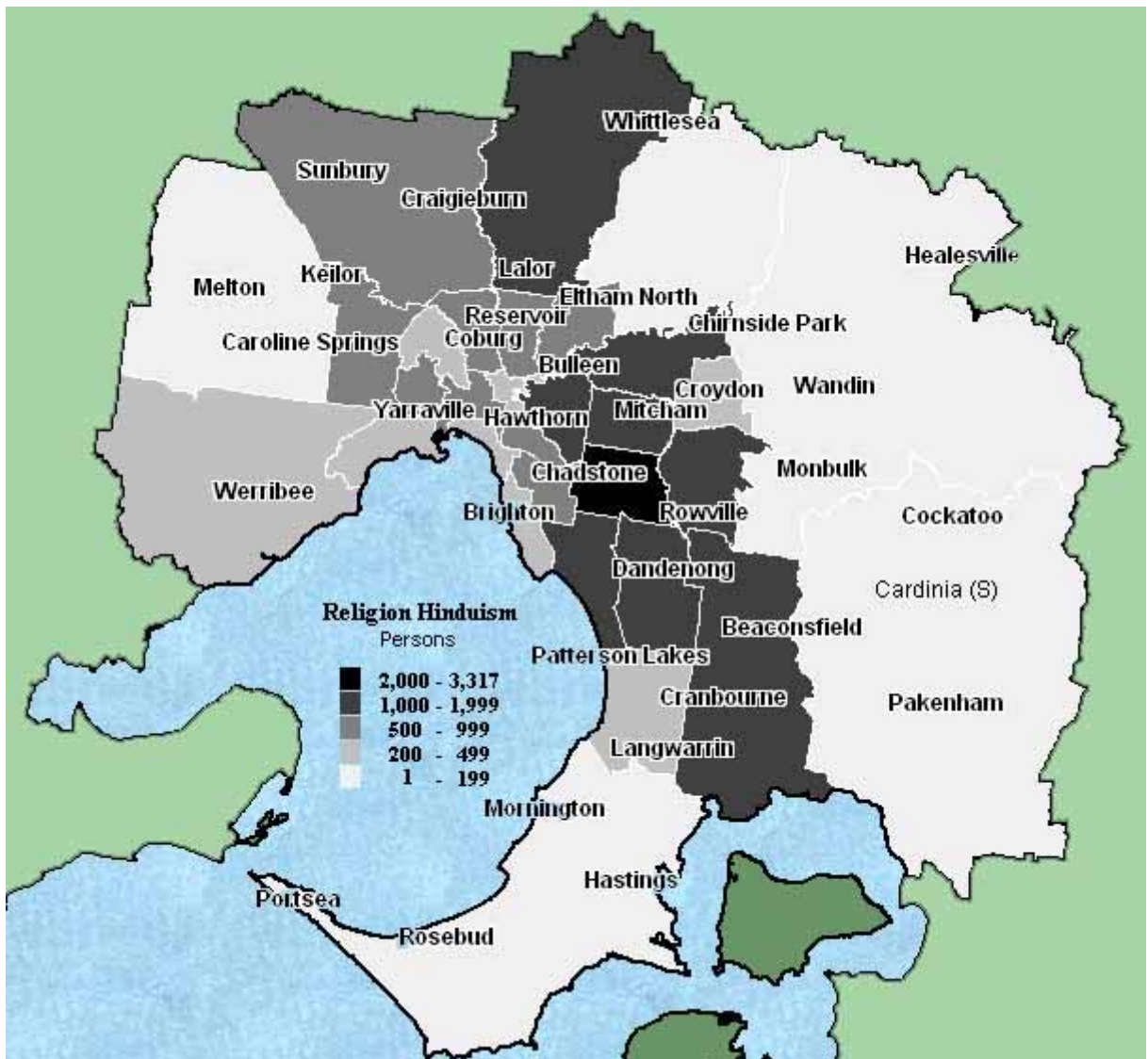
Distribution of Hindus in Victoria

As can be seen from the maps below, most Hindus live in the metropolitan area (96 percent). The only other significant population is in the Greater Geelong Area with smaller populations in regional centres like Bendigo and Shepparton.

In the metropolitan area, the greatest concentration is around Monash, probably reflecting the student population.

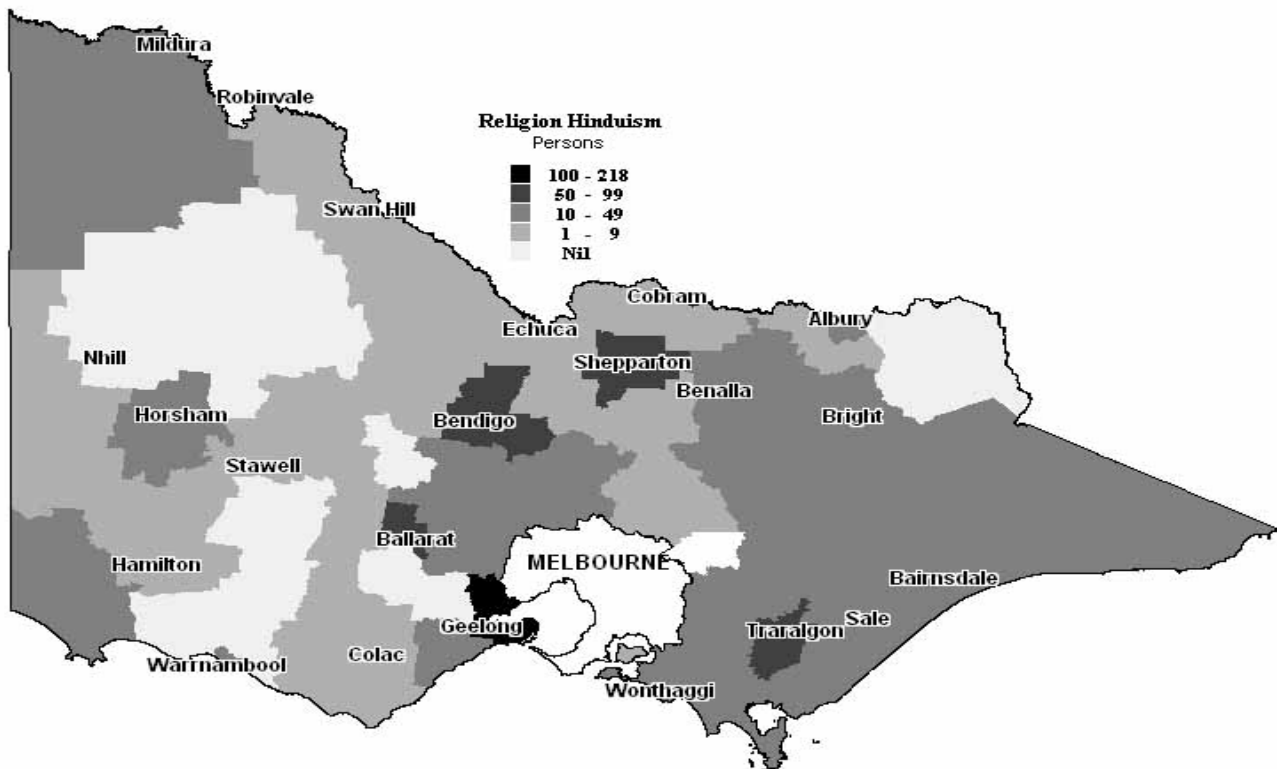
Figure 8.1 Distribution of Hindus: Melbourne 2001

[TOTAL POPULATION = 23,339]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 8.2 Distribution of Hindus: non-metropolitan Victoria 2001
(TOTAL POPULATION = 933]



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

Community Organisations

State

The Hindu Society of Victoria was established in 1982 and the Temple was consecrated in 1994. The group has also built a library.

For a list of Hindu temples in Victoria see:

- [Hindu Council of Australia: Australian Hindu Temples](http://www.hindu council.com.au/ahtl.html)
(<http://www.hindu council.com.au/ahtl.html>)
- [Hindu Foundation of Australia: Australian Temples, Hindu Temples in Australia](http://www.hindunet.com.au/australian_temples.html)
(http://www.hindunet.com.au/australian_temples.html)

National

The [Hindu Council of Australia](http://www.hindu council.com.au/) (<http://www.hindu council.com.au/>) was set up as an umbrella organisation for Hindu Associations at federal level. It aims to

have responsibility for acting as the representative of the Australian-Hindu community in dealings with the state and federal governments, as well as being a point of contact for other organisations and institutions.

Considerations for Schools

The Hindu faith does not observe any compulsory fasting periods. Sraavan is the month of fasting (July/August) and some individuals may choose to fast at different times during this month. Some Hindus will refrain from consuming grain at this time.

Many Hindus are vegetarian and also avoid eggs and dairy products. School activities involving food should consider Hindu dietary practices, particularly the need to exclude beef products. Canteens should provide a range of vegetarian foods and provide a list of ingredients for foods that use a combination of ingredients.

Acknowledge major Hindu festivals and celebrations. Of these, Diwali is the most important.

There are certain rules which must be observed when entering a temple. Shoes must be removed and women should cover their heads. Non-Hindus are welcome in temples provided they show respect and observe the rules.

When visiting a Hindu home, care should be taken not to enter the part of the home reserved for worship unless invited to do so.

Washing is important in Hindu life, including washing hands and rinsing the mouth before and after meals.

Clothing for PE or swimming needs to be appropriate for the activity, while at the same time ensuring modesty and dignity are respected.

In the classroom

Research the role that pilgrimages play in Hinduism and the particular places of significance for pilgrims. Research the significance and the particular god or goddesses or events associated with each place.

Research the attributes of Hindu gods and goddesses and the ways they are depicted.

Make a family tree of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Research the history of the caste system and its status in modern India.

Investigate the ceremonies (*samskara*) associated with rites of passage at different points in a Hindu's life.

Study the symbols associated with Hinduism and their significance e.g. Om or Aum, the lotus, the cow and the swastika.

Investigate Hindu floor paintings, their purpose, typical designs, and the media used. Have students design their own examples.

Make Diwali cards.

Investigate the functions, exterior and interior design and decoration of Hindu temples.

Study excerpts from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The [Asia Education Foundation](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au) has a series of lesson plans on line based on the Ramayana, with links to sites containing texts and graphics (<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/anthol/impress/imprstud.htm#characters>).

Study Hindu festivals as they are observed in Bali.

Discuss the diversity of different backgrounds of Hindus in Australia.

Investigate the development of new Hindu movements in Australia.

Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of the Hindu calendar. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions

What is similar in Hindu life cycle events and practices to other cultures and religions?

What is similar in Hindu belief and ritual to practices of other religions?

What is similar in the rhythm of the Hindu year to students' own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Compare the design, decoration and function of a Hindu *mandir* (temple) with a synagogue, mosque, cathedral, church, and Sikh *gurdwara*. [Racism no way](http://www.racismnoway.com.au), "[Lesson ideas, Australia's Religious Diversity](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson_ideas/20020124_42.html)" has related teaching resources

(http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/lesson_ideas/20020124_42.html)

Compare the "rules" of different religions. Discuss areas of commonality and difference. Use graphic organisers, e.g. Venn diagram, adapted from Lesson Six of [The Really Big Beliefs Project](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/pdf/lesson6.pdf) (PDF, 50KB)

(<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/pdf/lesson6.pdf>).

Useful websites

[Hindu Foundation of Australia](http://www.hindunet.com.au/hindu_foundation.htm)

(http://www.hindunet.com.au/hindu_foundation.htm), providing a wide range of content, including information on Australian temples and organisations.

[Shri Shiva-Vishnu Temple](http://www.hsvshivavishnu.org.au/) at Carrum Downs

(<http://www.hsvshivavishnu.org.au/>)

[University of Wyoming: Hinduism](http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/hinduism/index.htm)

(<http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/hinduism/index.htm>), useful overview of Hinduism from the Religious Studies program at the University of Wyoming.

[BBC Religion & Ethics – Hinduism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml)

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml>).

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(http://www.amf.net.au/rsch_research_religionDiversityCohesion.shtml) accessed June 22nd 2004. The following reports are available for download from this web page:

- "Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia"
- "Australian Muslims: their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions"
- "Constructing a Local Multifaith Network"

[Christian Research Association: Hindus Change Over Time](http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000230.cgi)

(<http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000230.cgi>) accessed June 20th 2006.

Interfaith Network, (2003), *Many Faiths, One People*, City of Greater Dandenong.

National Defence [Religions in Canada: Hinduism](http://www.forces.gc.ca/hr/religions/engraph/religions16_e.asp)

(http://www.forces.gc.ca/hr/religions/engraph/religions16_e.asp).

[Racism no way: Fact Sheets, An introduction to HINDUISM in Australia](http://www.racismnoway.com.au/classroom/factsheets/35.html)

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