

Hinduism

A member of Hinduism, the Hindu faith, is called a Hindu.

Much Hindu worship takes place in the home but there are also public temples. The temple is primarily a sacred space where individuals or families can perform personal acts of worship or "puja". Some Hindu communities also value congregational worship (for example the Iskcon community in Newcastle) as a way of glorifying God although this may not be so important to other Hindu denominations.

Dress

Smart, modest but casual dress - both sexes must remove their shoes before entry into the prayer room.

Visiting a Mandir (A Hindu Temple)

Before entering the prayer-hall shoes are to be removed. After entering quietly, visitors sit on the floor with legs crossed or with feet pointing on one side (i.e. not towards the 'murti' or sacred images). Men and women sit together.

If arti is taking place, you will be asked to stand for the main part of the worship but you will not be expected to participate.

Traditionally, a Hindu temple is dedicated to a particular Deity. The Deity (the sacred image of the God in which he or she is believed to reside after various rituals have been performed by priests), is kept in a sanctuary and treated with great respect. Worship revolves around these Deities. There may be a priest, or pujari, in attendance. His duty is to wash and dress the Deity in royal robes ready to be welcomed as an honoured guest.

The daily puja in the temple consists of making various offerings such as flowers and incense, to God. A sacred fire or flame is kindled near the altar and during the worship music is played, and sacred texts chanted. Prayers are offered and worshippers dip a finger of the right hand in water and touch various parts of the body as a sign of cleansing. All these activities help the worshippers to purify their minds, bodies and souls and concentrate on God.

During the typical *puja*, or ritual worship, the Deity is treated as a "guest" and the devotee is its "host". Prayers are directed to Him/Her, flowers are draped around or near, and incense is lit. Deities may also be bathed in special oils. The intention is to offer the best things to the "divine guest".

During the ritual, which is performed prior to eating, the food is blessed. The sacramental food called *prashad* (a gift of the blessed food), is distributed to visitors. This will be offered on a tray, usually in the form of sweets. Each visitor will be asked to take one. They either accept this or indicate politely that they do not wish to accept. No alcoholic beverages are served as part of *prashad*.

Books used

The *Bhagavad-Gita*, the epic Sanskrit poem. Also used are various scriptures favoured by each Hindu denomination.