Resources

Books and Articles

There is an immense array of literature about Hinduism written in English. Much of it is highly technical and of interest mainly to scholars. In my selections, I have sought to highlight some of the best works currently available and easily accessible for the serious beginning student of Hinduism.

General Surveys of Hinduism


A classic presentation of the history of Indian culture from the earliest times through the first millennium CE.


A fine collection of primary Hindu texts arranged chronologically from the Vedic to the modern period. Very helpful introductions place the readings in historical context.


This brief text is one of the clearest presentations of basic Hinduism in English. It is especially good for understanding the Vedic and classical periods in Hinduism.


An eminently readable and comprehensive study of Hinduism in all its major dimensions. Highly recommended.


A very clear and accessible introduction to the philosophical and religious dimensions of Hinduism.


The Kollers have assembled an excellent anthology of primary sources that include not only Hindu readings but Buddhist, Jain, Chinese, and Muslim works as well.

A fine selection of important Hindu texts, this work includes primary sources from the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy as well as texts from the heterodox traditions.


A good, basic introduction to the important dimensions of Hinduism.

**Early Cultures of India**


A very scholarly presentation of the origins of Hindu philosophy with thoughtful translations of Vedic hymns and early Upanishads.


This is one of the best scholarly analyses of the Indus Valley Civilization.


A superb rendering of the most interesting Rig Veda texts. An essential resource for those interested in a deeper understanding of the Vedic period.


Panikkar’s collection is an assembly of over 500 Vedic texts translated into a vigorous and compelling English.


An accessible survey of ancient India, covering the earliest periods of human culture in India, the Indus Valley Civilization, and the Āryan migrations. Both scholarly and highly readable.


Wheeler’s writings on the Indus Valley provide a wealth of information. This work focuses on the archaeology of the Indus Valley and northern Indian culture up to the Mauryan Empire.

[http://www.harappa.com](http://www.harappa.com)


Classical Hinduism


A classic anthropological study of the dynamics of purity and pollution. A valuable resource for understanding the theoretical foundations of caste and ritual uncleanness.


A detailed and careful analysis of the caste system, accenting its complexity and assumptions.


Eliade’s work is a detailed, scholarly exposition of the classical system of Yoga. Very helpful for understanding the path of wisdom.


Hume’s translation is one of the relatively early English translations of the Upaniṣads. After over a century, it is still one of the best and most scholarly. The introduction and textual notes are very helpful.


Although not as accurate or as elegant as later translations, Mascaro’s rendering is very accessible and readily available in the Penguin Classics edition. Represents a good selection of the most significant Upaniṣads.


This is a masterful recent translation of the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, the classic Hindu text that explains the very influential system of Yoga.


Wendy Doniger, formerly O’Flaherty, is one of the foremost Hindu scholars in the United States. This work is her analysis of the development of the concepts of transmigration and karma in the classical period.

An extremely well-done English translation of important texts interpreting dharma. Valuable for the information it provides on the regulation of daily life beginning in the classical Hindu period.


Olivelle’s translation is a superb rendering for the modern reader. It is informed by careful scholarship and provides excellent introductory material. This is the best of recent translations.

*Epics and Poetry*


The translation of *Gīta* by the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It is over 1000 pages of text, translation, and commentary.


The *Mahābhārata* is probably the longest epic in world literature. In this version, William Buck retells the story from whole story from beginning to end in a single volume. An excellent way to enter the world of the *Mahābhārata*.


The classic Hindu epic of Rāmā and Sīta retold by Buck after the fashion of his *Mahābhārata*.


One of the best English translations available. I use Miller’s version of the *Gīta* for my undergraduate courses.


The *Gītāgovinda* is classic Hindu poem celebrating the passionate longing of Rādhā for her consort Krishna. This is a moving rendition of the ideal of devotion for god.

*Women*


Although Bumiller’s work is more journalistic than academic, it provides a helpful analysis of the ambiguous situation of women in contemporary Hindu culture.

Though a bit dated, Cormack’s study of the Hindu woman is still insightful and informative.


The authors are leading women’s studies scholars in India, and this work is a comprehensive treatment of the roles of women in religion, economics, politics, and culture.


An anthology of works by Indian and western scholars discussing the representation of sati in literature, art, religion, psychology, economics, and politics.


This is a good resource for understanding the specific religious practices of Hindu women.


An excellent study of widow burning focusing on the 19th century.


This is a fine collection of scholarly essays by a professor of historical studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University focusing of the roles of women in Hinduism.

*Ritual and Practice*


A wonderful, succinct study of the role of images in popular Hinduism. Insightful and accessible to non-specialists.


*The Camphor Flame* focuses on the actual practice of contemporary Hinduism, especially in South India. It is scholarly and accessible to the intelligent lay reader.

This is a beautiful book. Its well-written text is supplemented by rich images of Hindu piety. Highly recommended.


Thubten Yeshe is a Tibetan Buddhist lama who written one of the best introductory texts explaining the theoretical foundations of Tantric practice.

*Gods and Goddesses*


A bit more difficult to find than other books on this list, this volume traces the historical development of gods and goddesses in the Indian pantheon and shows parallels in other cultural traditions.


A comprehensive volume on the myths, worship, and philosophy of the gods and goddesses of Hinduism. An excellent secondary resource.


A selection of translations of the *Purānas*, the collection of myths about the great gods and goddesses of Hinduism. A valuable resource for those interested in reading the actual mythology of the devas.


A very detailed discussion of the pantheon of goddesses from the Vedic period to the present. A excellent resource of studying the female principle in Hindu theism.


A very readable study of these two deities who represent such different aspects of the Hindu pantheon.


This is an intriguing study of Tantra and the Devi focusing on the Mahāvidyās, ten Tantric goddesses who are often associated with violence and sexuality.

A study of Śaivite mythology and iconography, emphasizing the paradoxical qualities of this great god.


A wide ranging collections of 75 Hindu myths, from the Veda through the Purānas, translated from the Sanskrit.


Zimmer’s text is a classic exposition of the important themes in Hindu art and mythology, focusing especially on Vishnu, Śiva, and Devi.

*Modern Hinduism*


An excellent study of Gandhi’s activism in the context of his religious convictions.


Although this volume has limited availability, it is excellent for understanding Ram Mohan Roy and his significance in the political and religious context of 19th century India.


This is Gandhi’s own account of his early life. It is indispensable for understanding the development of his mature thought.


A biography of the great modern Hindu saint, the work is especially good for its presentation of Vivekānana’s relationship with his guru, Ramakrishna.

*Films*


Fritz Staal’s controversial documentary about the ancient Vedic shrauta rite performed by Mambudiri Brahmins in Kerala in the 1970’s.
Delhi 6, 140 minutes, 2009
Centers on an Old Delhi neighborhood terrorized by a monkey-man and examines the ongoing conflicts between Hindus and Muslims.

Devi (The Goddess) 93 minutes, 1960
Based on a short story by Prabhart Kumar Mukherjee, this classic black and white film explores the conflicts produced by the modernization of 19th century India through a Bengali family when the family patriarch becomes convinced that his daughter-in-law is the incarnation of the Goddess. Bengali with English subtitles.

In the Footprints of the Buddha, 55 minutes, 1978
Although not about Hinduism, this installment from the BBC series “The Long Search” sheds light on the context of ancient Northern India at the time Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism were developing.

Gandhi, 191 minutes, 1982
The Academy Award winning film about the life of the Mahatma.

Guide, 183 minutes, 1965
A classic Bollywood film chronicling the life of a tour guide who starts out as a small-time nobody and ends up as a guru; a serious examination of what might be called a "Hindu worldview," from a novel by R. K. Narayan.

India and the Infinite, Part 3 of The Mystic’s Journey, 29 minutes,
http://www.amazon.com/India-Infinite-Soul-People-Home/dp/B002JSTOK8
Huston Smith’s film introduction to Hinduism.

The Mahabharata, 318 minutes, 1989
A six hour film version of the play by Jean-Claude Carriere, based on the great Hindu epic. Features an international cast.

Naked in Ashes, 103 minutes. http://www.nakedinashes.com/
Acclaimed documentary about Hinduism’s sadhus and ascetics.

Om Shanti Om, 162 minutes, 2007
Popular Hindi movie with a plot that depends on a Bollywood notion of reincarnation.

330 Million Gods, 55 minutes, 1978
After several decades, this BBC production is still the best short film introduction to the Hindu traditions.

Water, 114 minutes, 2005
Director Deepa Mehta’s moving exploration of the lives of Hindu widows.