

## **Fun interactive ways for kids and toddlers to learn about Hindu Culture and Religion**

By a young mother Dr Sunita Patel

Namaste.

Being raised in the East-West culture clash, I was fortunate to be exposed to Hinduism through my parents' persistent efforts. They ensured I could read and write my mother tongue and my childhood was spent in temples due to their involvement in helping to run our local temple for 25 years. But if I am honest, I see parents of today are frequently met with a lack of interest from kids, due to their frustrations of trying to fit in as a British Asian and this is no fault of the kids. On the flip side, some would argue that youth lack interest because parents lack interest in understanding how to engage their kids. Either way, as parents **WE** have to take the reins, invest time and effort to ensure Hindu culture is not lost through the next generation. I am fortunate.....I found a sound balance of coping with eastern-western life as my family gave me the support and freedom to go off to University, get my PhD, do the career thing and now I find myself embarking on a new stage in life...starting a family with my husband Jay.

This new stage of life leads to new challenges like how do I instill cultural values in my children like my parents did for me?

Whilst on Maternity leave with my two children Melissa aged 3 and Jaysen 4 months old. I notice that Melissa the 3 year old sees a clothes softener advert on the television two or three times and then sings along to the tunes without me having taught her a word of the songs. I notice just by watching kids TV, she now knows how to count from 1 to 10 in Spanish. With the help of jigsaws from the Early Learning Centre she knows her alphabet and it gets me to thinking.....their learning curve is so steep at the moment. How can I maximise what they can learn between 2 to 5?

This opens my eyes and gets me thinking.....Shame on me as a mother!

**Why cant she sing the Aarti if she can sing Twinkle Twinkle little star?**

**What does she know about Hinduism and Hindu Gods?**

**Why cant she count from 1 to 10 in Gujrati, her Mother tongue?**

**Why doesn't she know her Gujrati alphabet if she knows her ABC?**

**What will her generations Mandhata Samaj stand for? Will it exist?**

I set myself a mission enlisted with the help on dadima Kanta to put this right. We sit on the floor in the living room with tamberines and manjeeras and every day we sing the aarti and the odd bhajan. I am surprised that within 2 days she is pestering me to sit down and have singing sessions with her.

I go to enlist on when she can start Gujrati classes and to my horror am told not until she is 5! What a waste, I think to myself! Learning capacity between 2-5 years of age is the steepest, helps shape core principles and personality, so why is it not tapped into? If they started at an earlier age (3+), even if the lessons are not very structured (similar to toddler playgroups) where they sit in a circle and sing songs, play dandia ras, make sathias, play indian games, make cakes at Gods' birthdays, play dress up and role play gods stories or simply jump about to Bollywood music, they would easily grasp a feel of their Indian heritage. I plan to start some workshops for toddlers to see if they take off...maybe by reading this article, others around the country will be inspired to do the same.

Over the past year, I decide to ask parents and relatives to buy Melissa a Gujrati alphabet jigsaw from India, but sadly although posters and charts are readily available (not very interactive for kids), jigsaws are very difficult to find. I don't give up there...I contact the company that makes jigsaws for the Early Learning Centre and set to work to design Gujrati alphabet and Gujrati number jigsaws myself as none are available. These are now available from [divinitydesigns.com](http://divinitydesigns.com) for £15. What a fantastic yet unusual Diwali or birthday gift this would make.

Another find I wanted to share with you is a book written by an American Sanjay Patel. He works at Pixar Animations on the likes of animated films like Toy Story, Shrek, Finding Nemo and Cars. He decided to utilise his talent to write a fun cartoon illustrated book of Hindu gods. Its fantastic! A fabulous read for the mums and dads too! Even I learnt the odd fact or two! All my nieces and nephews (born and unborn!) will get this book as a gift from me. I only hope that by writing this article, some others will buy this book and enjoy telling their kids about Hindu Gods, their exploits and what they have come to symbolise.



Title The Little Book of Hindu Deities from the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow  
Available on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) ISBN 0-452-28775-8

In conclusion, I am pleased to say that Melissa now knows 8 lines of the Aarti and is well on her way to learning her gujrati alphabet and numbers through jigsaw play. I feel it is imperative to tap into a child's learning capabilities as early as possible and when they are highly impressionable. It is well precedented and research supports the fact that kids who are bilingual or multilingual, do better at school, have a greater brain capacity and get better grades. So let's maximise our children's development, maximise their knowledge, and nourish their minds as early as possible with the wonders of Hindu culture, religion and beliefs. Our culture is a great one...a vast one.....thousands of years old.....the oldest and most ancient culture still living, predating and outliving the Egyptians and Greeks. I hope this article begins to show how illustrious the culture that we share is and how we (parents and generations to come) should be rightfully proud and rigorous in our maintenance of it...for it to die within a matter of years because we try to fit into the western way of doing things would be a travesty to say the least.

Thank you for your time and Namaste

Inspired to write this article by my kids and my loving parents

Divinity Designs also sells customised cards in Gujrati, Hindi, Sanskrit and English. For more information on cards and jigsaws, please contact Sunita on 07786 865916. Divinity Designs Stall will also be at the London Mela at Gunnersbury Park on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2007.