

# [Hinduism](https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-essay-samples-3/)

Hinduism generally is regarded as the oldest formal religion in the world.

The origins of Hinduism go back to the pastoral Aryan tribes, spilling over
the Hindu Kush from Inner Asia, and mixing with the urban civilization of
the Indus Valley and with the tribal cultures of hunting and gathering
peoples in the area. Unlike other world religions, Hinduism had no single
founder and has never been missionary in orientation. It is believed that
about 1200 B. C., or even earlier by some accounts, the Vedas, a body of
hymns originating in northern India were produced; these texts form the
theological and philosophical precepts of Hinduism.

Hindus believe that the absolute (the totality of existence, including God,
man, and universe) is too vast to be contained within a single set of
beliefs. A highly diverse and complex religion, Hinduism embraces six
philosophical doctrines (darshanas). From these doctrines, individuals
select one that is congenial, or conduct their worship simply on a
convenient level of morality and observance. Religious practices differ
from group to group. The average Hindu does not need any systematic formal
creed in order to practice his or her religion Hindus only to comply with
the customs of their family and social groups.

One basic concept in Hinduism is that of dharma, natural law and the social
and religious obligations it imposes. It holds that individuals should play
their proper role in society as determined or prescribed by their dharma.

The caste system, although not essential to philosophical Hinduism, has
become an integral part of its social or dharmic expression. Under this
system, each person is born into a particular caste, whose traditional
occupation-- although members do not necessarily practice it--is graded
according to the degree of purity and impurity inherent in it.

Other fundamental ideas common to all Hindus concern the nature and destiny
of the soul, and the basic forces of the universe. The souls of human
beings are seen as separated portions of an allembracing world soul
(brahma); man's ultimate goal is reunion with this absolute.

Karma (universal justice) is the belief that the consequence of every good
or bad action must be fully realized. Another basic concept is that of
samsara, the transmigration of souls; rebirth is required by karma in order
that the consequences of action be fulfilled. The role an individual must
play throughout his or her life is fixed by his or her good and evil
actions in previous existences. It is only when the individual soul sees
beyond the veil of maya (illusion or earthly desires)--the forces leading
to belief in the appearances of things--that it is able to realize its
identity with the impersonal, transcendental reality (world soul) and to
escape from the otherwise endless cycle of rebirth to be absorbed into the
world soul. This release is known as moksha.

Veneration for the cow has come to be intimately associated with all
orthodox Hindu sects. Because the cow is regarded as the symbol of
motherhood and fruitfulness, the killing of a cow, even accidentally, is
regarded as one of the most serious of religious transgressions.

Hinduism is polytheistic. It incorporates many gods and goddesses with
different functions and powers; but in the most important and widely held
doctrine, the Vedanta (end of the Vedas), gods and goddesses are considered
merely different manifestations or aspects of a single underlying divinity.

This single divinity is expressed as a Hindu triad comprising the
religion's three major gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, personifying
creation, preservation, and destruction, respectively. Vishnu and Shiva, or
some of their numerous avatars (incarnations), are most widely followed.

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is regarded as the ninth avatar of Vishnu.

Some Hindus identify Christ as the tenth avatar; others regard Kalki as the
final avatar who is yet to come. These avatars are believed to descend upon
earth to restore peace, order, and justice, or to save humanity from
injustice. The Mahabharata (compiled by the sage Vyasa, probably before
A. D. 400), describes the great civil war between the Pandavas (the good)
and the Kauravas (the bad)--two factions of the same clan. It is believed
that the war was created by Krishna. Perhaps the flashiest and craftiest
avatar of Vishnu, Krishna, as a part of his lila (sport or act), is
believed motivated to restore justice--the good over the bad.