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**A GUIDE TO MINORITY
ETHNIC CUSTOMS,
RELIGIONS AND NAMING
SYSTEMS**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to raise awareness and promote equality of opportunity.

It is not intended to cover all minority ethnic groups, and does not claim to provide all of the answers.

Please remember you should not assume that all members of a minority ethnic group are practising religious believers, or adopt the same customs, traditions and attitudes. If you are in doubt you should make sensitive enquiries regarding preferred practice.

FESTIVALS

There are many important Hindu festivals, some are celebrated locally, some throughout the religion. Often the same festival has a number of different names.

What takes place at any particular festival depends upon the specific part of India that the worshippers' families originally come from.

- * **Diwali** (Divali, Deepvali, Deepawali): is the most widely celebrated Hindu festival. It usually occurs in October or November, varying from two to five days in length. The festival signifies the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance and goodness over evil.
- * **Holi**: the spring harvest festival takes place in March to April. It is the festival of fire and water and most of the ritual is associated with these.
- * **Janmashtami**: birth of Lord Krishna
- * **Ramnavmi**: birth of Lord Rama
- * **Navaratri**: nine nights - dancing festival
- * **Dashera** (Dussehra, Durga Puja): 10th day after Navaratri.

HINDU CASTE SYSTEM

The Hindu caste system comes from the belief that the supreme God, **Brahman**, gave different duties to each group of people as they were created. The groups are:

- * priests (**Brahmins**)

- * warriors and rulers (**Kshatriyas**)
- * farmers and merchants (**Vaishyas**)
- * unskilled workers (**Shudras**)
- * those who do the lowest work (**Pariahs** or '**Untouchables**') are called **Harijans** or **Children of God** by **Mahatma Gandhi**.

Caste is inherited by birth, one can not change or leave one's caste. Hindus in Britain may wish to observe the caste system and wish to avoid dining or inter-marriage with members of other castes.

Recently there has been a considerable relaxation in the enforcement of caste rules, especially among younger people.

There are also over 3000 **jatis**, occupational groups to which people belong.

NAMES

Hindu names usually have three parts. A first or personal name, a middle or complementary name and lastly a family or subcaste name.

Examples of typical names are as follows:

	Personal	Middle	Family
<u>Male</u>	Suresh	Kumar	Joshi
	Raj	Kumar	Verma