

Why are sacred texts important in Hinduism?

Lauren: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. My name is Lauren Layfield. As a presenter on the TV and radio I get to talk about lots of different things, and in this series, we're exploring Hinduism!

In each episode, we go over the key beliefs and practices you may come across in your GCSE, and this episode is all about the role of sacred texts in Hinduism. I do need some help with this though so joining me is my wonderful co-host Vallisa Chauhan.

Vallisa: Hi Lauren! As someone who has been raised Hindu, the traditions and beliefs we've been learning about are a part of my daily life. Throughout this series, we've been bringing some of these ideas to life and this episode is no exception! Hindu scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita can really guide our beliefs and practices, so I'm here to tell you all about them.

Lauren: Well, listen I've got loads of questions for you and I'm really excited to learn more today. But before we get into those details, grab a pen, some paper, or you can use your notes app, because throughout the episode we will be highlighting key ideas that you might want to jot down.

Vallisa: And keep on listening until the end, because there'll be a quick quiz to test your knowledge!

Lauren: So, Valissa, this episode is all about sacred texts. Let's start by exploring some of these texts and understanding why they're important.

Vallisa: Of course. In Hinduism, there isn't just one single text. Instead, there's a wide range of scriptures that guide beliefs and practices in different ways. These texts include hymns, philosophical teachings, and stories that have been passed down over time. They're often grouped into two main categories; Shruti and Smriti.

Lauren: Ok so what is the difference between Shruti and Smriti texts?

Vallisa: Shruti means 'that which is heard'. These are considered the most authoritative texts and are believed to be divinely revealed, meaning the message has been communicated by a divine being. Because of this, many Shruti texts were originally passed down orally, from people telling them to each other.

They have since been written down and they include important scriptures like the Vedas and, within the Vedas, the Upanishads. We're going to explain both of those in this episode. Shruti texts form the foundation of Hindu philosophy.

Lauren: Ok and what about Smriti texts?

Vallisa: Smriti means 'that which is remembered'. These texts were created by humans, often religious teachers or scholars, and were based on moral dilemmas requiring divine guidance. Smriti texts help explain how to live morally, according to the Hindu teachings. Examples include the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which are ancient Hindu epics (poems or stories).

Lauren: So Shruti texts are messages that have been divinely revealed and are different to the Smriti texts which are created and written by humans. So Vallisa, focusing on shruti first, which texts are part of that?

Vallisa: Well Lauren, Shruti texts are considered the oldest and most authoritative Hindu scriptures. The most important of these are the four Vedas. The Vedas are ancient texts written in Sanskrit and they form the foundation of many Hindu beliefs and practices.

Lauren: Ok can you tell me more about the four Vedas?

Vallisa: Yes, I can. They are four collections of texts, known as the books of knowledge. The four Vedas are called; The Rig Veda (Knowledge of the Verses), The

Sama Veda (Knowledge of the Chants or melodies), The Yajur Veda (Knowledge of the Sacrifice), and The Atharva Veda (Knowledge of the Fire Priest).

Lauren: And what's actually in these texts?

Vallisa: Well, the Vedas include hymns, prayers, and mantras that are still used in worship today. They also contain guidance on rituals and explore ideas about Hindu philosophy.

(Sound of Vedic reading)

Lauren: And how do the Vedas apply to your daily life, Vallisa?

Vallisa: Well Lauren for me, the Vedas are really about living an ethical life, showing respect to others, supporting your family and community, and leading with kindness in everything you do.

One belief I always try to hold onto is this: no matter how difficult your day might feel, someone else could be going through something even more. So, take something as simple as smiling at a stranger on the street. Well, that small gesture could end up being the best part of their day. That's the kind of message I take from reading the Vedas.

Lauren: Thank you for sharing that. Now, earlier you mentioned Upanishads, which are contained within the Vedas. Can you tell us more?

Vallisa: Yes Lauren. Each of the four Vedas is made up of a selection of different texts, one of which is the Upanishads. So, you'll find an Upanishad in each of the four Vedas, often found at the end of each Veda, kind of like a conclusion.

Lauren: Ok and can you explain what the Upanishads say?

Vallisa: The Upanishads are ancient sacred texts which explore spiritual and philosophical ideas. They ask big, profound questions about human existence. So, for example, the Upanishads will explore concepts like Brahman - the divine

consciousness, and Atman - the inner self or soul. The Upanishads teach that Brahman is present in all beings through the Atman.

Lauren: Yeah, and we talked about Brahman and the Atman in our episode on Hindu beliefs and traditions. You can listen to that one, and any other episode in this series, over on BBC Sounds. Just search for 'Bitesize GCSE Hinduism'. So Vallisa, how might Shruti texts, like the Upanishads, like the Vedas, influence everyday life for Hindus?

Vallisa: Well, these texts can influence daily life in different ways. For example, hymns and mantras from the Vedas might be used in prayer and worship. The ideas within them can also guide ethical behaviour and encourage reflection on deeper spiritual questions.

Lauren: So, we've spoken about Shruti texts Vallisa. Can you tell me more about the Smriti texts? Smriti, if I understand it right, means 'that which is remembered'?

Vallisa: That's right Lauren. Many Hindus are familiar with the Smriti texts because they're often written in a more accessible and story-based way. One well-known example is the Bhagavad Gita, which is often translated as 'The Song of the Lord'. The Bhagavad Gita, also known as 'the Gita' is one part of the ancient epic poem the Mahabharata.

Lauren: Okay so that's the poem as a whole, and then the Gita is a section from it. But that's really popular that section, isn't it?

Vallisa: It is popular because it offers guidance on how to live morally. The text is a conversation between Krishna and the warrior Arjuna, which takes place in the battle in the Mahabharata. Through this dialogue, Krishna teaches Arjuna about duty, selflessness, and different spiritual paths, helping readers reflect on how to live a meaningful life.

Lauren: And can you tell me some of the lessons that the text covers?

Vallisa: Sure! A major theme of the Gita is Dharma, which means Duty and Righteousness. It teaches Hindus that they must fulfil their duties in life selflessly. Failure to do so is believed to have negative spiritual consequences.

Lauren: Dharma seems like quite an important concept in Hindu scripture.

Vallisa: It is. Dharma is often understood as a person's duty in life. The Gita largely focuses on dharma and devotion to Brahman. In chapter 18 verse 66 of the Gita it says, "Leave all things behind and come to me for your salvation."

Lauren: What other Hindu concepts does the Gita explore Vallisa?

Vallisa: Well, the Gita teaches that selfless action is really important, but that Hindus shouldn't let the desire for reward motivate these good actions. In Chapter 2, verse 47 of the Gita we hear, "You have a right to perform your duties, but not to the fruits of your actions."

Lauren: So, would you say that the texts are teaching you important lessons for basically living a good life?

Vallisa: They are Lauren. And the way we interpret the texts and their messages are different for everyone. For me texts like the Bhagavad Gita guide me to live with purpose and integrity, to do my duty without expecting rewards, and to stay calm and balanced through both the highs and lows of life.

Lauren: Thank you so much, **Vallisa**, for taking us through some of the sacred texts in Hinduism. I think I'm ready now for you to put me to the test with a quick quiz!

Vallisa: Great! I'll ask the questions and you can grab a pen, paper, or your notes app to write down your answers.

Lauren: And remember you can pause the episode if you need more time on this.

Vallisa: OK first question. Can you name the two categories of Hindu sacred texts?

Lauren: Yes. The two categories are Shruti and Smriti.

Vallisa: Perfect, well done! Next question. What is the name of the collection of Shruti texts often described as the books of knowledge?

Lauren: Yes, I remember this one. It is a collection of four texts known as the Vedas.

Vallisa: That's it! And final question. Can you tell me the name of the smriti text which offers guidance for Hindu ethical behaviour?

Lauren: Yes, we've quoted it a couple of times in this episode. It's the Bhagavad Gita, or the Gita.

Vallisa: That is spot on, the Gita is a really important text in Hinduism. It is part of the larger ancient epic - the Mahabharata. Well done, Lauren!

Lauren: Thank you! Thank you for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Vallisa: Next time, we're looking at exam skills.

Lauren: Yes, that's right. That is going to be really really helpful for you. And remember it's not just Religious Studies podcasts that you can listen to. There are series on subjects like English, History, and Science. All you need to do is search for Bitesize on BBC Sounds, and we'll see you next time!

Vallisa: Bye!