

# [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.