




Hinduism

Festivals, Milestones, Sacred Writing

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- No set day of the week is holy – each day has its possibilities
 - Festivals may be solar or lunar if preferred
 - Approx. 125 special days in the Hindu year

Diwali

- Most well known
- Festival of lights
- Normally celebrated over 5 days, end of October/beginning of November
- Symbolizes victory over evil
- Fireworks, houses are decorated with lights, gifts are given, new clothes are worn to celebrate triumph of good and knowledge over the dark forces of evil and ignorance



- Candles set afloat on rafts on river, if candle remains lit, good luck will follow
- Lavish vegetarian dinners are prepared
- Puja performed at dusk before feast
- Honours Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and good fortune, and Vishnu, who defeated the demon Naraki



Holi

- Spring festival
- Night before, worshippers light a bonfire = burning of evil
- Celebrates good harvest
- Also called “Festival of Colours”
- People throw coloured powder and water at each other





Ganesha

- To honour Ganesh, elephant-headed deity, remover of obstacles
- 10 day festival
- Idol is placed on platform, decorated, and worshipped
- Idol is immersed in body of water



Milestones

- Steps from conception to cremation
- Each step is a rite of passage = samskara
- Approx 40 rituals, only about 16 are central to the religion
- Priests officiate these rites, relatives and friends attend

Naming a Child

- Named by a priest 10 days after birth
- Mother and child bathed traditionally before ceremony
- Baby's head is wet with water = symbol of purification
- Paternal aunt names the child
- Child given gold bracelet
- Black dot smeared on face to ward off evil
- Few still observe this



First Haircut

- 6-8 months old boys
- Cut by local barber
- Shaves head except for little area on top




Thread Initiation Ceremony

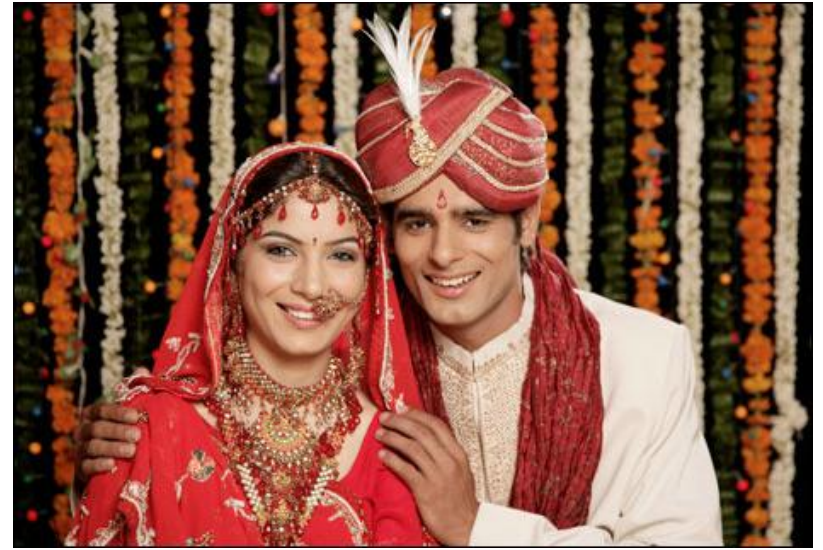
- Performed by boys between ages of 8-12
- Marks the boy's transition into the student stage of life where he is expected to begin his studies of sacred texts
- During 2 day ceremony, boy wears a sacred thread over his left shoulder and chants a mantra



Marriage

- Marks the bride and groom's entry into the householder stage of life
- Arranged marriages are common in India
- When parents agree on a marriage, they arrange an engagement where the father of the groom formally asks for the woman's hand in marriage to his son
- Family is present because marriage is not just union of 2 people but of 2 families

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- Wedding ceremony lasts approx. 3 hours
 - Performed by priest
 - Elaborate, consisting of about 15 rituals, including the bride and groom taking 7 steps around a sacred fire and groom's family giving the bride a necklace she is to wear around her neck for the rest of her married life



Death and Cremation

- Under the direction of a priest, the family members bathe and dress the body in new, traditional clothing, leaving the face uncovered
- Light and flowers are offered to the spirit of deceased
- Procession to crematorium
- Holy songs are chanted
- Oldest son, or male member of family, lights the fire to begin the cremation
- Family collects the ashes in an urn and scatters them in the Ganges River
- 10 and 13 days after funeral, relatives and friends gather for a special prayer and a feast

Sacred Writings

- Many sources or books that are considered sacred
- Approx 200 books that were composed over a 3000 year period
- Vedas – the oldest and most authoritative Hindu scriptures
 - Range from subjects on the divine spirit to medicine and science