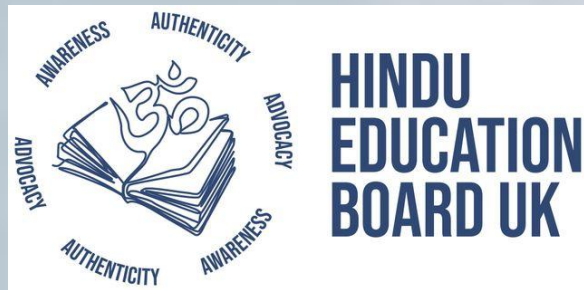


An Introduction to Hindu Dharma



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Hindu Dharma at a Glance

Hindu Dharma is one of the world's oldest living religious tradition.

It can be traced back to over 6,000 years.

Hindu Dharma is the **third** largest practiced religion on the planet.

It has over one billion followers globally.

The original name for Hindu Dharma is **Sanātana Dharma**.



Core Concept: Sanātana Dharma

This Sanskrit term means:

Sanātana: '*Eternal*' or '*everlasting*'.

It implies something without beginning or end.

Dharma: It describes **that which upholds, sustains and harmonises the universal order** - the moral, natural and spiritual principles that guide life.

This is a complex Sanskrit term with no single English equivalent.

Although often translated as duty, righteousness, laws of nature, each term captures only one aspect of its meaning.

Dharma is living in harmony with the inherent order of the cosmos.

Sanātana Dharma refers to the **Eternal Tradition**, the timeless principles and values considered inherent to all beings. It describes the eternal law or cosmic order through which the universe operates and by which life is sustained.



Core Concept: Sanātana Dharma

Sanātana Dharma (The Eternal Tradition)

Sanātana Dharma refers to the **universal** and **timeless** dimension of Dharma that applies to all.

At its heart are core ethical principles: cultivating kindness and empathy toward all beings, upholding integrity and truthfulness, and living with a deep sense of responsibility toward society and the natural world.

It **guides** individuals toward a life of moral dignity, encouraging thoughtful conduct, stewardship of the planet's ecosystems and continual honouring of the **divine essence** within the Inner Self (atman).

Sanātana Dharma inspires Hindus to **live in harmony** with the **laws of the universe**, recognising that ethical living, spiritual awareness and cosmic balance are **deeply interconnected**.



Understanding Dharma

Dharma is that which **upholds**, **sustains** and harmonises the universal order.

The term comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, meaning “to uphold” or “to support,” so *dharma* literally means “that which upholds.”

It refers to the **cosmic law** or universal order through which **balance** and harmony are maintained.

Dharma is not fixed or rigid; it **adapts** according to a person’s stage of life, responsibilities and character.

While universal principles such as truth and righteousness remain constant, an individual’s specific duties (their personal dharma) evolve as their role and circumstances change.



Concepts of God

At the heart of the Hindu understanding of God is the concept of **Brahman**.

Ultimate Reality: Brahman is the single, all-pervading and eternal spirit or force that is the source and substance of the entire universe and beyond.

Formless and Infinite: Brahman is not a deity with a personality, gender or physical form. Instead, it is the limitless, all-embracing reality. A principle that is **eternal**, **transcendent** (beyond the universe) and **pervading all existence** (present throughout everything).

Present in Everything (Ātman): The individual soul or self (*Ātman*) within every person, animal and thing is **interconnected** to Brahman. The goal of spiritual life is to **realise this oneness**.



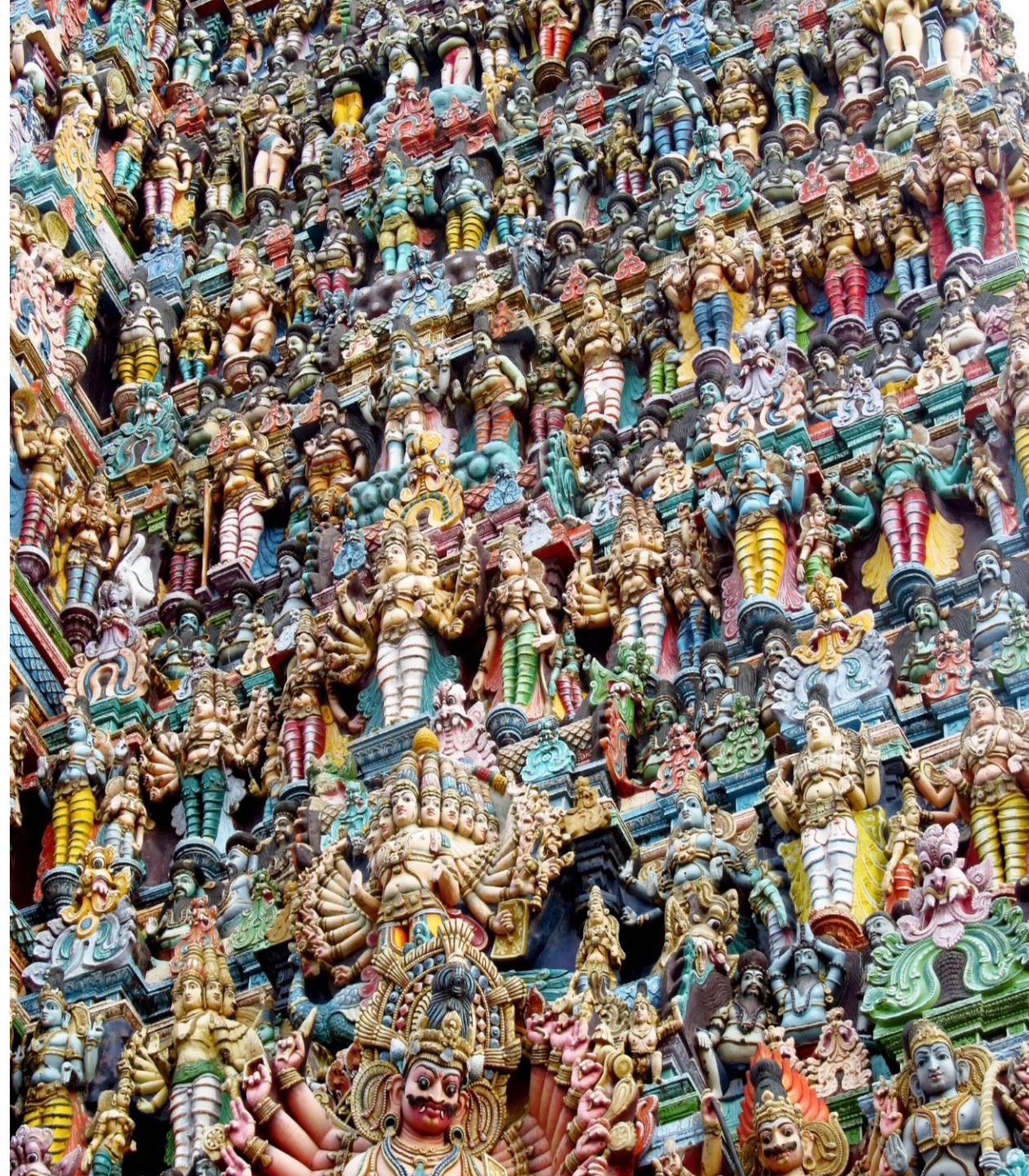
Concepts of God

Most Hindus believe that the multitude of gods and goddesses are ***different forms or aspects of that Ultimate Reality*** (Brahman).

Many Hindus revere gods and goddesses such as Shiva, Vishnu and Goddess Durga.

The various gods and goddesses are not seen as competing entities, but as countless forms or different pathways **leading to that ultimate divine source.**

It's often described as a single light shining through various coloured glasses. The light is one (Brahman), but the colours (the deities) are many.



Unity in Diversity

***"Truth is one; wise people
call it by different names."***

Rigveda (1.164.46)

This teaching is often summarised as:

**Truth is one, but there are many paths to
connect with and realise the Ultimate
Reality.**

Hindu Dharma teaches that there are many
paths to realise Brahman, expressing an
inclusive vision at its heart.



A Pluralistic Approach

Hindu Dharma teaches that there are **many valid ways to connect with Brahman**. This is why Hindu traditions, practices and beliefs are so **diverse** and Hindu Dharma welcomes different ideas.

There's no claim that only one path is the only right one. Instead, Hindus believe that everyone, in their own time and way, can **discover the divine**.

The Ultimate Reality, called **Brahman**, is seen as infinite and too vast for any single person, book or religion to fully explain.

Hindu Dharma offers a welcoming embrace, celebrating the beautiful **diversity** of the human spirit and **empowering** every person to find the **divine spark within themselves** to find their own meaningful way to **connect with the divine**.

All spiritual paths are **respected** as part of one deeper truth.



Seers of Truth

The foundations of Hindu Dharma were shaped by **many great thinkers and enlightened seekers and sages** who explored the relationship between humanity, the world and the universe. Through **deep reflection**, they realised that truth is not found solely in the external world (which is limited by the body, mind and intellect) but through understanding, realising and experiencing consciousness (Brahman), which has no limitations.

These **spiritual seers** are known as Rishis (male) and Rishikas (female). They gained insight through intense meditation (tapas) and direct experience, as well as intellectual study. Their teachings emphasise that spiritual knowledge must be lived and practised, not merely learned.

The tradition also includes notable female scholars. Rishikas such as Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi were respected intellectuals who took part in major philosophical debates.



The Sacred Scriptures

Hindu scriptures are broadly classified into two main categories:

Shruti ("What is Heard")

This is considered direct, divine revelation that is eternal.

It was heard and experienced by the Rishis and Rishikas.

This category is the ultimate authority and includes:

The **Four Vedas**: *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*.

The **Upanishads**: The philosophical end portion of the Vedas (also called *Vedanta*), which explore the nature of reality, the self (Atman) and the universal (Brahman).

Smriti ("What is Remembered")

These are texts "remembered" and composed by sages, based on the truths of Shruti.

They adapt eternal truths for different time periods and include:

The **Epics**: The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The **Puranas**: A collection of histories, genealogies and legends.

Dharma Shastras: Books of law and social conduct.



The Sacred Scriptures

The most ancient and important scriptures are the **Vedas**.

They are a vast library of hymns, chants, rituals and philosophy that describe how to connect with the eternal laws of the universe.

Did you know?

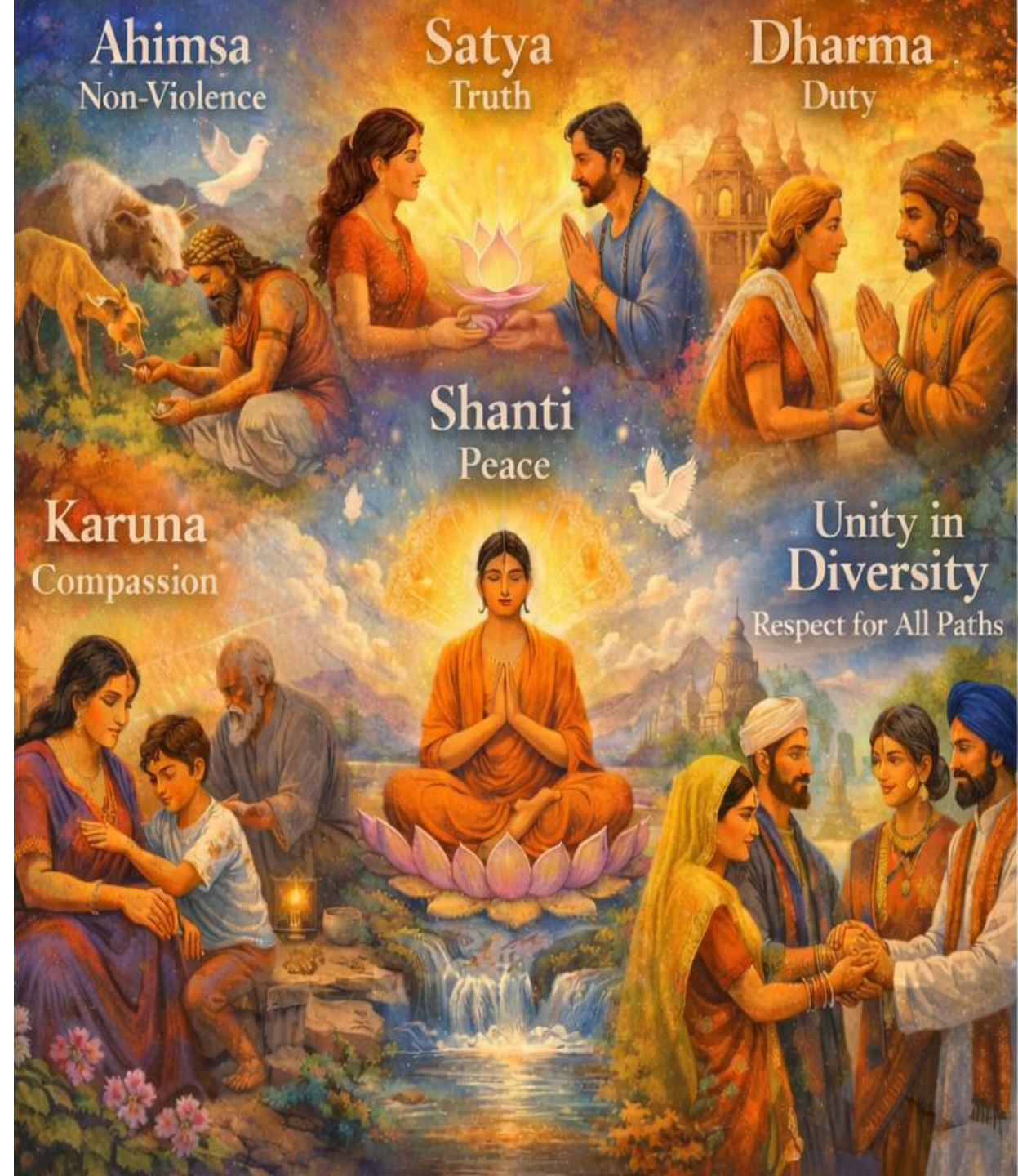
The *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most celebrated Hindu scriptures, is actually a single, 700-verse chapter within the vast epic *Mahabharata*. It takes the form of an insightful dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Shri Krishna, exploring themes such as duty (*dharma*), devotion, selfless action, meditation and the deeper nature of life itself.



Hindu Values

These values guide Hindus towards a life of ethical action, spiritual depth and harmonious coexistence.

- **Non-violence (Ahimsa):** Cultivating compassion and reverence for all life.
- **Truth (Satya):** Living with integrity and clarity, aligning speech and action with deeper truth.
- **Duty (Dharma):** Fulfilling one's responsibilities with wisdom and purpose, contributing to social and cosmic balance.
- **Peace (Shanti):** Cultivating inner calm and radiating harmony outward, even in times of challenge, fostering harmony in relationships, communities and the wider world.
- **Compassion (Karuna):** Meeting others with empathy, recognising the divine in every being.
- **Respect for Diversity:** respecting unity in diversity, multiple paths to the divine, embracing pluralism as a spiritual strength.



Summary

Hindu Dharma is the world's oldest living religion — a vast, philosophical tradition often called *Sanātana Dharma*, meaning the “Eternal Tradition”.

A Worldview:

Unlike religions with a single founder or fixed doctrine, Hindu Dharma is a **diverse** family of traditions, scriptures and philosophies. Its followers may be monotheistic, polytheistic, monistic or even agnostic, reflecting a deep acceptance of multiple paths to the divine.

The Unity of All Things (Brahman & Atman)

At its heart is the timeless idea of a single Ultimate Reality known as *Brahman*. A central teaching is that the individual soul, *Atman*, is not separate from this reality; it is a divine spark that is ultimately one with Brahman.

