Connecting British Hindus
An enquiry into the identity and public engagement of Hindus in Britain
Foreword

Britain today is a multi-faith society as much as it is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society and as such we need to look beyond the more broadly used categories to assess need within our communities.

The ‘Connecting British Hindus’ research project is the first to be commissioned with a specific focus on capturing an insight into the aspirations and contributions of Hindu communities in Britain. The research will allow Government and its agencies to access evidence based research which specifically identifies service needs from the Hindu communities’ perspective. I hope this will assist service providers in understanding the needs of Hindu communities in Britain and to feed this knowledge into tailoring public services appropriately.

British life has been greatly enriched by the contributions of all faith communities. It is important that Government and other service providers respond to the diverse needs of communities as they develop policies and deliver services. Working closely with all communities is at the heart of the Government’s core aim of building social cohesion and empowering communities to make this a sustainable reality. This commitment is very much reflected in the Government’s strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion ‘Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society’, which brings together practical measures across Government to improve opportunities for all, helping to ensure that a person’s ethnicity, faith or race is not a barrier to their success.

I share the commitment of all in Government to work closely with all faith communities to provide opportunity and advancement in priority areas, such as housing, education and employment. We are clear in Government that we need to utilise the knowledge and experiences of faith communities and work in partnership to meet this objective. There is a clear message from the Hindu communities of a desire to succeed, and they can be proud of their strong sense of community empowerment and the role they play in contributing towards social and community cohesion.

I would like to express my thanks to the Hindu Forum of Britain and the Runnymede Trust for exploring this new area of research. The findings have underlined the challenges ahead for all of us in considering the impact of policy on faith communities. I would also like to thank the Hindu communities who have taken the time and effort to contribute to this research and I can assure them that we will work with all Hindu organisations to address the report recommendations.

Rt Hon Ruth Kelly MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
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Preface

The Hindu Forum of Britain commissioned the Runnymede Trust to develop, conduct and independently report on the Connecting British Hindus Research Programme. The Project, which was sponsored by Cohesion and Faiths Unit formerly of the Home Office and now part of the Department for Communities and Local Government, is a demand led response from affiliated Hindu organisations and community leaders from the Hindu Community in the UK. It is a historical and pioneering attempt to document the feelings, aspirations, fears and contributions made by the third largest faith group in Britain and understand issues surrounding identity, public policy and public services.

The Hindu Forum of Britain facilitated the research by providing access to its networks and national infrastructure. Runnymede designed the research format, questions, facilitated discussions, organised online surveys, analysed the findings and produced the final report.

The independent nature of the report has lent it a level of credibility and utility that will prove invaluable in addressing issues surrounding the identity and public roles of British Hindus.

The Hindu community has now entered its second-generation status and is becoming integrated into the larger British society. The community is debating issues of identity and ‘Britishness’ with a view to playing a more active role in mainstream society. The community’s diversity and the strength of its voluntary and community sectors continue to play a great role in its successful integration and progressive cohesion. The sheer range of groups and organisations meeting social needs, from faith-based initiatives to campaigning groups contributes to the richness of civic life in this country and, are essential to the representation of a range of interests in local communities.

However, Hindu community groups and organisations face multiple disadvantage and discrimination. Hindu led voluntary and community organisations have struggled to deliver tailored services to the community. Moreover, a legacy of inequality and stereotyping [where the community is seen as though they are self sufficient and economically progressive] has left the Hindu community isolated and, with a limited capacity to engage with other communities or even to address their own problems. The Connecting British Hindus report is one of the first sources of authentic and credible information that will seek to understand some of these issues.

We hope that the sound recommendations made in this report will lay a firm foundation for engagement between the Hindu community and stakeholder groups like Central and Local Government, public service providers, media, other faith communities and civic partners, in the years to come.

Ramesh Kallidai
Secretary General
Hindu Forum of Britain
Introduction

In the current climate, those people, those communities who shout the loudest, those communities who put the most pressure on central government, either directly or through the democratic process or through the voting patterns, get a lot of attention. Those communities that stay silent, that haven't got a voice, which basically are very tolerant, don't get a look in.

*Focus group participant*

Each [community] contains many identities and affiliations; each is in a process of development with its own internal tensions, arguments and contradictions; each overlaps with several others . . . every community influences and is in turn influenced by, others. None is self-sufficient, entire of itself. ‘Britain’ is the name of the space they all share

*Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*

British Hindus form the third largest faith-based community in Britain yet we know remarkably little about them, their needs or experiences. This is for many reasons, some of them to do with a particular approach to the expression of the faith that many Hindus espouse, some of them due to a series of assumptions that are made about Hindus and their experiences. This gap in our knowledge and understanding has become harder to justify given the current prominence of political and policy discourses which have sought to include citizens’ faith identities in the public realm.

Hindus in Britain have been seen as synonymous with the Indian community. While there is a great deal of overlap, it is clear that while Hinduism is geographically associated with India, there are also significant numbers of Hindus from the Caribbean, Fiji, Sri Lanka and East Africa. Further there are many Indians who are not Hindus, identifying with other faiths (in particular Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians and Muslims) or no faith. Understanding the policy implications of working with Hindus in Britain relies on developing an understanding of Hindu communities; Hindu communities that are modern, dynamic and changing. This report is an attempt to begin that process.

We hope that its findings can go some way to highlighting the key issues facing Hindus in Britain and suggest key areas for further research. By creating a better understanding of Hindus we also hope that some light will be shed on the ongoing debate about the role of faith communities in relation to the state. Often this debate is coloured by the considerable tensions that Muslim communities are facing in Britain, and the deliberations of the Church of England in developing a modern relationship with the state. By considering the needs of Hindus in Britain we hope to be able to offer a view of faith-based communities which gives a different perspective to the debate and encourages deeper thinking about appropriate responses to the needs of members of our community of communities and of citizens.
Relating to the State

A large majority of people in this country have some religious faith and we wanted to make sure that the needs and perspectives of the faith communities are taken into account as we develop our policies. Moreover (they) have a wealth of experience and a proud record of work in their local communities and more widely and it makes good sense for the government to cooperate with them... in matters of common concern. Thriving faith communities are a vital component of our open and diverse society. Government can only benefit from engaging effectively with them.

Tony Blair March 2004 at launch of ‘Working Together’

Government’s decision to work positively with faith-based communities rather than attempt to erect barriers between the supposedly public and private realms has evolved gradually. It has largely been based on recognition that faith-based communities can offer effective routes to engage with people, are a source of motivation for people to work together for greater social good, and can leverage existing social assets to build both bridging and bonding social capital. Where the previous government supported the establishment of the Inner Cities Religious Council, the current government has supported a range of organisations to engage more effectively with faith-based groups1, which include the work carried out by the Cohesion and Faiths Unit of the newly formed Department of Communities and Local Government.

Against this background we see the continued importance of faith in the lives of British citizens. For some communities faith has come to the fore as a key identifier and motivator of community affiliation and action. The features of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism configured in Runnymede reports of the 1990s have taken on new and complex forms in the light of tragic experiences of terrorism both overseas and at home. New legislation and machinery have been created to understand and respond to religious discrimination. Discourse around faith and its relation to the state has taken on a very different shape over the past decade. Debate is far from settled and tensions remain over the role of religion, but it is clear, nevertheless, that faith in modern British society is a key area for action on equality.

Different faith communities are starting from different positions in relating to the state. For some there are long-established relationships based on historical precedence; for others there is a long tradition of motivation around political reform. Different faith-based communities face very different issues given the social and ethnic profile of their adherents. As government begins to extend and establish its relationships with various faith-based communities, these differences become more important. Any attempt to build effective relationships with faith-based communities needs to recognise these differences and find ways of ensuring that all communities are treated equally. This does not mean that all communities need to be treated the same, but with due regard to their particular needs.

The challenge for Hindu communities is to understand where they sit in relation to the new relationship that the state is seeking to establish with faith-based communities and to work to engage members of Hindu communities in positive relationships with government and the rest of society in a way which is consistent with their beliefs, values and religious outlook.

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1 The Cohesion and Faith Unit has established a Faith Communities Consultative Council as a successor to the Inner Cities Religious Council.
Government engaging with Faith Communities

The relationship with faith communities needs not only to be placed in the wider context of the modernisation of local government but to be considered in terms of the contribution faith communities make to good health, as providers of pastoral care, promoters of citizenship and community development, voices for social justice, and as the locus for gatherings of people from varying economic and social positions, of differing political views, from a range of ethnic backgrounds with shared concerns

*Faith and community: a good practice guide for local authorities* (2002) Inner Cities Religious Council; DTLR; Active Community Unit and the Inter Faith Network for the UK

As noted above, the government has expressed its desire to work more closely with faith-based communities in matters of common concern. This has caused consternation in some parts of society. For many there are difficulties in further involving the state in working with faith-based communities. Debates surround the implications that working with faith-based communities might have for equality, especially for women, LGBT people, and those who do not share a particular faith. Further, there are many who would argue for a purely secular state. Government have adopted a pragmatic approach to working with faith-based communities, recognising that for many people, faith is a key motivator and source of social action and affiliation, and working to ensure that basic human rights and equality principles are respected.

Government has been particularly keen to involve faith-based communities in certain parts of its reform agenda.

- Regeneration and neighbourhood renewal have been a key area for the engagement of faith-based communities. Central and local government have attempted to consult with faith-based groups and have involved them in the delivery of reformed public services as well as decision-making about them.

- Education is a key area in which faith-based communities have had a long involvement. Since 1997 Muslim schools have joined the state-funded sector alongside Jewish, Sikh, Seventh Day Adventist, Greek Orthodox, Catholic and Church of England schools. The government has recently accepted an application for the first Hindu school.

- There has been a great deal of discussion about representation and engagement of communities through faith-based organisations. Issues about community leadership arise given the wish of government to use faith-based organisations to extend the reach of its democratic processes, using them as a conduit to reach a wider range of people. This has posed a challenge to many faith-based organisations that have not necessarily operated in this way before.

Hindu communities have a role to play in society and have a vested interest in social policies such as education, regeneration and civil renewal. Through this project and others, finding a way of articulating Hindus’ voice and working to improve policy so that the lives of Hindus and indeed those of people from all communities are improved.
Cohesive communities

Controversies and disputes that have remained within certain communities are now more open to scrutiny and wider public debate. This is often a healthy development but can expose certain intra-community tensions that have proved resistant to resolution. Government can have an influence on these matters by judicious use of its funding and access to support and other resources. This, however, suggests a question about how far government should go in intervening in what are internal matters to a particular faith-based community and what the boundaries are between using government influence in changing behaviour and attitudes within faith-based communities.

Disputes also operate between communities. The government has developed a range of work under the umbrella of community cohesion. The community cohesion agenda rose to prominence in the wake of the disturbances in the former mill-towns of northwest England in the summer of 2001, compounded by the virulent Islamophobia after the terrorist atrocities of 11 September 2001. A cohesive community is described as one in which:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities
- The diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds

*Guidance on Community Cohesion (2002)* LGA, Home Office, Interfaith Network

This has proved to be a real challenge and there will be an ongoing need for work in this area in an increasingly diverse society. It requires the development of capacity within as well as between communities to be able to engage in community cohesion activities. It has called for local and central government to support the internal development of communities if there is to be dialogue between them.

Where these communities are also faith-based communities it has provided a further agenda on which to involve faith in the community action. Challenges remain in making sure that all communities play their full part in promoting community cohesion, prompting further concerns about the need for equality, and ensuring that Muslim communities are not unfairly singled out as being ‘non-cohesive’. As one focus group participant commented:

> Government also has to recognise that there are people from other faiths and those faiths are equally important as the Christian faith and Jews; Muslims and Hindus come into it. So, if you want to have community cohesion, then we have to do that. The government has to play a role in treating everybody fairly and equally.

*Manchester focus group participant*

Hindu communities are often already engaged in work to promote a more cohesive community. Through building the capacity of communities to understand themselves and others better, efforts to promote community cohesion can be enhanced for the benefit of all in a multi-ethnic society.

Civic participation

Government has also put faith-based organisations to the fore in its agenda to promote civic participation and volunteering; the ‘active communities’ agenda, which aims to encourage the development of:
Active citizens: people with the motivation, skills and confidence to speak up for their communities and say what improvements are needed

Strengthened communities: community groups with the capability and resources to bring people together to work out shared solutions

Partnership with public bodies: public bodies willing and able to work as partners with local people

Faith communities are not left out of these aims and indeed form an integral part given the links made to tackling inequalities, community cohesion, promoting understanding and acceptance between groups.

In today’s world, we live in more than one community simultaneously: the place where we live, our network of family and friends, the community we share with people of the same faith or cultural background, for example. The challenge is to ensure that communities have a shared sense of belonging and mutual respect for each other’s diversity.

Some of the tensions between communities arise because of misinformation and fear of the unknown. To help counter this, we are encouraging local authorities to work with local people to expose myths, confront racism and involve residents in preparing for new arrivals and helping them settle into their new community.

Together we can action plan - Government Action Plan (Home Office 2005)

Understanding Hindu communities better and working with them to build leadership capacity will support the agenda which recognizes the role that communities play in helping citizens to engage with politics, policy and wider groups of citizens.

Community representation

Faith communities are required to have the capacity to not only engage with agendas presented to them by government, but also to define the needs of their communities, work with community members and others to find solutions and establish partnerships with public bodies. The onus on faith-based communities that also include significant numbers from minority ethnic communities is to engage with their community and with others to promote a shared sense of belonging and confront racisms.

These expectations will have been met more readily by some faith-based communities than others. The challenge remains to ensure that all faith-based communities can engage with this agenda. The government has made some funding available for this purpose in a pilot-funding project run through the auspices of the Community Development Foundation. Evaluation of these projects will highlight the areas in which communities need the most support in developing their capacity to deliver. It is clear that these are ambitious tasks for many communities.

The Hindu community has a well-developed infrastructure of community organisations. Whether they are equipped to deal with these agenda is a key focus for this research.
Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain - a community of communities and a community of citizens

The framework through which this research has been conducted and the starting point for analysis is the Runnymede sponsored report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain\(^2\). Though published in 2000, we believe that its key messages remain relevant for understanding the dynamics of a multi-ethnic society. The report developed six key points to frame its discussion of changes necessary to create a successful multi-ethnic Britain.

1. All individuals have equal worth irrespective of their colour, gender, ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation, and have equal claims to the opportunities they need to realise their potential and contribute to collective wellbeing. The principle of equal moral worth cannot take root and flourish within a structure of deep economic or social inequalities.

2. Citizens are both individuals and members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities. Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities, both a liberal and a multicultural society, and needs to reconcile their sometimes conflicting requirements.

3. Since citizens have differing needs, equal treatment requires full account to be taken of their differences. When equality ignores relevant differences and insists on uniformity of treatment, it leads to injustice and inequality; when differences ignore the demands of equality, they result in discrimination. Equality must be defined in a culturally sensitive way and applied in a discriminating but not discriminatory manner.

4. Every society needs to be cohesive as well as respectful of diversity, and must find ways of nurturing diversity while fostering a common sense of belonging and a shared identity among its constituent members.

5. Although every society needs a broadly shared body of values, of which human rights are a small but important part, there is a risk of defining these so narrowly that their further development is ruled out or legitimate ways of life are suppressed. While such essential procedural values as tolerance, mutual respect, dialogue and peaceful resolution of differences are paramount, as are such basic ethical norms as respect for human dignity, equal worth of all, equal opportunity for self-development and equal life chances, society must also respect deep moral differences and find ways of resolving inescapable conflicts. Human rights principles provide a sound framework for handling differences, and a body of values around which society can unite.

6. Finally, racism, understood either as division of humankind into fixed, closed and unalterable groups or as systematic domination of some groups by others, is an empirically false, logically incoherent and morally unacceptable doctrine. Racism is a subtle and complex phenomenon. It may be based on colour and physical features or on culture, nationality and way of life; it may affirm equality of human worth but implicitly deny this by insisting on the superiority of a particular culture; it may admit equality up to a point but impose a glass ceiling higher up. Whatever its subtle disguises and forms, it is deeply divisive, intolerant of differences, a source of much human suffering, and inimical to the common sense of belonging lying at the basis of every stable civilisation. It can have no place in a decent society.

Hindu communities are now an integral part of the community of communities and citizens that makes up modern Britain. By using these principles to challenge current understandings and develop responses to particular issues and problems faced by members of Hindu communities it is hoped that the contribution of people from Hindu backgrounds to British society can be recognised and enhanced.

**Research Methodology**

The research project was conducted between January and April 2006. The aim of the project was to provide a baseline study highlighting areas for further research and giving voice to people from Hindu communities.

Desk research was conducted to review existing literature on the contemporary needs and experiences of Hindu communities in Britain. This research was used to develop a series of research questions that were discussed in eight focus groups. The participants for the focus groups were contacted through the Hindu Forum of Britain and were largely Hindus who were involved in faith-based community organisations. Focus groups were held in north-west London, Birmingham, Leicester and Manchester. In order to gather information from specific groups within Hindu communities one group was women only, one was young people under 25, and one was with those over 65. In total over 120 people participated in focus groups. Similar questions were posed in each group to provide a level of triangulation.

An online survey was also conducted. This was again advertised through the Hindu Forum of Britain website. No particular sampling was conducted and the limitations of online survey formats are recognised in the research report. There were 680 responses to the survey. 60% of the respondents were male and the majority of respondents were in the 25 - 55 age bracket. The majority of respondents lived in the metropolitan areas of Birmingham, London and Leicester. It provides a good indication of the responses to issues but given the resources a more rigorous approach to sampling would provide greater confidence in the survey findings.

A series of telephone interviews was also undertaken with experts in particular areas. An expert seminar was held at the start of the project to engage a wider group of people with the research process and the first draft of the findings was shared with the same group at the end of the research project.

Given the time and resource limitations the research could not hope to be comprehensive. Instead it is indicative and aims to stimulate further debate, research and conversation both within Hindu communities and with those in central government, local government and wider civil society.

**Structure of the report**

The report follows the six principles of the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. It begins with a discussion of the current status of Hindus in Britain drawing on socio-economic data, immigration figures and comments from focus group participants, as a means of understanding the contemporary ‘story’ of Hindus in Britain.

The report then goes on to a discussion of current understandings of identity for people of Hindu backgrounds in Britain and to consider some of the challenges of intergenerational change and transnationalism. This is followed by an examination of the views and participation of Hindus in efforts to promote community cohesion,
and to celebrate and reflect their cultures together and with the wider society.

Racism is the topic of the next section with participants in the research focusing on their experiences of racism and the impact it has in their lives. Then, the report looks at those groups that are marginalised within society and within Hindu communities, including women, young people, LGBT communities, older people, and people with disabilities.

The final section draws together the key findings and links them to the development of a human rights approach to community development and establishment of mutually beneficial relationships with the state.
Executive summary and recommendations

Hindu communities in Britain are already making a considerable contribution to the task of building a successful multi-ethnic society. Learning from their successes will be made easier if they can be enabled to develop their communities further in order to promote political engagement, tackle racism and facilitate community cohesion. All communities have challenges and through building the capacity of Hindu communities to respond to them these can be addressed. Modern British society is enriched by a range of different cultures and faiths. Hindu communities should be supported in playing a fuller role in British society through improved capacity for leadership, community engagement and increasing their visibility to promote understanding of Hindu beliefs, cultures and perspectives. The report makes the following recommendations:

1. The processes for building a sense of community around contested formations of identity is a political and social project that could enable people from Hindu backgrounds to work more effectively together for their needs. Further discussion and debate will be a key part of this process.

2. Further research about Hindu communities will be necessary to build a fuller picture of their experience and needs. This research project is only a start in this process. More detailed examinations of statistics, primary research to learn more about specific parts of Hindu communities, and longitudinal research would all yield useful information as a basis for policy and community action.

3. For Hindus in Britain the relationships with other communities with a stake in India and the rest of the sub-continent are important. By building community responses based on the British context, potential conflicts can be minimised.

4. Building the capacity to address intergenerational changes and to use the existing expertise within the Hindu community to reinterpret Hindu values, beliefs and practices in times of social, technological, and political change is a key task.

5. It is important that the schools and community organisations work together to improve teaching about Hinduism in schools.

6. Media monitoring projects, training of those leading community organisations in engagement with the media and the development of members of communities as journalists should be undertaken to challenge some of the cruder stereotyping that some media have been guilty of in the past.

7. The process of developing a sense of fellow feeling, mutuality and belonging will take a commitment of time and effort, but also some capacity building to be able to engage with others outside of immediate community links.

8. Community organisations need to find sensitive ways of responding to fears and misinformation in order to reduce tensions, and to work with other faith communities, including Muslim communities, to build dialogue and understanding.
9. There is a lack of resources that would enable members of communities to invest more time in working with their community and others.

10. An umbrella organisation should be resourced to engage fully in all of the detailed planning processes that were necessary to establish new places of worship or community centres.

11. Wider political and civic education, and leadership capacity building for existing and new organisations would be welcome in order to support Hindu communities in improving their engagement with political structures.

12. Learning from the experiences of other faith-based communities, work to tackle the impact of racisms must include the experiences of Hindu communities.

13. A key task for any Hindu leadership is to find ways of respecting traditions but challenging discrimination based on family background, religious tradition or jaati (caste) within a community.

14. Efforts to establish projects that enable intergenerational contact, opportunities to learn from each other, and that build the capacity of community organisations to engage young people more fully in decision-making would be useful contributions to community development.

15. Initiatives that helped to encourage discussion about the role of LGBT people in Hindu communities would help to enable greater understanding and recognise the existence and contribution of LGBT people to Hindu communities.

16. Further research and activity to engage people with disabilities from Hindu backgrounds is necessary.

17. It would be a useful contribution to community development to engage more women in leadership positions and provide opportunities for women to define the issues that they would like to tackle with their community.

18. There will need to be increasing levels of support for older people. Community organisations are well placed to develop their work with older people but need to develop their capacity to offer such support.

19. Mainstream organisations which have until now been able to operate without taking into account the needs of older people from Hindu backgrounds will need support in offering appropriate services to older people; sharing good practice will be a useful contribution to supporting older people.

20. Developing resources, understanding and support for human rights within Hindu communities is a key task as it is for all communities and citizens in the UK.
Rethinking the national story

Understanding the Hindus in Britain

Summary of census data

The 2001 Census found that there are 546,982 Hindus in England, making up 1% of the total population. This makes Hindus the third largest religious group in the country. More than 97% of Hindus live in urban areas.

Figure 1 below shows that the greatest concentration of Hindus is in London and the South East, with significant communities based in the East and West Midlands.

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3 The religious question in the census was introduced for the first time in 2001 so no longer term figures are available. There have been concerns raised about the accuracy of the figures based on understanding of the purpose of the question, including over 200,000 people wilfully protesting against the inclusion of the question by filling in the answer wrongly as ‘Jedi’. The Hindu Forum of Britain has extrapolated from the Census figure of 559,000 Hindus living in Britain in 2001 to an estimate of 700,000 in 2005, based on inflow through immigration and an estimate of numbers of Hindus who did not declare their faith in the last Census.
97% of Hindus are classified their ethnic group as Asian or Asian British. 23% of those identifying as Asian or Asian British were also Hindu. 63% of Hindus were born outside the UK.

Hindus are more likely to be married (60.8%) than the general population (43.6%), and less likely to be divorced (2.7% compared to 8.1%). The average household size for Hindus is 3.2 compared to a national average of 2.4. 48.6% of Hindus have at least one dependent child. The national average is 29.4%. Hindus have the lowest proportion of lone parents of any religious group at 8.3% (national average 22.2%).

Figure 2 shows the age distribution of Hindus compared to Christians, Jews and Muslims. Hindus are relatively young in comparison to the general population. There is a smaller number of Hindus over 65 but this likely to change considerably given the numbers in the 35-64 age bracket. The sex breakdown of Hindus shows that as a group they are remarkably evenly balanced (50.49% Male) compared to the general population (48.61% Male).

Hindus are more likely than average to own their own property and less likely to reside in socially or privately rented housing. However, Hindu households are much more likely to be overcrowded than average. 22% of Hindu households are overcrowded compared to a national average of only 7.4%.

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4 Measures of overcrowding are contested and may be based on a White British norm rather than practices that favour extended families living together. For further discussion of these figures see Harrison, M. and D. Phillips(2003) ‘Housing and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities; Review of the evidence base’. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
The Census data on health (self-reported) shows that Hindus are more likely than average to report not good health. They are also slightly more likely to have a disability or limiting long term illness (17.2% compared to 15.9% on average).

Figure 3 - Housing Tenure by selected religion (Census 2001)

Figure 4 - Age standardised 'not good health' rates by selected religion (Census 2001)
Monitoring by religion is not yet undertaken in the criminal justice system. New legislation outlawing religious hatred, and promoting the equal rights of religious groups, with increasing pressure from community-based organisations will be likely to ensure that effective monitoring is adopted.

The evidence that we do have is largely anecdotal and based on smaller, indicative surveys. In research carried out by the Home Office in 2001, Hindu organisations reported dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system. This dissatisfaction was based in part on the attitudes and behaviour of police officers. There was also some unease expressed at the failure to recognise faith-based hate crime. Legislation and practice have changed in response. The Metropolitan Police reported, that between 7th July and 10th August 2005 there were 932 instances of faith hate crime against Indians (predominantly Hindus and Sikhs).

Employment patterns in Hindu communities show a higher than average rate of unemployment for women and in particular in older age groups. Hindus are over-represented in the professional and managerial occupations. Hindu men are more likely than average to be self-employed.

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Figure 6 - Female unemployment by selected religion and age 2004

Figure 7 - Occupation by selected religion 2003-4 (Labour Force Survey)
In 2001 there were 91,993 Hindu children aged 5-16 in full-time education. Schools do not yet collect data on the religious background of pupils. It is therefore impossible to report on levels of attainment by religion. The Labour Force Survey provides us with some indication of educational attainment. This data shows that Hindus are more likely to have a qualification and less likely to have no qualifications.

**Figure 8 - Highest qualification 2003/4 Hindu Males/Total Males**
(Labour Force Survey)

**Figure 9 - Highest qualification 2003/4 Hindu females/Total females** (Labour Force Survey)
Focus group participants gave their responses to the data on education. They were keen to highlight the high value placed on education in Hindu families and some of the sacrifices that families made to ensure that their children received support for their achievement in schools.

Hindus are confident in the cultural background, the home environment . . . The parents’ attitude to the education system itself and the parents’ desire to take that extra step to support the child in the education system. I think that is the real reason why Hindu children are really forging ahead.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Hindu students are achieving only because of huge amount of pressure from home and the teaching by parents . . . Hindu achievement is not because of the system but in spite of the system. If it was on an equal footing they might get 10% more. The Hindu community is putting in huge resources to the education of their children.

*London focus group participant*

The data above shows a community that is enjoying some economic and educational success. While there are some specific difficulties such as health outcomes and over-crowding in housing, there are also some indices on which Hindus are achieving at a higher than average rate such as educational qualifications and male employment. In discussion of these figures, one respondent pointed out that statistics often hide pockets of deprivation and as with any normal distribution curve there will be some who are achieving at below average rates.

Within the community, there are poor Hindus, there are rich Hindus, there are middle-class Hindus, there are working-class Hindus, a whole range of Hindus. There are Hindus who are not happy. There are Hindus who are happy. It’s bound to happen. But within that scenario is a very self-confident community.

*Leicester focus group participant*

### Contribution of Hindu communities to British society

As can be seen from the census and other survey data quoted above, Hindu communities are relatively successful on the indices measured. For some there is highly conspicuous success which may indeed mask pockets of deprivation. Each year the Sunday Times publishes a ‘Rich List’. For the past three years it has published a separate list of rich Asians. Lakshmi Mittal, the Hinduja brothers, and Lord Swaraj Paul often feature. The contribution of Hindu individuals to business and wealth creation in the UK has never been quantified but it is clear that there are many industrialists and business-men and -women from Hindu communities that have made a significant contribution.

Similarly in other professions such as medicine, accountancy and the law there are many members of Hindu communities making a significant contribution. A Greater London Authority study showed that Indians own 4.4% of London’s businesses and employ over 51,000 people (Dewani 2004). As can be seen from Fruit 7 above, more than one in three Hindus in employment is in professional or senior management positions.

I think Hindus require recognition. Hindus are not being recognised for their contribution to the society, to the economics to this country, to the social fabric of this country.

*Leicester focus group participant*
The family was particularly prominent in the focus group discussions. This is unsurprising given the resilience of Hindu family structures. As noted above Hindus have a higher than average level of marriage and low divorce rates. As a consequence they have the lowest rates of lone parents of any faith community and are nearly twice as likely to have at least one dependent child than average.

Discussion about the stability and support of family life was a recurrent theme in the focus groups.

The ethos of being a Hindu is very different to being from any other faith or community. It is about being inclusive, the ability to work with everyone around you constantly, you are born into a family structure of respecting everyone else.

*London Focus group participant*

It’s also just the culture that... how we’ve been brought up as well and the relationship between father and mother with the children and the love and attention that’s given to the children.

*Leicester Focus group participant*

Participants were also proud to report the successes of their communities in organising support for themselves. This self-sufficiency was a source of pride and frustration at the lack of support from outside their own immediate community. The levels of contributions, both financial and otherwise, to set up temples and community centres have been impressive in a relatively short space of time.

For me another example of self-sufficiency is that when I look around, I don’t see many other faith groups having a number of community centres or their own centres where they meet to congregate, they have a sense of identity around themselves. I think in the Hindus, it’s probably the largest number that I’ve come across. Every... We talked earlier about how we’re divided around the caste system or professions, whatever. Each one of them seems to have something or other there. And the amount of money that’s been generated just to purchase one of those buildings, in itself, shows us the self-sufficiency around. We care for ourselves.

*Leicester focus group participant*

There was a need for a community centre because of the number of members we have. And we’d been looking for a property for many, many years and, back in 1992, we identified a property that we thought would be nice to go for. It was a derelict building. A few of us who ran the project had a look at it and identified the potential of that particular property and we took the view of the members. We had an open day, brought them into this derelict saw-mill and the response we had from our community members was great and we thought people would say, ‘What the hell do you want to buy this for?... we had very limited funds to acquire that property. We negotiated with the vendors to purchase that property and we generated enough funds from our own community members. We didn’t need to go out to the bank or anything. And that, to me, is where the self-sufficiency came in. Once they knew that it was achievable, people came forward to allow us to buy the property, refurbish it and now we run this community centre. But we’re one of the largest centres in Leicester. And the advantage of having that community centre is now every day in the evening, there is some activity going on which brings, not only the Punjabi community, but the local community as well; it’s open for everybody, it brings people through the doors and then we carry out trading, social activity and so on.

*Leicester focus group participant*
We had a very small terraced temple, you know, in a terraced property and it was burned down. So, since 1992, we have been struggling to collect money from our own community. There are only 300 families in Derby; Gujeratis and Punjabis. And we collected £192,000, bought some land and now we have collected £130,000 again, from the community and we’re building a community centre and temple.

*Leicester focus group participant*

This self-sufficiency applies not only to community centres but also to social action to support those in need. The vast majority of the organisations engaged in the research have full-time staff and many have no paid staff at all. Nonetheless numerous examples were provided of volunteering to support members of the community whether in their religious needs as unpaid hospital chaplains or in everyday needs in terms of care of the elderly.

I suppose one example I can give from Nottingham about self-sufficiency within the community is that we’ve got a project set up where people from the Indian community, if they’re in hospital and they need things or they haven’t got anybody to look after them or something like that, the community actually has a set of volunteers who actually go and visit those people and ask them what they want and they would bring them. That’s being self-sufficient because, as a community, they’ve identified that that’s an issue and they’ve actually got volunteers who would go out and see those people.

*Leicester focus group participant*

The Home Office Citizenship Survey (2003) asks participants about their levels of civic participation and volunteering. Unfortunately it does not analyse the data collected by faith. The findings do show that there is a lower than average level of civic participation and volunteering among those who define themselves as Indian. This suggests that the participants of the focus groups may be unrepresentative of Hindus more widely. The levels of formal volunteering are close to average but the numbers of people engaged in civic participation is low.

*Figure 10 - Participation in community and voluntary activities in 12 months before interview, by ethnic group: 2001 and 2003*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Civic Participation</th>
<th>Informal Volunteering</th>
<th>Formal Volunteering</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Home Office Citizenship Survey (2003)*
These low levels of civic participation have not always been the case and members of Hindu communities have led some of the most important struggles for racial equality. For example, the Grunwick strike marked a turning point in British industrial relations. Workers, predominantly Hindu women from East Africa, embarked on a strike in protest against working conditions and to win recognition for unionisation at the Grunwick Processing Laboratories in north-west London. The strike lasted from August 1976 to the end of August 1977 when the Grunwick company rejected the principal recommendations of the report of a Government Inquiry headed by Lord Scarman. The strike became the focus of national debates concerning working conditions, especially for immigrant, female workers, and union rights. (Runnymede Collection).

There are also a number of councillors from Hindu backgrounds, though these numbers fell between 1998 and 2002, largely due to the fortunes of the major political parties. There are 4 Members of Parliament from Hindu backgrounds.

Nonetheless, a key theme from the focus group participants was a lack of engagement with local and national politics despite levels of commitment to the community and to the family.

"most of our first and second generation of people have concentrated . . . and said, ‘We want to be at the top,’ and that’s what it’s done. If you look now, our vision is completely wide open and in every sphere of life you can see you’ll see an Indian person, a Hindu person. We’re all getting there. What is lacking is, we’re not taking an active part in local politics or national politics or regional politics. This is where the Hindu people are suffering. This is where we’re suffering."

Manchester focus group participant

This is an issue to which we will return in more detail later.

Hindu communities are relatively successful and are making a significant contribution to a multi-ethnic Britain in many spheres and walks of life. It would appear that there are currently limits to this contribution and limited recognition for it. There remain challenges to spread the contribution of Hindu communities more broadly to take in mainstream British politics and civic participation.

It would appear, however that there are many positive attributes and activities being undertaken by and within Hindu communities in Britain that it would be useful to understand more about to see if there are lessons for other communities such as strong families, educational and employment success, and intra-community support.

Immigration and integration

The relationship between Britain and India is along and involved one. From exploration to market for goods, to Raj, to colony, to partition, to independence; British history and Indian history are inextricably intertwined. Movement between the two countries has been great. Indians moved to Britain in significant numbers in the 18th Century, though it was mainly highly skilled members of the Parsi and Bengali communities emigrating as lawyers and doctors.

After independence in 1947 the first influx of emigrants came to work in UK’s industrial sector. The 1960 and 70s saw increasing restrictions on non-white immigration and in particular on unskilled labour migration. These restrictions had the effect of increasing family reunification immigration as people brought their families to join them rather than risk never gaining re-entry. In the 1970s unsympathetic regimes in East Africa caused many Asians to flee Uganda and Kenya for Britain - leading to further tightening of immigration policy. It is estimated that as many as one quarter of Indians in Britain have arrived via East Africa. East African Asians
were dominated by Gujaratis, largely Hindus, who entered the small and medium business sector and the medical professions. In more recent times;

professions rather than geographical origin have determined flows to Britain; in particular, these include IT professionals [at least two-thirds of all software professionals entering Britain are from India], medical professionals, and workers in the hospitality industry who come from various states of India (Van Hear et al 2004)

The numbers of people moving to Britain from the Indian sub-continent have increased since the early 1970s. However as a proportion of all immigrants they have fallen. We have no indication of the faith of migrants. Hindus now make up 1% of the population of England and Wales. As a community they have had a long presence in the UK and as noted above they are making a significant contribution to the country. In both the online survey and the focus groups respondents considered what this meant in terms of integration to society in Britain.

Figure 11 - Inflow to Britain, by region, 1971 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1971 (%)</th>
<th>2002 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>21,000 (10.5%)</td>
<td>89,000 (17.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia, NZ, Canada</td>
<td>52,000 (26.0%)</td>
<td>61,000 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>8,000 (4.0%)</td>
<td>27,000 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian sub-continent</td>
<td>24,000 (12.0%)</td>
<td>46,000 (9.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>5,000 (2.5%)</td>
<td>5,000 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Commonwealth</td>
<td>36,000 (18.0%)</td>
<td>52,000 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>22,000 (11.0%)</td>
<td>28,000 (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East *</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>32,000 (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31,000 (15.5%)</td>
<td>172,000 (33.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>513,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*in other for 1971

In response to the question ‘do you think Hindus are well integrated in English society’, the overwhelming majority (89%) agreed. When this was discussed in the focus groups, however, there was some considered debate about what it meant to be ‘well integrated’.
For some participants the very self-sufficiency which was seen as a strength, was also a weakness in terms of integration or 'assimilation';

We are a very self-sufficient community which, actually, hinders us from assimilating because we don’t need to assimilate to the same extent. If you look right across the field, you will find Hindus there, you will find them in commerce and industry, you’ll find them in professional life - not to the same extent in public life . . . I think that we find that assimilating into the society generally is difficult because we don’t...

_Leicester focus group participant_

There was also understandable concern at the thought that assimilation would mean losing Hindu culture and that integration with an undesirable culture was thought to be problematic.

As far as I understand, integration and assimilation are two different things. Assimilation means losing your own identity and integration means mixing together socially and not losing your identity. So most of the Indians do prefer integration. We would like to mix socially and all that, but we don’t want to be assimilated so that we lose our own identity as well.
Leicester focus group participant

Yes, there should be integration in ways, but some sort of Western culture we don’t agree with some of that and maybe the Indian nations may not agree.

Leicester focus group participant

Overall, however, the members of the community that responded had the perception of Hindus as being well integrated.

If you look at those general value bases, they are very, very in tune with the Western cultures. Individuals, education, freedom. So if you look at assimilation from the cultural point of view, the wider perspective, then the Hindu community is very much in tune with the Western societies, Western cultures.

Leicester focus group participant

Another participant noted that this perception of integration had changed over time and relied on members of the Hindu communities realising that their future lay in Britain and recognising the impact that British values and society had had on them - noting that travelling back to India was often a reminder of the changes that people had experienced.

Now people are finding that their identity is here and not going to go anywhere else, previously people had this fallacy that they would work here for some time and then go back, but people are not returning home, even the elderly are leaving but returning to the UK. It is a great myth that they were going to return home at some time. Nobody is going anywhere. Their adjustment to their home country is much vaster than they had thought earlier.

Birmingham focus group participant

This perception of the community as well integrated is heartening. In the online survey we questioned respondents about the public services they received to gauge their happiness with them. This is crucial because of the role that public services play in creating and sustaining a sense of belonging. In the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain we argue:

It is essential if people are to have a sense of belonging to society as a whole, that they should not feel alienated or marginalised by public bodies. They must feel that their own flourishing as individuals and as communities is intimately linked with the flourishing of public institutions and public services such as the police, the courts, educational establishments and the health service. If they feel this identification and are at home with public institutions they have a commitment to sustaining them (p.49).

The majority of respondents were satisfied with the public services they received and that their needs as a Hindu were being met. The major exception to this general rule was with their MP. The highest satisfaction rate was for GPs.
Further research about Hindu communities will be necessary to build a fuller picture of their experience and needs. This research project is only a start in this process. More detailed examinations of statistics, primary research to learn more about specific parts of Hindu communities, and longitudinal research would all yield useful information as a basis for policy and community action.
Identities in transition

Asian, Indian, Hindu, Desi and British

The starting point for the focus group discussions was about identity. Participants were asked to reflect on how they defined their own identities and what their identities meant to them. This was chosen purposely to examine contemporary formations of ethnic identities for Hindus in Britain rather than presuppose a static or monolithic identity. To suggest that communities and identities are static denies the dynamism, agency and creativity that informs a multi-ethnic society, as is argued in the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain:

To speak of ‘the black community’, ‘the Irish community’, ‘the Bangladeshi community’, and so forth, is to refer accurately to a strong sense of group solidarity. But it may also imply a homogeneous set, with fixed internal ties and strongly defined sense of group solidarity. But it may also imply a homogeneous set, with fixed internal ties and strongly defined boundaries, and this is a hopelessly misleading picture of a complex, shifting multicultural reality. (p.27)

Identity (like culture and community) is not a fixed concept - it is constantly mutating in response to the social, political, and economic contexts in which it operates. It is personal and internal, yet at the same time operates in public spaces and in negotiation with others to draw boundaries, build communities, and form social bonds. The danger of approaching identities and communities as monolithic and fixed is that, despite the fact it has little purchase on peoples’ lived experience, it creates fixed boundaries and oppositions which lead at best to ‘parallel lives’ and at worst to community conflict; or in other terms, at best ethnic segregation and at worst apartheid or sectarianism.

As Claire Alexander (2006, forthcoming) notes:

While identity can be viewed as internal, personality led and psychologically driven, it has long been recognised that this individualistic approach has to be located within broader societal constructions and limitations – for example around social categorisations of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and so on, as well as within social groupings, whether nations, ‘communities’ or families. Identity is formulated and experienced at the intersection of these internal and the external factors.

The focus group discussions threw up a range of ways in which external factors such as location, age, gender, political imperatives, and other communities, impacted on internalised conceptions of faith, belief, and personality for the participants. The participants reflected on their perceptions of their own identities and those of others. For many there was an attempt to try and describe their identity formation in terms that expressed their discomfort with labelling of their identity as ‘Hindu’ with a realisation that there were external pressures (social and political) to adopt such a label;

We are part of something without feeling the need to say I am Hindu. But now that more and more people are becoming more aware of their identity and religion, Hindus are coming out more about their culture too.

Birmingham focus group participant
I’ve always seen myself as Indian not Hindu, unless someone asked my religion, it is intertwined being Indian. Hindu? Perhaps that is being brought up this country . . . Hinduism is within our community not in individuals.

*London focus group participant*

Hindus . . . don’t feel they have say that it is a Hindu thing. They feel that they can still be successful without mentioning that they are Hindu.

*Birmingham focus group participant*

Alexander (2006) goes on to note that the emphasis of current government policy on communities may in some ways be responsible for shaping identities rather than recognising the concept of shifting and mutable identities that often characterise people’s experience;

Academic narratives of identity have increasingly moved towards the assertion of open, shifting and increasingly multiple forms of identification - of identity defined by choice, lifestyle and performance - but it can be argued that in political rhetoric and policy practice, identity remains much more simple, neatly bounded and static. This is certainly true in the discourse surrounding community cohesion, in which ethnic (particularly minority) identities are transfixed either side of the cultural barricades - parallel rather than hybrid or even multiple lives . . . This raises difficult questions about how such identities/communities get represented, and by whom, as well as how such representations are reflected, or refracted, in policy and politics.

The focus group participants were (unsurprisingly) unable to reach unanimity on the way in which they express their identity. Some went as far as claiming that identifying as ‘Hindu’ was challenging due to their religious and philosophical beliefs in pluralism;

Why we embark on the whole process of labelling is because we wish to tell people who we are . . . Hinduism is not about labelling; we are all spirit souls. So then we have to impose this artificial label to define ourselves, that label will never be sufficient for our way of life.

*London focus group participant*

There was, however a great deal of agreement that categorisation as ‘Asians’ was an inadequate and led to confusion;

People are all grouped under the ‘Asian’ banner, when in fact there are many differences within Asian groups and sub groups. It feels as though the term Asian is associated to anyone that is not either black or white, but any other colour than those. There is no apparent level of sensitivity to the fundamental differences that exist.

*Online survey written response*

Our identity is being lost in the one word of ‘Asian’, which we’re not. Whilst we want to work with all the black organisations as a team, as an organisation, to eradicate that racism in the community, at the same time, we must be seen as a different identity in terms of who we are. We are Hindus. We want our voice to be heard.

*Manchester focus group participant*

The Asian word is abused and I totally disagree with that. I would rather somebody called me ‘Indian’, ‘Hindu’ - but to be called Asian is a violation. Russians are Asians. Half of Russia is Asian but they are
never called ‘Asian’. Chinese are Asians and they're never called ‘Asians’. They're called ‘Chinese’. But Indians, somehow, become ‘Asians’ as though they own the whole of the continent of Asia...

*Leicester focus group participant*

It’s just like you have to kind of force yourself to tick it because you’re not going to fit in to any other categories and then, obviously, if there’s an ‘Other’, then you’ll tick that and say, ‘Actually, I’m not an Asian, I’m a Hindu.’

*Leicester focus group participant*

Everybody looks at all the brown people as the same and I think the knowledge about Hindu people in the host community is very limited.

*Manchester focus group participant*

This concern extended to the use of ethnic monitoring data. Where the group ‘Asians’ was used participants felt that it could obscure more than illuminate given the diversity of experiences. Where targets were set or policy changed as a result they felt it would be possible to leave out Hindus and their needs while meeting the target.

For many the description of an identity as ‘Hindu’ was an attempt to correct others’ assumptions in the light of the political context in which Islamophobia is widespread and much contemporary political focus has been placed on British Muslims. This is especially understandable given a public discourse that has increasingly identified British Muslims as a distinct community, though formerly it had been one of the group of communities defined as British Asian. This change has been about largely through the wishes of many Muslims in Britain to be primarily identified as such, rather than as ‘Asians’. The development of British Muslim identities has left those who had at one time shared the British Asian category to consider where they now stand, and whether ‘British Asian’ is a socially meaningful identity.

If you are brown skinned and you say you’re Indian or, generally, you’re being dubbed as Asian, somebody on the street generally assumes - unless you point it out, unless the scenario comes up where you can show yourself, that you’re not actually Muslim - they’ll assume you to be Muslim. And it’s just like a general assumption that they just make.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Similarly, the label ‘BME’ was felt as inadequate and difficult for some to identify with;

Joining under the umbrella of “Black” groups is not in the interest of Hindus/Asians. We should campaign to be identified separately or at least the groups should be known as e.g. “Asians, Black, Chinese and Minority Ethnic Groups” and NOT be hidden within “Black and Ethnic Minority Groups.”

*Online survey written response*

BME is ‘black minority ethnic’ and none of these people here will tick ‘black’ so we need to educate our community to tick the BME box.

*London focus group participant*

The focus group of young people talked about their experiences in universities where there were a significant number of Asian students. They reflected that student cultural societies had moved away from defining themselves as Asian into Hindu, Muslim and Sikh groups. Some universities even have cultural societies that represented particular traditions and groups within each faith community.
I think there’s a general sort of move away from defining yourself as an Asian now and moving more towards what you’re into. So, in our fresher stall we have, like, the Krishna Consciousness Society, the Hindu Society just round the corner and then there’s a Sikh Society, an Islamic Society and there’s the Asian Society. They were just getting bypassed because people knew that the other stalls were there.

*Leicester focus group participant*

If you look at the Asian Society, I would probably say that it’s 70% composed of Hindus and then Sikhs and very few Muslims because the Muslim societies are very strong at my university

*Leicester focus group participant*

Many chose to describe themselves as Indian in order to express their ties with India;

I’m a British Hindu or ‘Indian’ as we would call it. It is because I live in Britain. I have my loyalties with Britain but my roots are in India so I have an attachment to India.

*Leicester focus group participant*

I’ve always seen myself as Indian not Hindu, unless someone asked my religion, it is intertwined being Indian and Hindu

*London focus Group participant*

Other contemporary self-definitions referred to ‘Desi’, derived from the Hindi word for country and used in this context to refer to something that has its roots in the homeland. It is a term that is particularly popular in media terminology and used to describe people and culture with its roots rights across the Indian sub-continent. It is a comparable to ‘Latino/Latina’ or ‘people of the African diaspora’. The BBC TV programme Desi DNA, the MTV Desi channel recently launched in the USA, the film American Desi, and the London club night called Urban Desi, highlight the potential popularity of this terminology, its link to diaspora from the sub-continent and suggests a way in which young people are expressing solidarity with other Asians worldwide. The term was raised very rarely in either focus groups or the online survey, but could potentially have some purchase, especially given the influence of the media and the increasing population and influence of people of Indian origin in the USA.

The results of the online survey and the focus groups highlighted that many had decided that ‘British Hindu’ was a good descriptor of their identity, but this remains contested and mutable. Overall 75% of the respondents to the online survey noted that they described themselves as a Hindu, rather than by their ethnicity.
Interestingly, this proportion fell to 66% of those in the 20-24 age bracket.
Another of the participants in the focus group rejected the definition, arguing that he would not be able to recognise it;

I physically can’t even conceptualise that. I really can’t even say, ‘That’s a British Hindu.’ I just can’t do it. In terms of something like that, say if it’s a music style or a dress sense, particularly. I just don’t think there is anything like that.

*Leicester focus group participant*

The expression of a British Hindu identity also posed some challenges for other participants. Partly this was due to the novelty of the language, but also because of the diversity within and between various Hindu communities.

...young people born in this country, many of them don’t have an identity in terms of Hinduism. So they look around with the cultural environment around them for their identity in music or whatever. For the other minority of British Hindus, they would then look to role models within their particular... whoever they’ve come into contact with, different sects, etc. So, there’s no unifying thing. And, for many British Hindus, there’s no identity.

*Leicester focus group participant*
Others tried to define what it meant to be a British Hindu referring to characteristics that they could identify that British Hindus held in common;

I used the word ‘self-sufficient’, but I used in the sense of being confident about its own identity. Being confident about where it’s going as a community, as the Hindu community. And self-sufficiency is also about being proud of what one is. One is a Hindu, one is proud of being a Hindu.

*Leicester focus group participant*

the way they [Hindus] work is: they’ll take the best bits about itself and adopt the best bits about Britishness and adopt them and they put them together naturally. They don’t need to consciously go out there and do it. I think it just happens subconsciously and naturally.

*Leicester focus group participant*

As Hindus we are very progressive, it is the pride we feel in ourselves.

Attitude has a lot to do with it. The love, nurturing nature that binds everyone together, brings positive strong communities. We don’t have negative traits; our attitude is what makes all the difference. We enjoy bringing people together.

We do not discriminate against anyone, we accept everyone, we treat people equally, be fair in dealings with everyone, only ask for that is rightfully due to you. Even Hindu-run businesses have this ethos. By accepting the whole world as one family, the Hindus in this country are out there first to help when there are natural calamities even if the victims are not Hindu.

*London Focus group participants*

Others noted the difficulties with this approach and felt that given the diversity of experiences and ways of living as Hindus, were cautious of defining British Hindus too narrowly;

The reason why the definition of being a Hindu is a challenge is because there is a spectrum of definitions depending on where you are, your age etc. People around the table have different views maybe because they belong to different groups. It can vary because of different aspects that make up what today’s British Hindus are.

*London focus group participant*

Identities remain a contested area for the participants in this project, as they are for members of all communities. For many it was the first opportunity to discuss these issues with other Hindus and their positions developed during the course of the focus groups. For others it was clear that the formation of a British Hindu identity made sense of the political and social context in which they found themselves. It is clear that Asian, Desi, British, Indian and Hindu are all relevant expressions of identity. The processes for developing a common language and building a sense of community around these formations of identity is a political and social project that may enable people from Hindu backgrounds to work more effectively together for their needs. Further discussion and debate will be a key part of this process.

These identities should be understood in their context, I don’t think one will disappear making way for another. For many people I am Asian, for others I am Hindu, and for others I am a British national.

*London focus group participant*
Trans-nationalism and British identities

When I go to India, there is a difference between me as a British Hindu and the Hindu in India, and in 20 years, the gap will be wider.

London focus group participant

India loomed large in the focus group discussions. This is hardly surprising given the geographical foundation of Hinduism and the sustained links that many of the participants have with India. This was true even of those who can trace their heritage to the Caribbean, Sri Lanka, or East Africa.

The development of identities and practice that pays credence to a country of heritage but is clearly located in and influenced by living in Britain is a common experience for most minority ethnic communities. The influence of the country of heritage can be felt not just as a historical memory but also as a current engagement. Relationships with the country of heritage change over generations but can remain strong and have an influence on self-image, social and political engagement, values, and aspirations.

Steve Vertovec (2001) notes;

The past ten years have witnessed the ascendance of an approach to migration that accents the attachments migrants maintain to people, traditions and movements located outside the boundaries of the nation-state in which they reside. While recognizing the similarities to long-standing forms of migrant connection to homelands, today most who engage the approach underscore the numerous ways how, and the reasons why, today’s linkages are different or more intense than the homeland-immigration land connections of migrants in earlier periods.

He highlights the networks that operate across national boundaries, more regular travel, easier communication, and involvement in social, political and economic activities in more than one country. The most obvious way in which the ties operate is through remittances, which in 2000 were estimated to exceed US$60 billion each year.

India and its diaspora are no exception to this practice and increasingly the diaspora are recognised as playing an important role as unofficial ambassadors for India, as sources of direct foreign investment, and of aid in times of need. The extension of a class of citizenship to non-resident Indians (NRIs) and of the celebration of their contribution is evidence of the Indian government’s attempts to recognise this contribution;

January 9 (the day Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1910) [is observed] as “Pravasi Bharatiya Divas”. Apart from honouring members of the diaspora, lectures, seminars and business meetings were held to try and engage the diaspora in a symbiotic relationship.

Passage ... back to India? Rajesh Vetcha and T.L.S Bhaskar The Hindu 12/01/2003

This relationship is very often positive and participants in the focus group discussions were proud of their Indian heritage and keen to discuss the way in which their experience of India impacted on them in a positive way. There was also no perceived contradiction between being British and Indian.

It’s a sense of pride as well, of being a Hindu, coming from a country [India] which is very well respected. Because I’ve had quite a few of my clients say that it’s a wonderful country, beautiful people and I get quite proud.

Manchester focus group participant
I’m a British Hindu or ‘Indian’ as we would call it. It is because I live in Britain. I have my loyalties with Britain but my roots are in India so I have an attachment to India.  

*Leicester focus group participant*

The lives of people in India remain important to British Hindus. Van Hear et al. (2004) note;

... non-resident Indians (NRIs) have come to be recognized within India as a significant external resource. Indians abroad have traditionally supported their families through remittances and improved the status of their families in the sending communities by investing in the village and improving social or religious infrastructure. (p.16)

The tradition of charitable giving is strong within Hindu communities. However, Hindus in Britain can be drawn into some of the more controversial politics and social tensions in India. There is an extensive literature on ethnic conflict in India, Hindu extremism, and caste-based discrimination. It would be surprising if these tensions and social inequalities did not impact on communities living in Britain.

One respondent talked about the response that was necessary in the light of ethnic conflict in India to improve harmony between Muslims and Hindus in Preston;

I think the majority of the times - I talk about Preston, I think - we do live in harmony. I think there were instances where something had happened ... to do with India. ... All the community got together and we had a meeting. This was about five or ten years ago or something like that. We got together and everybody keeps talking about living in harmony. So that’s overall of the faiths getting together. The two faiths that got together were, obviously, the Muslim faith and the Hindu faith because of the India connection.  

*Manchester focus group participant*

Others spoke about occasions where events in India had sparked tensions that had not been resolved so peacefully;

When events happen back in India or Pakistan, the Muslim community straight away recognises Hindus and [there is tension between the communities] ...the host community don’t recognise Hindus as separate, you know.  

*Manchester focus group participant*

Ensuring that tensions in India do not impact negatively on relationships between communities in Britain requires leadership. Interventions and comment on events is an important way of expressing solidarity and challenging those who would use the events to create conflict. One such example is the response to events in India published on the Hindu Forum of Britain website;

It is most unfortunate that terrorism has reared its head once again in an attempt to divide the communities in India,” commented Ramesh Kallidai, secretary general of the Hindu Forum of Britain. “The fact that they have targeted one of Hinduism’s most sacred cities seems to suggest they want to exploit communal tensions. Many British Hindus are deeply concerned about the developments in India and hope that people from all communities will remain united in defeating the terrorist agenda. 

*Ramesh Kallidai, Hindu Forum of Britain General Secretary, 9/3/2006 www.hinduforum.org*

Transnational communities provide opportunities for exchange and development between countries. The UK
government has been quick to realise the benefits to Britain of the role that they can play in opening new markets and developing meaningful links across territorial boundaries. However, they can bring complications for multi-ethnic communities and impact on relationships. If mindful of such an impact the negatives can be reduced. For Hindus in Britain the relationships with other communities with a stake in India and the rest of the sub-continent are important. By building community responses based on the British context, potential conflicts can be minimised.

**Intergenerational change**

As noted above, identities are dynamic and changing. These changes are often more stark when there has been a history of migration and when viewed over generations. The experiences of those who spent their formative years in India or East Africa and those born and brought up in Britain will be very different. Seeking to maintain a static vision of identity and community across these experiences is an unrealistic task. There is a significant literature about the experiences of ‘second-’ and ‘third-generation immigrants’ and their relationship to the values, understandings and worldviews of their forbears. Popular culture reflects these intergenerational tensions in films such as Bhaji on the Beach, East is East, and My Beautiful Launderette, and in books such as White Teeth, Brick Lane, and Londonstani.

All communities have to find ways of living with the changes in attitudes, values and behaviour between generations, whether migrant communities or not. The rapid changes in society in post-war Britain are felt by all. Unsurprisingly it was a topic of concern and subject for much of the discussion in our focus groups. A British born participant commenting on the younger generation noted;

> There is a huge gap between generations. Youth practice our culture but not our faith; there is a disparity. I think this is due to language, our faith should be taught to youth in English. It would make it much easier, everything gets lost in the translation. My age group has gained their knowledge through books and by visiting India rather than learning through their parents. We have become like the westerners who travel to India to learn about our culture.

*London focus group participant*

From the children’s point of view and the dads and the mums, we are so worried about the fact that they’re succumbing to the external ‘Eastenders’, ‘Coronation Street’ pressures, they’re succumbing to the drinking, to the obsessions that their colleagues are, kind of, tagging them along and [corrupting] them to, sort of, participate in. Unfortunately if you’re not with them you’re an outsider . . . But us as parents, we have to grin and bear, I suppose, and yet we live in the 21st century. It is a burden.

*Manchester focus group participant*

Participants, younger and older, were worried that knowledge about Hindu cultures and religious practices was weak. Some expressed this as a fear that cultures would be ‘diluted’ to such an extent that they would disappear. Others were of the opinion that there needed to be greater effort expended on teaching young Hindus more about the way of life, beliefs and values of their parents.

> . . . we are at the crossroads. In a generation’s time, the ‘hooks’ from history that exist now for the older generation would have gone, and for the next generation, the hooks will be gone and replaced. They will have the British identity more. Just like the Italians in America, who have now lost more of their Italian identity, and become more American. The generations have assimilated.

*London focus group participant*
In 20 years’ time everybody here will be more or less fathers and mothers and whatever so they’ll have their own children. What you’ll find is that... I think in terms of some of the more - I would say - harder traditions, they will be completely diluted.

Leicester young people’s focus group

Our children are almost ‘half Hindu’, we need to be able to teach them our culture.

London focus group participant

If we can educate ourselves as well as the next generation to come, then I think we’ve got a bright future. But if not, then from what we’ve seen of Hinduism today - and what we follow is a diluted version of Hinduism anyway - if we cannot even keep these roots, obviously it will just dilute further and further because there’s no education involved.

Leicester young people’s focus group

We have discussed this in our youth group, we do realise that our generation is not taking enough interest in our religion, the interest and effort to learn more is lacking. The reason is that our generation is growing up in a more secular system

London focus group participant

It appeared to be even more of a concern for those who were born in Britain and were now bringing up their own children. This suggests that this has been a longer-term issue that has not been addressed and now as parents of young children, there are Hindus who are unsure about how to pass on aspects of their inherited culture and beliefs.

I believe that young Hindus, particularly young parents, are concerned their Hindu identity will be lost over time. Therefore more resources need to be delivered at a local level to address this concern plus a greater effort at publicising the Hindu faith

Online survey written response

When your child starts to question you about things what some parents do is: if they don’t know, you’re sort of fobbed off. Whereas what’s very important is, if you don’t know, you find out. For every festival, every custom, and ritual there’s a significance behind it and it’s important. If you take part and you celebrate that, then you actually explain to your children what’s behind it and if you don’t know, you have a... I think you have a responsibility to find out.

Leicester focus group participant

This is especially important given the traditional means of transmission of information about Hinduism;

Interviewer: So where do you learn about being a Hindu?
Participant 1: The house.
Participant 2: Home.
Participant 3: Parents.
Participant 1: It’s the first place you’re going to learn. And then, after that, it’s generally left up to yourself to find out.

Leicester young people’s focus group
The reliance on the family and the home for education about Hinduism and Hindu religious practice means that children’s’ understanding of the faith is only likely to be as good as that of their parents. It also means that changing patterns of family construction to smaller and more nuclear families will have a great impact on the levels of knowledge and understanding of Hinduism.

Some community organisations are responding to this need by offering classes to children in temples and in after-school clubs. The provision is patchy, however, as it is dependent on having the volunteers with the necessary skills. Where there are gaps in understanding this can lead to confusion for Hindus trying to learn more about their faith;

In Leicester we’ve got a lot of Indian schools or Indian society schools where they teach a community language . . . But there is no funding for that sort of thing . . . not for cultural languages, community languages. So [parents] put their hands in their own pockets and spend money to teach . . . there are religious classes which happen in these temples on Sundays where they teach religious education to youngsters.

Leicester focus group participant

I think one of the things that we do have to have is some sort of consistency across all of these types of Sunday Schools, Saturday Schools - whatever you want to call them - where some of the basic, fundamental philosophies of Hinduism are introduced as well as, then, the fact that there are other sects and other ways that you can follow our religion. Because I think that this is where, from a young age, children start to get confused. They say, ‘My mum and dad told me this, so if I go to the temple and be told something different, where does that fit in?’

Leicester focus group participant

Youth organisations such as Hindu Youth UK are organising large-scale events for older children and young people to discuss their faith, which are proving extremely popular, suggesting that there is considerable interest.

About two years ago now was we did a festival called ‘Get Connected’ . . . where we talked about religious values; we looked at religion and . . . how science is combined with the religion. Because what I think... nowadays youths want an academic process to take place as well. They just don’t want hard-hitting facts, that ‘you will do this’; ‘you will do that.’ If they want to do it, there has to be a reason behind it and science plays a big part in life now . . . we had about 13,000 people come through in just two days.

Leicester young people’s focus group

One of the barriers to learning more about Hinduism was language. Language skills were often poor and over generations community languages were being spoken less regularly and written even less. The use of priests and religious teachers from overseas was a problem for some participants as it made it difficult for those whose proficiency in a community language was weaker to engage in learning;

For young Hindus to have access to learning and understanding their faith they need to have priests and leaders who are able to relate to them and understand the experiences of young Hindus in the west. Personally speaking, I have felt caught between two worlds, trying to merge two different experiences without much support and feeling as if I am doing something wrong.

Online survey written response
Intergenerational tensions over values existed but participants were keen to stress that families were finding ways of resolving their issues and there was often dialogue within communities, in Asian media and between interest groups.

Our generational dialogue is there, it is conflict ridden sometimes but we are managing that, it is not adversarial.

*London women’s focus group*

We have seen these problems [intergenerational tension and conflict] E.g. I live with my mother in law, who has old values and ideas, then there is me in the middle trying to balance the old and new thinking, then there are my children who have different values. Trying to balance the two is difficult. Conflict is in families and a challenge for the communities. We need support for this. Our culture says that family problems should not be taken out of the family; we have to find our own ways of dealing with these issues. The two generations must work and learn together to narrow the gap.

*London women’s focus group*

The challenges of intergenerational change are not unique to Hindu communities but they take on a particular shape due to migration, language, religious traditions, and family patterns. Below we will examine further some of the inequalities and problems faced by the young people who participated. **Building the capacity to address these intergenerational changes and to use the existing expertise within the Hindu community to reinterpret Hindu values, beliefs and practices in times of social, technological, and political change is a key task.** For the Hindu communities to build an ongoing legacy and improve understanding between generations is crucial in maintaining the support networks, social capital and contribution of the communities to wider British society.
Cohesion, equality, difference

Celebrating diversity - Beyond Diwali; culture and Britishness

Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined by the decisions we make about what is or is not our culture, and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions [p.159]

Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain

Hindu communities are part of what makes up the community of communities and citizens that is modern Britain. The means of sharing knowledge, information and understanding of Hindu communities in our society form the focus of this section. The focus group participants were particularly interested in expressing their views about how the knowledge about Hindus is shared through the school curriculum, and images of Hindus seen in the media and in other cultural spaces. Municipal multiculturalism has meant that the major religious festival of Diwali features regularly in the public imagination, but beyond this celebration, participants were sceptical about the levels of knowledge about the communities, their traditions, values, and practices that were shared with their fellow citizens.

This is more than a question of vanity or self-promotion. If we are to be a successful multi-ethnic society then it is important that we begin to understand each other in a more than superficial manner:

A lack of public recognition is not conducive to encouraging the full participation of everyone in the public sphere... recognition of cultural diversity widens a society’s range of options and increases its freedom of choice, for it brings different cultural traditions into a mutually beneficial dialogue and stimulates new ideas and experiences [p.48 ibid.]

Hinduism in schools

Schools are seen as key opportunities to create understandings of Hindu cultures and to consider the role, experiences and contributions of people from Hindu backgrounds to British society. While teaching about diversity should be seen as part of all subjects in schools, the main focus for learning about Hinduism was seen to be through religious education. Religious education operates in a unique way in schools in England and Wales. While it is a statutory requirement, it is taught to local rather than national guidelines. Each local education authority agrees its own syllabus with support from a standing advisory council on religious education [SACRE]. Membership of the SACRE would usually be extended to representatives of the major faiths in the area. Despite the fact that Hindus are likely to be represented on most, if not all, SACRE there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the way in which children were learning about Hinduism. Schools were not seen as meeting the needs of Hindu young people in learning about their faith;

At the moment, you see, 75% of the syllabus hours taught in the schools are Christianity and 25% is given to Hinduism, Muslims, and Sikhs. Which is, say, about one hour or half an hour per week, or something like that. That’s a major concern, you see, because our children are more conversant with Christianity than Hindu

Leicester focus group participant
When I was at school, it was about 2 or 3 years ago - the only thing they touched upon Hinduism, it was wedding rituals, which I didn’t think was relevant. If you’re going to teach kids and society - even non-Hindus - about Hinduism, I think one of the most important things is not wedding rituals. I think there are a lot of more important things they can teach them. So the curriculum in that way is a bit, is set a bit wrong. If they could teach them more stuff . . . the fundamentals, what Hinduism is about, why they study it... why Hindus are Hindus, what they do, stuff like that would be more important than wedding rituals.

Leicester young people’s focus group

In the RE lessons that we were taught Hinduism, I personally switched off because I felt that the fundamentals were incorrect or very inaccurate and I didn’t see the point in sitting through that lesson

Leicester young people’s focus group

If I remember correctly, when I was studying... each religion was at least given four weeks, or something like that, where you study the fundamental basics of the religion. Then you go on to the practical aspects. If I remember correctly, I must have studied Hinduism for two weeks. One on the fundamental basics, which I believe were wrong in the first place and then the weddings, as he just said. And that was it. That was Hinduism over and done with.

Leicester young people’s focus group

The experiences of the young people in Leicester are particularly significant given the fact that many of them had attended schools where children from Hindi backgrounds were in the majority.

The participants were aware that Hinduism might be difficult to teach given its differences from other religions and the diversity of traditions and practices that characterise the faith;

Hinduism is very rich. There are even actual different organisations within Hinduism that teach a particular philosophy, teach a... So, it’s that... It’s so rich that it actually needs that proper training, just like you go to university and concentrate on one subject. It’s a bit like that.

Leicester young people’s focus group

I think it’s true to say that many of the students would know more than the teachers teaching it

Leicester young people’s focus group

Another thing that schools do is compare the religions rather than teach them. Because when I was a school we just got told to, on an A4 piece of paper, write down the 6... put 6 headings of the 6 major religions and write down their prophets, you know, their scriptures, beliefs...you get to Hinduism and it’s like, ‘Well, I can just write down all of the other religions’ stuff plus everything good about everything else.

Leicester young people’s focus group

I also think that there’s an important link here because you comment there about school teaching it. You know, from a very young age for many Hindus it’s a way of life and we heard that. So that from the point that you’re toddlers - and I’ve got a two-year-old - it’s always around. My two-year-old comes to the temple. It’s a way of life . . . So I don’t think you can wait until you’re at school.

Leicester focus group participant
Despite the fact that many of the young people were dissatisfied with the way in which Hinduism is being taught in schools they recognised that it was important not just for them but for young people of other backgrounds to learn about it.

I think it should... For the education of the wider community that still should be there. But, for Hindus, I think education lies in the home

*Leicester young people’s focus group*

Members of the communities gave up their time to supplement education about Hinduism in schools, perceiving it to be an important activity and a means of sharing their culture. Though others felt concern about their ability to gain access to schools to influence change;

We now have developed a team of volunteers who dedicate their time to show school groups around the temple and talk to them about what happens there.

*Manchester focus group participant*

I’ve done a speech at my children’s school when I had to bring in some displays at Diwali and explain to the class, to the children what Diwali was about and, basically, just explain what Hinduism was about, briefly. Obviously because they are primary school children, there’s only so much you can say.

*Manchester focus group participant*

They used to celebrate multiculturalism and it was a start, now, the doors are shut, the teaching is from textbooks by the CRE and we are not allowed to visit schools to teach about our faith. We are that community and we should be consulted and not [just] at a national level.

*London focus group participant*

Organisations have also been engaged in action to improve the quality of education about Hinduism. This year, the Hindu Forum of Britain published a religious education toolkit, piloted in 72 schools in the London Borough of Harrow, and hopes to disseminate the toolkit to at least ten other local education authorities by the end of the year. Other organisations are also involved in providing educational resources;

In ISKCON we produced a resource pack for teachers to teach Hinduism and for students to learn. As a temple, we are the first place, many parents come to for religious education. We automatically feel we are best placed to educate and resourced to teach Hinduism . . . So you have this environment where we do not have a school environment and yet people believe this is where the education must happen

*London focus group participant*

**It is important that the schools and community organisations work together to improve teaching about Hinduism in schools.**

**Hindus in the media**

There was widespread concern that the images of Hindus presented in the media were inaccurate, and often disrespectful. Though participants valued the media that were aimed specifically at them, such as specialist
programming on BBC television, the Asian newspapers that were published, and various radio stations, there was less satisfaction with mainstream media representations.

The online survey found that over 80% of respondents were unhappy with the representation of Hindus in the national media.

**Figure 16 – Response to Online Survey Question – ‘Hindus are well represented in the national media’**

Participants commented that they felt their contribution to society as a faith-based community was unappreciated and commented on their exclusion from some religious programming;

The media should emphasise more the important contribution that Hindus and other minority groups make towards Britain’s multi-cultural society

*Online survey written response*

I made repeated requests [to BBC and ITV] that where you have these programmes where you have got hymns and now you’re a multicultural society, why don’t you just invite us from different religions . . . And the answer is: No, these are Christian programmes and if someone wants your input, we will ask you.’ But basically, ‘No.’

*Manchester focus group participant*

There were worries about the misrepresentation of religious practices and stereotyping that occurs;

"
You have this 'Goodness Gracious Me'. Okay, it’s comedy but, at the same, time there’s a lot of stereotyping in there as well, which some may feel offended by.

*Leicester young people’s focus group*

I think you mentioned the Kumars [at No.42]? Now, one episode there - I don’t know whether you have heard of it - they were doing yagya - fire sacrifice - and they were throwing meat . . . Now, that was absolutely abhorrent. Nobody ever thought of that. We protested to them. I phoned them up. But it just went into a black hole, you know. It was not taken notice of at all. So there are some very derogatory things being shown on the television about Hindus which nobody does [anything about]. . . It’s not a Hindu practice to throw meat.

*Manchester focus group participant*

There was also some concern about advertising and fashion and its use of religious imagery. This has been a source of political action for some members of Hindu communities where images have been used disrespectfully;

Our deities on underwear, on toilet seats and then very recently - and there are so many - very recently [disrespecting] Lord Shiva [Our deities] with bottles of whisky and so on and also with the postage stamps, Royal Mail, of course.

*Manchester focus group participant*

Responses have included picketing and demonstrating against such abuses. The Hindu Forum of Britain requested that the Royal Mail withdraw its 68p Christmas stamp because of the inappropriate use of imagery.

Other participants wanted to reflect on how to influence change and suggested that the mainstream media ought to consult more regularly with representatives of Hindu communities;

There aren’t either any advisors at media and governance level or in terms of the programming level, planning level. And I think there aren’t advisors there. And I don’t think we are contacted when they make most of the programmes.

*Manchester focus group participant*

For others in was about improving the presence of people from Hindu backgrounds in public arenas, where they could be visible representatives of modern Britain;

Look at sports, how many Hindus are there in the national scene? Can we guarantee that there will be one medal won by a [British] Hindu at the Olympics?

*London focus group participant*

Where Hindu communities felt that they had some control over their representation in public spaces they were more confident about the benefits of activity that brought Hindus and other communities together. Large scale events were a source of pride for many and these were largely around celebrating Diwali

When we had Diwali at Trafalgar Square four years ago, we had 50 people, but last year we had 35,000 people. The pride has come out

*London focus group participant*

At Diwali, there are 30,000 people on the Belgrave Road . . . That’s something that the Hindu community is doing together
Leicester focus group participant

If you look at Leicester as a city, at times of festivals - and you’re looking at Navaratri, Diwali, even, you know, Mahashivratri, you do get a buzz, you know, being a Hindu you could... driving around parts of Leicester. It is busier, at Diwali it is, and so many people will comment who live in London. Even a place like London that has pockets of Hindu population like Harrow, you don’t get that buzz because here it’s a very clear, concentrated, you know... And I think that’s a very positive thing. So, at festivals you will see there will be a lot of activity

Leicester young people’s focus group

The media plays an important role in reflecting the lives of British people. The lack of presence in the mainstream media in a way that Hindus were comfortable with is of concern since media provide opportunities to share information and knowledge about Hindu experiences with other communities. For other communities media monitoring projects, training of those leading community organisations in engagement with the media and the development of members of communities as journalists have begun to challenge some of the cruder stereotyping that some media have been guilty of in the past. While public expressions of Hinduism are confined to festivals the understanding of Hindu communities for other groups will remain limited.

Building relationships with other communities

Challenges to community cohesion

Community cohesion is an important part of building a successful multi-ethnic society. As noted above, it is not enough to focus solely on equality and diversity, in order to create a society in which all can thrive; we need to consider relationships between communities and citizens. The government set about developing its community cohesion agenda in the light of the disturbances in the northern mill towns in 2001. The report into the disturbances (Cantle, 2002) introduced the term ‘parallel lives’ to the policy discourse, arguing that it was not enough for communities to live separate lives, however equal.

In order to make the language around community cohesion more accessible and capable of action, we have used the terminology ‘sense of belonging’ to get at that part of a successful society that has proved so elusive - how all citizens can feel they have a stake in their society and share a sense of fellow-feeling with their compatriots.

Bhikhu Parekh (2002) argues that there are three components to this common sense of belonging:

- **Mutuality of claims and obligations.** Members of a community recognise each other as part of a single community, and are bound together by claims and obligations that do not obtain in relation to outsiders. This does not mean that they have no obligations to outsiders, but rather that, other things being equal, their obligations to their fellow-members are stronger and more pressing.

- **Fellow-feeling or a sense of concern** for other members of the community, including a willingness to promote their interests, if necessary at the cost of one’s own.

- **Loyalty to the community or commitment to its integrity and well-being.** This does not mean that members of a community might not disagree deeply on many important issues, and periodically protest against their government, but rather that they care enough for their community not to allow their differences to get out of control and damage its well-being.
He also notes that there can be barriers to a sense of belonging:

Those who are devalued, mocked, taken lightly, treated as outsiders, made butts of offensive jokes, and so on, build up alienation and resentment and do not feel a sense of attachment to the community.

In focus group discussions with Hindus it became clear that in many ways the construction of a common sense of belonging was often a challenge for them, despite a positive attitude towards British society and a feeling that they were well-integrated communities.

The online survey showed that respondents felt that they got along well with people from different communities and backgrounds in their neighbourhoods (89%).

**Figure 17 – Response to Online Survey Question – ‘People from different backgrounds get along well in my neighbourhood’**

![Pie chart showing response percentages]

However, participants in the focus groups felt that some barriers existed to their wishes to engage in meaningful exchange with members of other communities. For many it was an expression of their identities that they were able to communicate with other communities and find commonalities and shared values;

And I think, also, the other thing I think that’s important is as British Indians is actually sharing our culture and our philosophy with the other British people. I think that’s one of the things that I would identify with us.

*Leicester focus group participant*
[Hindus] are very tolerant and they’re very sensitive. They listen to other people’s views and don’t
make their minds up straight away.

*London focus group participant*

Living in Wembley/ Harrow, we are lucky we can teach more to our children about our faith. In terms
of integrating with whites, we have to, but we have to make the effort not them.

*London women’s focus group participant*

Given this background of willingness and commitment to share with others, some pointed to problems with
moving beyond superficial relationships with other communities, either due to a lack of infrastructure and
opportunity, a wish to avoid confrontation of difficult issues, or lacking the capacity to engage in debate and
discussion;

Simply by looking at it from the point of view that nothing wrong has happened in a city doesn’t mean
that inter-community relations are good, that cannot be an indicator. The main indicator of whether
the relationships are good or bad or ugly or whatever depends on how much traffic – communication -
takes place between different communities. Now, if you take that as an indicator, you will find: not
much

*Leicester focus group participant*

There is a lot of bilateral dialogue between the Christians and the Muslims, but what is not happening is the
dialogue between the other faiths, if you like, the Muslims and the Hindus all together.

*Manchester focus group participant*

I think we live in parallel communities. We all have very strong identities of our own, all the faith
communities. We will live in parallel and when we have to interact, we interact. The reason we don’t
have a lot of problems in Leicester, for instance, is because the majority of Hindus are, as we said
earlier on, not only tolerant, but quite self-sufficient and feel self-confident in themselves and they
don’t mind just moving away from a friction situation, saying, ‘Well, it doesn’t matter. We’ll move away
and get on with the next thing.’

*Leicester focus group participant*

I actually think that very few Hindu youths - we’re talking from let’s say 10 to 16/17 . . . know about
their own identity, actually, and they know even less about the others . . . So, in terms of integration,
they may have exposure in schools but I don’t think they have the scope nor the environment where
they can engage in any... in depth. It’s all very much, ‘Let it simmer at the surface.’

*Leicester young people’s focus group*

The process of developing a sense of fellow feeling, mutuality and belonging will take a commitment of time
and effort, but also some capacity building to be able to engage with others outside of immediate community
links. Despite a willingness to engage there were ways in which the participants felt constrained and lacking in
opportunity to develop relationships with other communities. For some this had led to a level of social
segregation that they were not comfortable with;

I grew up in Slough, in a multicultural area; I have a feeling that in the schools, amongst Indian kids,
they started sticking together. It wasn’t political, they just gravitated into this coming together, this was
negative for the others kids, and there was this branding.

*London women’s focus group participant*
Cohesion: an agenda for all communities?

The focus of much of activity around community cohesion has been to tackle the relationship between Muslim communities and white communities. The impact of the disturbances of the summer of 2001 was to suggest that it is these communities alone that need to develop better understanding of each other and engage in shared experiences in order to develop a shared sense of belonging. This is not the intention of government policy but the way in which it is often interpreted. The impact of the terrorist atrocities in July 2005, the response to the Iraq conflict, and the focus of public debate, has pushed Muslim communities to the fore. The success of BNP candidates in the 2006 local elections in various parts of the country have also made white communities the subject of attention as government and activists aim to reduce the influence of far-right political parties and opinion. In a multi-ethnic society it is important that all communities have a stake in building community cohesion. The barriers to that cohesion include prejudice, fear, a lack of engagement, misinformation, and stereotyping. It would be presumptuous to believe that not all communities are prey to these influences. As noted above the relationship between Hindu communities and Muslim communities has a special resonance given the influence of the sub-continent. Yet (especially in areas where Hindu communities were small in comparison to Muslim communities) there appears to have been a lack of focus on engaging Hindu communities in community cohesion and interfaith activities.

I keep pushing the point that, when they do these exchange sports programmes between Muslim youths and Christian youths, they also have to invite Hindu youth in there and we keep pushing for that; one day it will happen

*Manchester focus group participant*

On a number of occasions where they talk about other religious communities - either made post 7/7 or before - we actually rang and said to BBC Northwest, 'You mention Judaism, you mention Islam, you even mention Buddhism, but there’s no mention of Hinduism and Hinduism is the third largest group in this country, yet there’s no mention.'

*Manchester focus group participant*

Government is also at fault because it seems that the only minority ethnic community in this country is Muslims. Nobody else. They forget Hindus, they forget Jains, they forget Sikhs, they forget Buddhists, and so many others . . . the government is very keen to go out into the community and talk to the community, but particularly with the Muslim community. They’re not very much interested in other communities,

*Manchester focus group participant*

In other parts of the country participants were keen to discuss ways in which they had engaged in community cohesion and interfaith activities from which they saw great benefit;

Communities from, you know, Pakistani, Indian community, Gujarat community - all the communities actually work together to promote Asian arts and I think, well, that’s a good example where, you know, the communities in Nottingham are actually working together.

*Leicester focus group participant*

I also wanted to mention that we also have an Indian-Jewish Association. I mean many people most probably don’t know and I’m one of the members of the Indian-Jewish Association in Manchester. The first one started in London and then the third one is going to be started in Birmingham very soon.

*Manchester focus group participant*
We have these exchange programmes where a group of people will come to the temple from other religions and we will have an afternoon programme of awareness, talking to each other at a grassroots level and the same thing is happening with the schoolchildren.

*Manchester focus group participant*

The Cantle Report (2002) pointed to some of the activities that caused the tensions that turned into violent disturbances. They included confusion over the criteria by which resources are allocated, and rumours spread by mischief-makers who understood how to play to existing tensions between communities. Both of these factors were evident in conversations during the focus group sessions and in responses to the online survey.

Children are getting brainwashed at school by Muslim friends.

*London focus group participant*

Most of the privileges that are going off in Manchester are going to Pakistani communities. Now, last week, I heard from the City Council that it is allocating 16 acres of land to this Pakistani community. I said, ‘How is this working?’

*Manchester focus group participant*

Participant 1: there are various other aggressive methods also used [to convert Hindus]. Recently I saw the leaflet whereby a Muslim youth is offered £10,000 for converting a Hindu girl into Islam.

Interviewer: You saw this leaflet?

Participant 2: Yes. We have all got a copy.

Participant 3: We’ve seen it. Lying around universities.

*Manchester focus group*

I’d be really scared if I came to a Navaratri festival and I saw lots of Muslim boys around and if I had a daughter, I’d even be more scared.

*Manchester focus group*

I feel Hindus are victimised because of the fear of Muslims. When Muslims want funding, they get it. I have tried for years for funding but can’t. Muslims make a fuss. They take advantage of our passiveness.

*London women’s focus group participant*

The challenge for community organisations is to respond to such fears and misinformation in order to reduce tensions, and to work with Muslim communities to build dialogue and understanding. Interventions can be powerful statements of support for a cohesive community and support Hindus in matching their aspirations for inclusiveness and pluralism with their behaviours and attitudes towards Muslims in the wider community. Racisms operate in such a way as to affect all communities. Challenging racisms is an important part of building community identity and strength as it encourages an open view of society (see Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain p.247), which in turn reflects on how communities view themselves.
Supporting community development and religious practice

We noted above ways in which members of Hindu communities might not be best prepared to engage in relationship building with other communities. For many this was a question of resources and community development. For others it was about developing leadership at all levels throughout the communities.

Practical barriers to community development were identified, including the lack of resources that would enable members of the communities to invest more time in working with their community and others.

We all work on a voluntary basis, if we had funding, we would be able to tackle the areas that are lacking.

The main thing is that resource centres need to be established in all cities where we can collate our activities and take it forward. We need funding for full time employees rather than volunteers.

We have the people but no resources.

First of all we need resources to find out what our people need. Then we need to throw resources at them. Overall we look successful and assimilated, but the Government does not recognise problems festering in the community.

London focus group participants

Most Hindu organisations are voluntary run and, because of that nature, what tends to happen is if I’ve got 2 hours this week, I’ll say, ‘I will do the work for my local organisation.’ . . . everybody is working voluntarily whereas some of these other organisations that we’re trying to compare with, they have funding available, they have people working full time who then take action to follow these things up. And this is where, I think, the funding becomes an important issue to actually support the leadership as well as the local organisation.

Manchester focus group participant

It’s extremely difficult for people who are working to take time out because their organisation may not give them time. If we go, we go at our own expense. So, the representation is patchy, we go if it is in the evening, we go if it is in the weekend and that’s an issue. Police would then turn round and say to us, ‘Well, we did send you a consultation paper, we did invite you, but you didn’t choose to come.’ And what can we do?

Manchester focus group participant

Others pointed to other practical problems that had made it difficult to organise. In particular wrangles that they had experienced with local planning authorities about setting up temples and community centres, and celebrating rituals in ways which fit with their traditions:

Planning issues especially parking.

Planning problem exists in the SKLPC centre as well.

In [our] borough they have a real problem with temple applications. The local authorities must be encouraged to take these applications because religious organisations are not drug centres! They
keep kids away from mischief, and teach religion; they should be encouraged more, planners seem to have something against temples.

Planning issues on Hindu temples up and down the country: we feel there is discrimination against the Hindu community. All faith communities should be given same exemptions as the Church of England. Legislation should change to reflect this for all faiths.

One of the cultural things we have in the community is to pay respects to the dead person . . . Our rituals take 2 hours and crematoria do not have the time, facilities or space for these rituals and we are restricted. We are trying to build a crematorium but the planning permission needs to be given.

*London focus group participants*

These challenges seemed to be particularly prevalent in London and posed problems for those who were attempting to engage in community development. There were existing organisations which offered some support (e.g. National Council of Hindu Temples) but they were unable to engage fully in all of the detailed planning processes that were necessary to establish new places of worship or community centres.

**Leadership and engagement**

The focus group participants were keen to discuss the dynamics and patterns of community leadership for Hindus. This was in reaction to the widespread belief that Hindus were not well represented by political institutions, either locally or nationally. Many participants stressed the importance of engagement in politics for Hindu communities. It was felt that by improving representation and political engagement, Hindu communities could play an even more important role in society, increasing their visibility, bringing Hindu perspectives to contemporary issues, supporting the development of their communities, and delivering on the widely felt aspiration to play a full part in Britain’s multi-ethnic society.

The online survey showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) felt that the views of Hindus were not well represented in national politics, or in local politics (85%)
Focus group participants expressed their frustration at this state of affairs and highlighted building leadership capacity and skills as a key area for development activity.

We are strong within our community - we have good inside infrastructure, but externally we are not strong. We do not have the networking or clout that the Jewish or Muslim community, so externally we are not strong . . .We don’t have a strong voice in government.

*London focus group participant*

This is where there’s an apathy with Hindus not... Hindus are... We are very strong economically as a faith group and we become... You know, we work hard and that’s an ethos, a central pillar, I think. And we are successful. But when it actually comes out, broadening that out and being in the public face, we’re not as good.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Basically, it is a very self-contained, confident religious community in a very broad sense. It is so self-confident, so self-assured in a sense - I’m talking broadly now, generalising, -- it sometimes forgets that they have to have a voice nationally either politically or socially and they don’t push against those boundaries all the time for help. They hold back and that is a problem.

*Leicester focus group participant*
Government has to look at disadvantage and lack of access. Look at Hindu elders - no one actually bothered to find out what they wanted...you need to strengthen the community, and strengthen their capacity to engage. Over the last thirty years, they have proved and shown that this can be done.

*London focus group participant*

The barriers to improving the levels of engagement in political activity were identified as being, in part, related to the self-perception of Hindus, their values and beliefs. For some the way in which Hindus held pluralism, secularism, voluntary activity, and humility as values made it more of a challenge to engage in politics;

It’s never been a Hindu thing to try and be famous or to try and get in the limelight or to be the one who speaks first. It’s always been a... When we sit at the dinner table, you know, everybody waits until everybody’s served and then you eat. You know, nobody goes first. That politeness; that humbleness has always been there

*Leicester young people’s focus group*

What the Hindu community doesn’t do is, I suppose, it’s like we might have issues with - I don’t know - our elderly, our health, education or something; we don’t shout. Saying this is what we would like. And we try and solve the problems within the community itself, you know, because we work as a community together instead of, actually, bringing it up with the politicians, saying, ‘Right, we want this! You know, our community needs that.’ We don’t do that.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Hindus should be prominent and spread their proud culture around. They seem to be too shy to portray themselves as Hindus

*Online survey written response*

Other barriers that were identified included the diversity amongst Hindu communities. As with many faith-based communities, the diversity of practices, religious interpretations, regional differences, traditions, and backgrounds was seen to be a difficulty for those who attempted to create a single unifying voice;

We have divided into so many communities, sub-communities and all that and, first of all, we’ve got to have in our mind that we are Hindus first so that our identity is Hindu and when we have established that thing, then we need one leader. Not, for example, ‘he’s a Gujarati, he’s a Bengali, and he’s a Punjabi.’ One leader, you see and then you see when that community is established under one umbrella group and then, you see, we can move forward and speak with one voice

*Leicester focus group participant*

We should be in a group of Hindu Community rather than divided in all the different caste groups (which make us weak as community). All Hindus should have unity between each other for good representation

*Online survey written response*

These barriers were not seen as insurmountable and there were many participants who had suggestions for ways in which leadership capacity could be built and issues that could be used to build a common agenda across Hindu communities;

Leadership should be from different aspects: leadership from the political point of view; leadership
from the socio-economic point of view; leadership from the religious point of view; leadership from the cultural point of view. Now, no one person can have all that. But it’s the recognition that there are many different forms of leadership and that we need that as a Hindu community.

Leicester focus group participant

The future of the British Hindu would be to actually nurture good leaders in our younger community because I think there are leaders in our youths who are budding but we, as a community, have to support them and make them come forward . . . I’m not going to sit here and say, ‘We can’t do this and we can’t do that.’ What can we do to get there? Let’s all think about what can we do to get there?

Leicester focus group participant

If you look at public services and the public appointments, if you look at Leicester, at University Hospitals Leicester NHS Trust, we have no representation on the board. For a local institution, there are no Hindus on the board.

Leicester focus group participant

We started having attacks on our temples and then the Hindu Forum of Britain brought about 400 Hindu organisations together and that was the launch of the Hindu Forum of Britain. Security became an issue. It is an issue for all the temples and we realised that we needed to do something at national level to organise something.

Manchester focus group participant

Unity was seen as important at a national level as well, where organisations had been set up, some participants found the relationships between them confusing and felt that it led to an unnecessary level of politicking. There was also some questioning of the influence that existing organisations and leaders of community organisations had and questions were raised about how to ensure that those in leadership positions reflected the views of women and younger people;

Hindus need to unite as one in the UK, rather than all these bodies who only have their own political self-interest at heart promoting their own agenda. Groups need to support one another and have a strong Hindu voice, right now they are not attracting the young up and coming Hindus because all we see is political wrestling in Mandhirs and competition for media attention.

Online survey written response

Those people going there, inter-faith, from our communities, we know that there are only a few but nobody listens to them. When the Hindus are suffering, nobody stands up for them.

Leicester focus group participant

What hasn’t happened - and it may not be those leaders’ fault - is we haven’t empowered the women; we haven’t empowered the young people. So there’s a big gap there. In terms of young people, there’s now a big inter-generational gap now because their way of thinking and living and everything is completely different to how the existing leaders see things.

Manchester focus group participant

From these comments it is evident that there is a desire to improve the leadership capacity and engagement of people from Hindu backgrounds in national and local politics. Some efforts have already been undertaken in this direction, for example through the Hindu Forum of Britain parliamentary experience programme. Wider political and civic education, and leadership capacity building for existing and new organisations would be welcome in order to support Hindu communities in improving their engagement with political structures.
Dealing with racisms

Impact of racisms

Tackling racism is an important part of building a successful multi-ethnic Britain. Racisms operate in various ways and are felt at many different levels;

We have distinguished between institutional racism, street racism and violent racism; colour racism and cultural racism; the racism of beliefs and attitudes and the racism of behaviour and structures. We have recalled also that racisms have been an integral strand of the weft and warp of British history [p.105]

Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain

No communities are immune from racisms as they impact on our relationships, inform attitudes and beliefs, create mistrust, mobilise anti social behaviour, and undermine dignity and respect. Where racisms have the greatest impact is when they constrain opportunity, create feelings of alienation or deny our shared humanity.

It is heartening to note that for many of the participants the impact of racisms were not felt to have constrained their opportunities or led to alienation. Many found it difficult to identify times when they had been discriminated against due to their ethnic or faith background. Half of the survey respondents noted that they had been discriminated against because they are Asian, but less than a quarter (23%) could identify discrimination against them based on their faith.

Figure 19 – Response to Online Survey Question -
‘I have been discriminated against because I am Asian’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>12.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly agree</td>
<td>37.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>40.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely disagree</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The focus group participants noted various ways in which they experienced racism - for some it was experienced 'on the street' and had overtones of violence and intimidation, for others it was about the ways in which institutions operated to exclude them. There was debate about the causes. It was argued that the perpetrators of racism would not discriminate between Asians as Hindu or Muslims or Sikh, but acted largely on the basis of colour.

When I was young and I was playing football in the leagues, literally, you wouldn’t go. But every two weeks, you’d have some spectator saying, 'Can’t you tackle, you-’ And it’s generally, yeah, ‘Pakistani’ or a... I was once called an ‘Afghan’. So, yeah, there’s that kind of thing. But never, ‘You bloody Hindu!’
Leicester young people’s focus group

Just having brown skin is [enough] . . . I haven’t experienced it myself but I know a lot of my cousins, they all always talk about it when they’ve been for job interviews and stuff... They know that the white person will get chosen over them just for having brown skin. And they could have more qualifications, more skills, more everything but, I don’t know, a company will choose the white person over them.
Leicester young people’s focus group

My son went to a party, he was of only two BME people; the rest were white. The NF came to the door and the police were called but did not come. We were woken up by police saying ‘come and pick your son up there’s been trouble’. Asian kids stick together because of incidents like these. They make kids realise their culture and faith more important.
London focus group participant

Whether that is just because you’re Hindu - as my fellow said there - it’s very difficult to prove. It is your skin colour rather than your religion.
Leicester focus group participant
The way in which racism was a consideration in people’s career choices and employment prospects was discussed. For some there was a sense that the experiences of people from Hindu backgrounds in the past informed the attitudes towards working in certain public services in particular, and an emphasis on entrepreneurship and professionalisation was, in part, a response to the fear of discrimination in public sector institutions;

. . . we think that the police force is, sort of, a white man’s domain. And when ethnic minorities creep in, you know, they probably resent it, you know. Although they may like him, you see, but they resent because, ‘Oh, he’ll be on top of us.’ Because they consider us, you see, as something lower than themselves, you know.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Discrimination. I come from a teaching background. I work in an FE college and it’s very difficult to go up the career ladder. There’s only so far you can go and you know within yourself that you can’t go any further.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Just wanted to bring to your attention what my doctor friends - medical doctor friends - [have said to me.] There is still definitely in this country an invisible ceiling. Beyond that you can’t progress no matter how good you are in your profession and I have not once heard it from my doctor friends, but many a times

*Manchester focus group participant*

There’s the expectation and, if you think about it, in the police force, you know, with all the issues that we face in terms of getting to be an inspector or things like that, that’s something that, perhaps, not want to go for because they think, ‘Oh well, will I reach that position or not? And if I take another career, you know, I might get there earlier.’ So there’s that issue as well there.

*Leicester focus group participant*

Others raised the problems of institutional racism that meant that services failed to be delivered to people from Hindu backgrounds due to ignorance about their needs, and a failure to engage with communities in order to understand them better;

Needs of diet, dress, prayers etc are different for Hindus from other Asians. There are immediate differences so there are different requirements e.g. cremation not burial. This is not being addressed. There are no paid chaplains in prisons and hospitals. So many old ladies who don’t eat onions or garlic but [hospitals] won’t cater for it, they do cater for Halal but not Hindu diets.

*London focus group participant*

Racisms do impact on many people from Hindu communities’ lives. The motivations for these racisms are not always to do with their faith but their ethnic origin. This does not lessen their impact. From the examples noted here, it can be seen that where discrimination is felt it creates barriers to full and equal citizenship, constrains opportunities, and can lead to disconnection from public services. **Learning from the experience of other faith-based communities, work to tackle the impact of racisms must include the experiences of Hindu communities.** Thankfully, there were few reports of violent racisms targeted expressly on people from Hindu backgrounds they are vulnerable to racist attacks. The focus groups were undertaken in areas in which there were significantly large Asian communities, further research in other areas across the country may highlight where overt racism is more prevalent.
Reducing inequalities

Inequalities within Hindu communities

The creation of a successful multi-ethnic Britain is dependent not just on reducing inequalities between communities, but also within them. There are inequalities in all communities that have the effect of marginalising certain voices and their hampering engagement in communities working together to respond to their needs. The current government have developed a wide range of work to tackle social exclusion. The government’s Social Exclusion Unit state;

Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown.

Work to tackle social exclusion recognises that communities are complex and multi-faceted. As noted above, statistics show that there are many areas in which the Hindu communities are achieving well - male employment, educational achievement, and family stability, are all higher than average. General statistics, however, can mask where there is deprivation. There are Hindus who are poor and unemployed, some who face discrimination within the community, some who need extra support, and others who have particular needs and requirements to play a full part with Hindu and British communities.

We have pockets of deprivation. E.g. elders, who have very little to live on, and people who live on the dole, our organisations don’t have funding to do minimal things [to support them]

*London focus group participant*

Those who are socially excluded can be particularly invisible within communities that are perceived to be relatively well off. Others can be dismissive of those in need and public policy may be ignorant of their needs or unable to design tools subtle enough to reach them - as one participant noted;

Our economic success is being used against us by society; they think we should be self-fulfilling due to our business success.

*London women’s focus group*

We are very economically contributing to the society and yet our voice is not heard . . . Because now they have labelled us that we are economically very able people, so we don’t need any help

*Manchester focus group participant*

Overall we look successful and assimilated, but the Government does not recognise problems festering in the community.

*London focus group participant*

The emphasis in Hindu communities on the role of the family, and on self-sufficiency within the community, may also make it harder for members of marginalised groups to be able to find common cause and support from others in similar situations outside of their communities while maintaining their connections and loyalties within their families and networks. Below we briefly consider five groups that generally experience marginalisation within their communities in the UK; people with disabilities, women, young people, older people, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people. First, a particular issue for people of Hindu
backgrounds is caste and whether it also operates to exclude people from full participation in Hindu communities.

Diversity within - caste, traditions and change

We have noted above the diversity within Hindu traditions and communities. It has been posed as a challenge to create a unifying voice because of the range of approaches to the faith and certain traditions being closely linked to a geographical location and tradition.

A further contributing factor to the diversity of traditions is varna (caste). The ancient Hindu system of varna is based on division of labour to accommodate work done by priests and teachers (brahmanas), soldiers and administrators (kshatriyas), businesses and farmers (vaishyas), and artisans and the workers (shudras). This system, which was migratory and based on work and occupation later, gave rise to a hereditary system called jaati or caste. Another tradition in Hinduism is that of sampradaya, or followers of a line of teachers. In trying to explain the ways in which communities had formed and operated, participants in the focus group and respondents to the survey regularly referred to divisions along varna or sampradaya lines.

Especially in Hinduism, you have various sectors and every single sector was, in a way, participating with the event; we had Brahma Kumaris, we had ISKCON. So, in a way, we weren’t just giving people information on just Hinduism, but every single way of life within Hinduism.

*Leicester young people’s focus group*

The local organisations, sometimes they might be a very small sect, they have their own temple or community centre and many a time what happens we need not the Hindu participation but we also need participation with that local authority and other issues. And what I have found is that time and time [again], what people want to do is: I want to stay in my little sphere; I want to work for my little community.

*Manchester focus group participant*

I feel that the Hindu community itself still largely (as in India) practices the class prejudices of the caste system. This and all other intra-community tensions needs to be lessened considerably before the Hindu community in Britain can seriously start tackling the problems it has with those of other backgrounds.

*Online survey written response*

We talked earlier about how we’re divided around the caste system or professions, whatever. Each one of them seems to have something or other there. And the amount of money that’s been generated just to purchase one of those buildings, I wish I could integrate some of them.

*Leicester focus group participant*

varna and sampradaya inform the shape of the community-based organisations and act as a contributing factor in creating ambivalence about a broader British Hindu identity. They have implications for capacity building, visibility of Hindus, and opportunities for building confidence. Participants were, however, keen to identify divisions based on jaati (caste) as a problem for ongoing unity and were questioning how useful traditional readings of jaati (caste) might be in modern Britain.

We as a community have too many divisions by caste that often leads to confusions with the wider community. These confusions do not project a positive image nor inform the wider community of the
vast amount of charity work, economic prosperity the Hindu community has brought to this country

*Online Survey written response*

As a young Hindu I feel we need to break down the barriers of caste and region that the generations before us bought with them to the UK

*Online survey written response*

Others identified the waning importance of *jaati* in the British context - suggesting that generational change and the realities of life in a multi-ethnic society were making discrimination on the basis of *jaati* much more difficult to maintain. For some, *jaati*, along with *varna* and Sampradaya were seen as an expression of tradition and positive familial and community links rather than a constraining factor.

I think the caste system was to do with very old traditions; those traditions are disappearing. Because of equality

*Birmingham focus group participant*

My personal view, caste is not a cause of discrimination, if there is discrimination, it is dying, it is probably still in the older community but it is definitely diminishing.

*London focus group participant*

A key task for any Hindu leadership is to find ways of respecting traditions but challenging discrimination based on family background or religious tradition within a community. The choices that people make about who they establish relationships with in terms of marriage, business networks, and co-celebrants of religious worship are their own. Where intervention may be of benefit to all Hindu communities is to support the creation of unity where appropriate across castes, sects and traditions.
Young people

In response to the online survey there was a fairly even split of opinion as to whether young people played a full part within Hindu communities. This is true regardless of age of the respondent. As noted above there has been considerable change in attitudes and behaviours between generations and focus group participants pointed to the importance of improving the ways in which young people were engaged in work within Hindu community organisations.

Organisations such as Hindu Youth UK are members of the Hindu Forum of Britain and their activities to engage more young people from Hindu backgrounds with Hindu religious traditions has been noted above. There were calls from other young people for more efforts of this type;

Now that I am at university I feel more involved with Hinduism for the first time as I joined the ‘Hindu Society’. This should be an option from a younger age

Leicester young people’s focus group

There were calls from focus group participants for those who are currently leading organisations to involve young people more in meaningful decision-making positions

One is this whole thing about accountability because, if you look at the youth, I think the key issue is: there is a reluctance by some of elders to let go completely and it’s almost like, you know, ‘We’ll still need to control a bit of it. You can organise this or you can do that.’

Leicester young people’s focus group
Youths are struggling in a way because they want to do something; they haven’t got enough funds or need funds. You go to the person who has got the funds and they don’t trust them. They say, ‘Why should we give you the funds? We’re struggling ourselves to get the funds. How can we give it to you?’ Right? So, I mean, everybody says youths are the future of the country, right? But there’s nothing, no resources, for them to progress in that direction.

*Leicester focus group participant*

I think in our community especially - the Punjabi community - the main issue at the moment is recruiting young blood, isn’t it? Who still identify with being Hindus and will take up posts within our community organisations first, before we can see... I think we’re struggling to do that especially in our [community] … you can’t get enough youths to feel really mobilised enough to come into it and take part.

*Leicester 1*

There was also worry expressed that many young people were not engaged in religious activity of any kind. Those that were religious felt that this is a problem, as it did not enable the young people to benefit from spiritual leadership;

There’s an assumption generally that, actually, youth belong to a sect or youth belong to a mandir. The reality is, I believe, that sixty percent of the youth don’t belong anywhere. They belong to their families and their friends. That’s it. So, actually, a large percentage of Hindu youth don’t have a spiritual leader for sure, but they might have social, cultural, political role models-

*Leicester focus group participant*

The younger generation who are born here they don’t know anything different, you know, they are... Their friends are part of the whole community and they [motivate] around that and I think they have benefitted, I think, as a result of that as well. And it’s a positive move

*Leicester focus group participant*

There was a call for there to be more opportunities for young and older people to engage in a dialogue in order to improve understanding and work together for the benefit of their communities;

I think there is, certainly, a lack of communication between the younger generation and the older generation especially if the older generation are grandparents and if they aren’t able to communicate in English. Young children have got a life of their own. They know what they want and it’s not the same, it’s not on a part with what the older generation want.

*Manchester focus group participant*

The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies undertook a major piece of research in 2002 that surveyed over five hundred young people who had attended a Hindu youth festival, they found;

Overall, this group of Hindu youth were clear about their aspirations and personal religious practices, e.g. prayer and visiting temples . . . However, there were areas where uncertainty was high, e.g. social and personal issues. It was also felt that there is a significant lack of knowledge about basic Hindu concepts and practices. Although Hindu youth feel a strong personal sense of community, they also feel Hindus need to work together more in order to gain greater recognition in British society and better resources for their own community.

*Hindu Youth Survey 2001 (OCHS 2002)*
The young people who participated in this research project were keen to engage more with Hindu ideas, beliefs and practices. They were also keen to work with other members of their communities - though in ways which were more suited to their needs, for example through using sporting activities, discussions about their faith and social issues, as well as engagement with other communities. Using this existing energy and the insights that young people can bring is a key task in improving understanding about Hindu beliefs and cohesion within Hindu communities. 

**Efforts to establish projects that enable intergenerational contact, opportunities to learn from each other, and that build the capacity of community organisations to engage young people more fully in decision-making would be useful contributions to community development.**

### Older people

Older people from Hindu communities are well respected in their communities (88% of survey respondents agreed with this statement) and many of those that were in leadership positions in community organisations were older. Focus group participants pointed to some of the specific needs of older people that were often related to health, but also related to their confidence in public services and language barriers, though such barriers were believed to be diminishing;

I think that there’s a problem between the older generation and younger generation. Language problem. That’s why the older generation, probably, are a bit shy of going forward into the main clubs like swimming pools and gardens and all that, because of the language problem . . . because of the language problems, the older generation are a bit shy.

*Leicester focus group participant*

The older generation had that difficulty, whether it was language barriers or other barriers which I’ve come across. And that made it very difficult for the older generation to integrate and to get the best out of the system.

*Leicester focus group participant*

at one time, the elders did not speak English, so language was a barrier, but now our generation is more educated, they know the languages, these are the differences. The next generation will be more different.

*Birmingham 2*

There are resources for Asians to report hate crime. If an elder is mugged, they won’t register a complaint, there is the fear factor, and we need to set up something to link temples and community centres to deal with it. There needs to be a comfort zone for reporting hate crimes.

*London focus group participant*

As older people began to need the care and support of others the changing patterns of family life began to become more of an issue. Prior expectations that young people would look after their parents are becoming less prevalent. It was argued that elders had faced up to the reality that in this society while they would like the support of the family as carers, this was unrealistic. For some this was a source of resentment and tension between generations. Some organisations have been set up to offer support to older people by finding space for them to get together and share meals, support each other, and participate in cultural activities.

I think there are complaints about not being looked after. I think they do have expectations that their children will look after them but then, obviously, the children have obligations to their partners as well as children and obviously work commitments, so they’re moving away from their parents and,
obviously, the parents do resent that.

*Manchester focus group participant*

Traditionally living in big families, everything was sorted out in the family, now people live separate and although the network is still there its not as supportive.

*London women’s focus group*

Older people are well respected in Hindu communities but as their number grows and family structures change, *there will need to be increasing levels of support for older people.* Community organisations are well placed to develop their work with older people further, given resources and the capacity. Mainstream organisations which have until now been able to operate without taking into account the needs of older people from Hindu backgrounds will need support in offering appropriate services to older people; sharing good practice will be useful contribution to supporting older people.

**Women**

There is a great deal of existing research literature that has focused on the experiences of Asian women in Britain and highlighted some of the real challenges that have faced a minority of women from these communities over recent times (Wilson, 2006). Given this understanding it was heartening to hear so many positive stories of women’s engagement in Hindu communities and concern in each focus group discussion to improve the engagement of women and recognise their role in community development.

*Figure 22 – Response to Online Survey Question – ‘Men and women are treated equally in Hindu communities’*
Online survey responses showed that 58% of the women who responded felt that men and women were not yet treated equally within Hindu communities.

**Figure 23 – Response to Online Survey Question – ‘Men and women are treated equally in Hindu communities’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>17.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly agree</td>
<td>54.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely disagree</td>
<td>3.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men’s responses were different - only 28% noted that men and women were not treated equally. Focus group participants were keen to highlight that Hindu beliefs held a central role for women as upholders of the family and of traditions. In terms of involvement in decision-making positions in community organisations, women were beginning to become more involved and were leading a number of organisations;

Culturally [the community] hasn’t empowered women, but we are seeing more women coming out. They are being empowered but its whether they want to take that responsibility? Yes things are happening, but it takes time. The Hindu Council of Birmingham has a woman chair.

*Birmingham focus group participant*

My experience has been both good and bad. When I was first introduced to Hindu leaders, they were all men, I was shocked, but they were very positive to me; most organisations are ruled by men anyway.

*London women’s focus group participant*

Leaders need support. Women take control. It is a man’s world but they need women to take control. In my group we are trying to get women to take control. Trying to engage more women to support the men leaders to get things done.

*London women’s focus group participant*
Participants were keen to highlight that the way in which women were engaged in leading the Hindu community should be seen as a signal of the way in which it hopes to engage with other communities. Opportunities for Hindu women to get together and discuss issues and support each other were seen as an important step in creating greater involvement for women;

The more women like this group come together, the better it’ll be.
*London women’s focus group*

Making Hindu communities realise that men and women are equal and therefore should be treated equally. How will England treat Hindus equally if Hindus themselves aren’t treating each other equally?
*Online survey written response*

There were issues that participants raised about the lives of women from Hindu communities

I can speak on behalf of myself and I haven’t, personally, experienced anything like that at home or anywhere. But I have seen other Hindu women going to... Like, I don’t know, family pressures like mother-in-law doesn’t allow the daughter-in-law to do certain things because she’s a woman - only because she’s... it’s been passed on from generation. Things like that, but I don’t... Socially, I think it’s changing now
*Leicester young people’s focus group*

I’ve got two girls and when they were born - the second one was born - I had family members saying . . . ‘It’s a shame isn’t it? Did you not want a boy?’ Can you believe it? Could not believe it! What can you say to that? When you’ve got somebody who’s not saying, ‘Congratulations’
*Leicester focus group participant*

Youth now are trying to grow up so quickly. We [Hindu women] have the highest educational standards in the UK; women are threatening the situation of men in our community. E.g. girls are having problems finding suitable partners, educational standards are lacking in opposite sex.
*London women’s focus group participant*

Overall participants who recognised inequalities were positive about the possibilities for change

I think that period is, sort of, going away with education. The younger generation, they’ve been educated more and that trend is, sort of, going away
*Leicester young people’s focus group*

It’s also about the age, because I think a lot of the younger girls from the Hindu religion, I think they, probably, would challenge. So, if anyone said, ‘Right, you can’t do this,’ they’d ask why. ‘Tell me why,’ you know, they will challenge.
*Leicester young people’s focus group*

Gender inequalities operate across British society. They have a particular frame of reference in Hindu communities. Participants were positive that inequalities were declining and that there were projects and initiatives that had had some impact on attitudes and behaviours. *It would be a useful contribution to community development to engage more women in leadership positions and provide opportunities for women to define the issues that they would like to tackle with their community.*
People with disabilities

There is not a great deal of extant research on the experiences of people with disabilities from Hindu communities. This is true across all minority ethnic communities and has been a source of concern for organisations such as the Disability Rights Commission (DRC 2004) who have initiated some action to discover more. 76 597 Hindu respondents to the Census (2001) declared that they had a long term limiting illness or disability. As a proportion of the Hindu population (age-standardised) this is about average in comparison to other religious groups.

The online survey showed that over a quarter of the respondents (27%) did not believe that people with disabilities were treated fairly within Hindu communities. The focus group research did not produce much data that referred to people with disabilities and this is an area in which more research would be welcome.

Though there is little work undertaken specifically on people with disabilities from Hindu communities, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned some research that highlighted the experiences of young people with disabilities from South Asian communities (Hussain et al., 2002). They concluded;

There was a general sense that the values of the South Asian community living in the UK were more supportive of disabled people than those held in their parents’ countries of origin. Young disabled people felt they were respected more as impaired people in Britain than in South Asian countries. . . Disability was a powerful influence on how disabled young South Asian people saw themselves but so was racism and the low expectations of their parents and community. Young people had to deal with negative views of disability, both from their family and the wider society. This suggests people with impairments share a great deal beyond ethnicity.

A respondent to the online survey pointed out how they felt excluded from the Hindu community due to their disability;

I am a deaf Hindu person, and find it very hard to integrate into our culture as no one understands my deaf culture, or knows how to communicate with me. Because of English understanding of disabilities I am treated better than within Hindu culture, I think we need to modernise the way we think

Online survey written response

Further research and activity to engage people with disabilities from Hindu backgrounds is necessary. Hindu communities could be a major resource of support for people with disabilities and people with disabilities’ contribution to Hindu communities could be enhanced so that the entire community could benefit.

LGBT communities

Part of the rapid changes to British society over recent years has been the increased visibility and contribution of same-gender loving people to communities. It often proves difficult for faith-based communities to work out their attitudes to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered members of their communities. The comments on LGBT people in the focus group showed that this was an issue about which there was little consensus and that there is an invisibility of LGBT people from discussions about Hindu communities

It is happening but not openly, it isn’t exposed. People are more accepting about it but it won’t be that visible. It is more of a western thing to be gay. It is to do with identity, they lack identity, it is the
insecurity of their identity that causes lack of identity.

_Birmingham focus group participant_

The same issue did come up and everyone said yes it is more acceptable. We are seeing this as a third gender, it is being marketed as an Asian gay night, yes it is more acceptable. But with the older community, it is not open.

_Birmingham focus group participant_

There are a lot of issues that you wouldn’t be able to mention in our community e.g. homosexuality is taboo. There is a substantial gay community in our community but is not discussed and not accepted

_London women’s focus group_

I am concerned about the negative way many Hindus treat their LGBT brethren

_Online survey written response_

Participants expressed their belief that Hinduism is a very tolerant and accepting set of beliefs. LGBT communities present a challenge to faith-based communities of the extent of their tolerance and understanding. Initiatives that helped to encourage discussion about the role of LGBT people in Hindu communities would help to enable greater understanding and recognise the existence and contribution of LGBT people to Hindu communities.
Building a pluralistic human rights culture

Supporting a human rights culture within Hindu communities

Human rights provide not only the ground rules in law for protecting minimum standards and negotiating conflicts of interest but also an ethical code on how individual should minimally treat their fellow citizens - for example respecting their privacy, their freedom of religion or belief, or their right to a fair hearing. They are therefore central to achieving an equal sense of belonging (p.91) Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.

Human rights are not just a legalistic instrument but form the bedrock of the ways in which we engage with each other in British society. They form the language within which we can resolve disputes and controversies. Human rights can be a powerful tool in the development of communities’ relationships with each other. By focusing on our shared humanity we can ensure that the principles of equality, diversity and cohesion are kept in balance and create relationships between communities and citizens that do not violate the dignity and respect of the individual.

Human rights discourse will be important for Hindu communities in establishing a more unified and effective voice in local, regional and national politics in Britain. It will also be important to government and its agencies to be mindful of the rights that it affords its citizens under international agreements such as the 1966 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Developing the resources, understanding and support for human rights within Hindu communities is a key task as it is for all communities and citizens in the UK.

Reassertion of commitment to human rights is an appropriate place to conclude this report since the themes that we have heard in discussions with people of Hindu backgrounds are all represented in them. Participants wished to find ways to express their identity as a religious and ethnic minority in the UK, to develop ways of passing on their traditions and values between generations, to live free from fear and intimidation, to tackle racisms, and to respond to inequalities within and between communities. In working to build a successful multi-ethnic Britain, these are principles and aspirations that are most welcome. By connecting British Hindus we can create a better society for all.
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Understanding Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religious traditions in the world. Hindus themselves call their tradition ‘sanatana dharma’, where ‘sanatana’ refers to eternal principles and ‘dharma’ refers to one’s original constitutional position that upholds one’s relationship with God. Some of the values and beliefs that Hindus share include:

**One God - different aspects:** Hindus worship One God who is manifest in different aspects as the:
1. Absolute and ultimate reality (brahman) without material form, attributes and qualities
2. Supreme-soul (paramatman) residing within the heart of every living entity as the witness to all activities
3. Supreme Personality of Godhead (bhagavan) in His eternal kingdom, refuge of all beings and reservoir of universal grace

**Reincarnation & Samsara:** The soul gives up one body and takes up another on the basis of its bodily activities. This cycle of rebirth is samsara. Liberation or moksha frees the soul from samsara.

**Gunas:** The cosmos is comprised of three qualities called gunas: sattva (goodness), rajas (passion) and tamas (ignorance), which constitute the physical, mental and spiritual realms

**The law of karma:** One enjoys pleasure or suffers pain from the fruits of one’s actions birth after birth until we realise our true spiritual nature, the immortal and divine atman.

**Yoga:** Communion with God by directing one’s thoughts, activities and speech towards Him. There are different systems of Yoga including that focus on action, devotion, knowledge and meditation as the means to attaining communion.

**Hindu rituals and practises**
- **Puja** or worship at an altar, either at home or the temple.
- **Yajna** or ‘sacrifice’ which can take the form of oblations into the sacred fire or chanting of mantras and the names of God
- **Dana** or charity to the needy and less fortunate as an expression of the ownership of God and the custodianship of humankind
- **Tapasya** or voluntary acceptance of hardships in the form of fasting, penance and regulation
- **Japa** or chanting of holy mantras and the names of God
- **Kirtana** or the congregational singing of devotional songs
- **Dhyana** or meditation as a means of withdrawing from the sensual realm to realise one’s own eternal spiritual self.
- **Yatra** or pilgrimage to holy spots like Varanasi, Haridvar, Prayag, Ayodhya, Vrindavana, Rameshvaram, Puri, Kanchi and other great centres of spiritual excellence.

**Hindu scriptures**
Hindus believe that their holy books, the Vedas are originally revealed by God and forms the basis for all Hindu philosophy. The four Vedas are the Rig, Yajuh, Sama and Atharava. There are other books that have evolved from the Vedic tradition including the Itihasas like Mahabharata (which contains the Bhagavad-gita) and Ramayana, and the Puranas like Bhagavata Purana and Shiva Purana.
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Every migrant community follows its distinct path of development in the host society. Shaped by its cultural resources and historical memories and the wider society’s perception of it, it takes advantage of such opportunities as are available to it and carves out a niche for itself. Drawn mainly from India and East Africa, British Hindus quietly concentrated on building their careers, holding their families together, forging communal ties based on traditional institutions, and giving their children the best education they could afford. Over the course of the last fifty years and three generations, they have come to occupy important positions in professional, managerial, commercial and other areas of life, and have a larger middle class than any other community except the Jews. They have also built up a reputation as a peaceful and hard working community. Since they made few noises even when confronted with injustices, they remain the politically most invisible community.

Their progress has not been without its problems. Although well represented in the House of Lords, British Hindus remain poorly represented in the House of Commons. Their presence in senior positions in trade unions and professional associations is comparatively low. Their internal divisions, some inherited from the past and others new, remain, and in some areas are growing deeper. Although their relations with other communities are excellent, those with Muslims leave much to be designed, and call for efforts on both sides.

Connecting British Hindus is the first ever systematic effort to produce a comprehensive profile of the Hindu community in Britain and is to be warmly welcomed. It is well researched, balanced, and full of much new information and many valuable insights. I very much hope that it will be widely read and acted upon. No single report can be exhaustive, and this one needs to be followed up by others exploring issues it neglects or skates over.

Bhikhu Parekh
House of Lords
Research Partners

The Hindu Forum of Britain commissioned the Runnymede Trust to conduct the *Connecting British Hindus* research project and draft this report. The project was sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Runnymede Trust

Runnymede’s mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain - a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging. Runnymede acts as a bridge-builder between various minority ethnic communities and policy-makers. They believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. They stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

www.runnymedetrust.org

Hindu Forum of Britain

The Hindu Forum of Britain (HFB) represents 270 Hindu organisations across the United Kingdom. At the core of the Forum’s activities is a strong belief in the richness and diversity of the Hindu religious expression, its philosophical value system that encompasses respect for all beings and faiths, and a cultural heritage that facilitates community cohesion and coexistence. One of the key aims of the Hindu Forum of Britain is to ensure that British Hindus are fully included in building a compassionate, safe and respectful British society driven by its common vision of diversity, equality and social cohesion. HFB has three main activities supporting its aims: Public policy and consultation; capacity building and project development; and interfaith cooperation and community cohesion.

The aims of the three Programmes are co-ordinated through different departments and projects. Each department or project is managed by a select working committee. There are currently 180 committee members serving on 12 departments and five projects of HFB.

www.hfb.org.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government

The DCLG has a powerful new remit to promote community cohesion and equality, as well as responsibility for housing, urban regeneration, planning and local government. It unites the communities and Civil Renewal functions previously undertaken by the Home Office, with responsibility for regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and local government (previously held by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). The new department brings together responsibility for equality policy, including policy on race, faith, gender and sexual orientation. DCLG will also be the sponsor department for the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR).

www.communities.gov.uk