

**MIGRANT INFORMATION CENTRE (Eastern Melbourne)
Multicultural Equity and Access Program**

Hindu Profile

PLEASE NOTE: This religious profile provides an overview of the range of beliefs and practices that may apply to individuals who practice this religion. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients. This is an update of the profile in the Home and Personal Care Kit developed by the MIC in 2004.

Introduction:

- Hinduism is not a religion in the strictest sense of the word. It is the recommendation for living a disciplined, pure and blissful life. It is the desire to free oneself from worldly bondage and to obtain a better present and future life through proper karma (actions) in the present life. Hinduism has grown to become the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism originated around 1700 BC in Southern Asia in the area that is now India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. There is no singular doctrine or founder and the holy writings include "Bhagavad-Gita", "Veda", and "Upanishads".
- It is also closely associated conceptually and historically with the other Indian religions: Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. (BBC 2009).

Migration:

- The first Hindus were brought to Australia in the 19th century to work on cotton and sugar plantations. Many stayed to settle as small business owners and merchants. However, most Hindus arrived in Australia since the late 1970s, after the removal of the 'White Australia Policy'. They migrated from a number of countries particularly India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The largest number of Hindus identify as being Indian-born. People of Indian descent have settled in Australia from Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand and many other countries.
- Between the 2006 and 2011 Census the number of people who identified themselves as Hindu in Australia increased by 127,405 (86%) to a total of 275,535 people.
- Based on 2011 Census there are 83,137 Hindus residing in Victoria (1.5% of the Victorian population).

Local Demographics: Hindus Residing in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	No. of Hindu Residents	% of Population
City of Boroondara	3362	2.1%
City of Knox	3063	2.1%
City of Manningham	1300	1.2%
City of Maroondah	925	0.9%
City of Monash	6942	4.1%
City of Whitehorse	3007	2.0%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	269	0.2%
Eastern Region	18,868	1.9%

(ABS Census 2011)

Language:

- As Hindus come from such a vast number of different countries, cultures and areas within India, they speak many different languages.
- Languages that may be spoken by Hindus include Hindi, Telegu and other Indian dialects.
- English proficiency is generally very high within the community.

Religious Practices:

Beliefs:

- Though there are many gods in Hinduism, Hindus believe there is one Supreme Being, 'Brahman', who is the source of all existence. God is worshipped in many different forms.
- Each region, clan, village, and even family has its own versions and stories of the gods and important holidays, prayers and practices.
- Hindus believe in "samsara", the repetitious Transmigration of the Soul. This is the transfer of one's soul ("atman") after death into another body. This produces a continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth through their many lifetimes. The goal of life is to attain Nirvana, 'Enlightenment or oneness with God.'
- Karma determines how you will live your next life. A person can be reborn at a higher level, through pure acts, thoughts and devotion, bad deeds can cause a person to be reborn at a lower level, or even as an animal. The unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, and suffering are thus seen as natural consequences for one's previous acts, both in this life and in previous lives. Happiness is achieved by renunciation of earthly desires.
- Most Hindus in Australia follow one of two major divisions within Hinduism – "Vaishnavism" (generally regards "Vishnu" as the ultimate deity) or "Shivaism" (generally regards "Shiva" as the ultimate deity). In Australia, Hindu practices are extremely diverse. Belief systems and practices may have varying degrees of intensity.

Worship:

- "Puja" is the act of showing reverence to a god, a spirit, or another aspect of the divine through invocations, prayers, songs, and rituals.
- Hindus are encouraged to worship at dawn and dusk, but the actual time is not critical. Worship times at Temples are between 6.30am and 8.00am and 7.00pm and 8.30pm.
- Hindus worship both individually and communally. Most Hindus pray at least once a day, at sunrise or sunset. They must wash thoroughly and change their clothes before praying.
- The worship of Hindu deities in temples forms an important part of the religious beliefs and practices of all Hindus.
- Worship may include the burning of incense, offering of food, flowers and fruit.
- Meditation rather than prayer are the preferred communication with God.
- Hindus have detailed series of life-cycle rituals or ceremonies ("samskara") that mark major transitions in the life of the individual such as birth, marriage and death.

Places of Worship:

- Hindus pray in temples or at home
- A Hindu temple is viewed as somewhere that Gods live.

- The place of worship within one's home is the household altar.

Religious / Community Leaders:

- Clergy are priests, usually called “Swamiji”.

Icons / Statues / Symbols:

- Hinduism has many symbols, statues and paintings that are considered to be sacred. They incorporate aspects of nature and animal life. Statues and paintings are often of *Vishnu* or *Shiva*.
- “Aum” is also an important symbol for Hindus. It is thought to be the sound heard in deepest meditation.

Scriptures:

- Among the most important of all Hindu sacred texts are the “*Vedas*”. They contain hymns of praise, incantations and, rituals from ancient India.
- Other important religious books of Hindus are called the “*Ramayan*” and the “*Mahabharata*”.
- The “*Bhagavad Gita*” is the sixth book of the “*Mahabharata*”. It is an ancient text that has become the main sacred text of Hinduism.

Clothing:

- A Hindu woman puts on glass wedding bangles on her marriage day and they are not to be removed unless her husband dies. Breaking or removing wedding bangles is considered an extremely bad omen and will greatly distress a Hindu woman.
- Married women may wear a “*Thali*” or “*Mangal Sutra*”, a necklace of special design around their neck and traditionally it symbolises marriage. This is also only removed when her husband dies.
- Married women may wear red powder in the parting in the hair which also symbolises marriage. They may also have a red dot painted on their forehead, called a “*tilaka*”, “*bottu*”, “*bindiya*”, and “*kumkum or bindi*”. In the past many unmarried women wore black marks, whereas many married women wore red. In the recent times women often wear dots that match the colours of their saris.
- Some Hindu men wear a thread around their bodies, passing diagonally across the body from the shoulder to about waist height. It is put on at an important religious ceremony and should never be removed.
- Some Hindus (men and women) wear a religious talisman or chain that provides protection from evil actions by others.
- Hindus may wear traditional clothing during special festival and prayer.

Food:

- Many Hindus, but not all, are vegetarians. Hinduism forbids the eating of beef. This is because the cow is held to be sacred. There may be restrictions regarding other meats and eggs.
- Orthodox Hindus and most vegetarians are unlikely to consume alcoholic drinks.
- Fasting is common among Hindus, especially widows and elderly women. Normally Hindus fast for a day's duration, however, sometimes a vow is taken to fast for a specific number of days.

Holy Days:

- Holy days may vary relating to which geographic region the believer has immigrated from.

Other Laws and Customs

- Some sensitivities relating to the Hindu faith include:
 - Autopsies are considered objectionable and deeply disrespectful to the dead and his/her family. The preference is not to have autopsies unless required by law.
 - Visible expressions of grief are common and are deemed helpful to cope with the sense of personal loss.
 - Modesty remains important even after death. Corpses are bathed and dressed only by persons of the same sex. It is absolutely essential to handle the dead with dignity and modesty.
 - Hindus are generally cremated, except for children under three, who are buried. Funerals are deemed most sacred. Ideally, the cremation should be within 24 hours of death.

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Hindus believe that many aspects of illness and disease are a result of one's actions in the past and current life (Bad Karma). Hindus believe that faith and prayer can heal.
- The right hand is considered to be cleaner than the left hand, as the left hand is used to wash the body and to dispose of bodily waste and secretions, therefore eating must be done with the right hand. Personal hygiene is very important.
- The actions of supernatural forces and certain human excesses may be considered important in causing illness among Hindus.

Beliefs about aging:

- Family elders are expected to resolve issues within the family.
- Hinduism especially emphasises respect for all older people, with children having a special responsibility towards their parents.
- Hinduism encourages family members to take a role in the care of family members.
- It is considered a family obligation to care for the elderly and the sick.

Beliefs about disability and mental illness:

- Mental illness has severe negative connotations, especially among the older Hindu population. Some believe that mental illness is due to possession of the evil eye.
- Shame and denial are typical responses to any suggestion of mental illness. Because mental illness is concealed, it is often presented to a doctor as somatic complaints such as headaches or stomach pain rather than as anxiety or depression (Queensland Health 2011)
- Many aspects of illness and disease are a result of past and current life actions, the result of one's Karma.

Communication Styles:

- Orthodox Hindus avoid all physical contact with strangers especially with members of the opposite sex. Hindus in Australia do not object to formal handshakes.

- Hindu 'Namaskar' (clasping the palms together and holding them vertically near the chest) are acceptable.
- From a cultural perspective, Hindus do not like to discuss family problems with outsiders.

Naming Conventions:

- Naming conventions vary according to culture and where one lives. For example, Hindus in different areas of India have different naming conventions.

The Role of the Family:

- The family plays a very important role within Hinduism. The father (or in his absence, the mother) is expected to deal with external parties in formal interactions.

Customs / Values:

- Compassion, fortitude, self-control, purity and generosity are highly valued.
- Footwear that is worn outside the house is not normally worn inside the house. No footwear is worn in the prayer room or near the altar. This is for reasons of cleanliness and also to reduce negative vibrations coming into the prayer room.
- Marriage continues to be a powerful and significant institution for a Hindu.
- Sexual relationships outside of marriage are not viewed favourably.

Greetings:

English Greeting	Hindi (Closest English Pronunciation)
Hello	NAMASTE
Goodbye	PHIR MILENGAY
Yes	HAAN
No	NAHIN
Thankyou	DHANYAVAD

Key Hindu Festivals / Observances:

- Hindus in Australia celebrate many social and religious festivals, both in temples and in private homes.
- Most fasts and festivals in Hinduism are based on the lunar calendar year.
- The following are a selection of the many festivals and observances of the Hindu community:

<i>Vasanta Panchami</i> (Celebrate the coming of spring)	<i>Jan/Feb</i>
<i>Makara Sankranti</i> (Celebrate the start of Hindu New Year)	<i>Jan 14th</i>
<i>(Maha) Shivaratri</i> (Wedding celebration of Lord Shiva & Goddess Parvati)	<i>Feb/ March</i>
<i>Holi</i> (Festival of colours)	<i>Feb/March</i>
<i>Ugadi, Wishu and Gudi Parva</i> (Hindu New Year celebrations)	<i>March/April</i>
<i>Rama Navami</i> (The birthday of Lord Rama)	<i>March/April</i>
<i>Hanumana or Mahaveera Jayanti</i> (Birthday of <i>Hanumana</i> God of strength)	<i>March/April</i>

<i>Guru Purnima</i> (Honouring the Guru, the spiritual teacher)	<i>May/June/ July</i>
<i>Onam</i> (A social festival)	<i>Aug/Sept</i>
<i>Krishna Janmashtami</i> (The birthday of Lord Krishna)	<i>Aug/Sept</i>
<i>Ganesha / Vinayak Chaturthi</i>	<i>Aug/Sept</i>
<i>Navaratri</i> or <i>Dashahara</i> (Festival of nine nights)	<i>Sept/Oct</i>
<i>Teej</i> or <i>Karva Chauth</i> (Celebration of wife's benediction for her husband)	<i>Oct/Nov</i>
<i>Deepavali</i> or <i>Diwali</i> (Festival of lights)	<i>Oct/Nov</i>

* To search for exact dates of key cultural and religious events, festivals and national days for this year, visit: <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia/>

Local Services Useful for Hindu Residents in the Eastern Region

Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128	Ph: 9285 4888
New Hope Migrant and Refugee Centre	18 Chester Street Oakleigh, 3166	Ph: 9563 4130

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre Aged Care & Disability Services

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128

Ph: 9275 6901

The aged and disability team aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care. The Access & Support Program provides short term, individual support to help people who have difficulty accessing services themselves to find services that meet their needs.

Other Supports

Hindu Community Council of Victoria (HCCV)

President: Abhay Awasthi 0401 042 583

Email: info@hinduccv.org.au

<http://www.hinduccv.org.au/>

The HCCV was set up with the aim of bringing together various Hindu organizations and places of worship to present a unified voice for all Hindus living in the multicultural community of Victoria and fulfil the unmet needs of the Hindu communities, irrespective of their race, language or country of origin.

Hindu Society of Victoria (HSV)

Address: 52 Boundary Rd, Carrum Downs 3201

Ph: 03 97820878

<http://hsvculturalcentre.org.au/>

Hindu Foundation of Australia

Ph: 03 97380564

E-mail: hindufoundation@hindunet.com.au

http://www.hindunet.com.au/hindu_foundation.htm

Provides Welfare, Migrant, Youth, Senior citizen and counselling services.

Hindu Heritage Foundation of Victoria (HHFV)

Address: PO Box 36, Glen Iris, 3146

Email: hfhvic@gmail.com

Provides educational and cultural services.

Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple

Address: 1292 Mountain Hwy, The Basin 3154

Ph: 03 9762 1835

Chinmaya Mission Australia

Address: 4 Pioneer Drive, Templestowe, 3106

Ph: 03 98468359

Spiritual (*Bhagavad Geeta*), educational, & charitable activities through *Bala Vihar*, *Chinmaya Yuva Kendra* Australia etc.

Media

Media	Program	Details
Radio	ABC Radio National - <i>Religion and Ethics Report</i> is a weekly window into the world of religious affairs and ethical issues in Australia and around the globe.	http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/about/
	Greater India	Ph: 0410338900 http://greaterindia.com.au/
Newspaper/ Journal / Articles	Vedic Voice Magazine	Bhakta Dasa 0431829463 http://hinduccv.org.au/vedic-voice-current-issue
	<i>Samachar</i>	http://www.samachar.com/
	The Hindu	http://www.thehindu.com/
	Indian Link Newspaper	Email: info@indianlink.com.au http://www.indianlink.com.au
	Online Bookstore	http://shivayoga.org/html/bookstore.html

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