

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## *Hinduism Since Ancient Times*



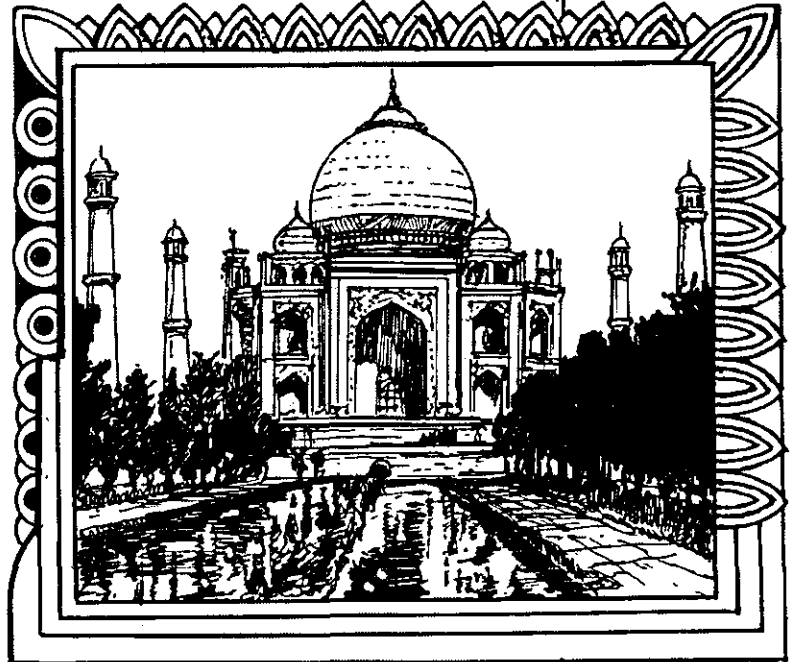
The history of Hinduism is inextricably linked to the history of India. Therefore, to understand how it developed and spread, it is necessary to look briefly at Indian history.

### *A Long Period of Invasions*

India and Hinduism changed little for hundreds of years. Then beginning in the 6th century B.C., a series of invaders made their mark on the country. First came the Persians under *King Darius I* in 522 B.C. Then came the great Macedonian Greek ruler known as *Alexander the Great*. Alexander conquered the northwest part of India in 326 B.C. and made it a part of the world's first great empire.

A few short years after Alexander and his army left, India came under the control of *Chandragupta Maurya*. Chandragupta Maurya was a prince from the northeast part of India. He established what was called the Maurya Empire, an empire that included all of India except its southern tip. Chandragupta Maurya's grandson, *Asoka*, became king in about 272 B.C. India soon changed under his rule. About 250 B.C., Asoka converted to Buddhism, and most of India then became Buddhist. Only by simplifying Hindu doctrine by printing the Vedas and other holy scriptures did Hinduism become popular again.

The Maurya Empire fell apart after Asoka's death. Other invasions followed. The *Huns* came, followed by *Muslim Arabs* about A. D. 700. The Muslims attempted to stamp out Hinduism by burning Hindu temples and persecuting the Indian people. But Hinduism survived. The *Mongols*, who became known as *Moguls* in India, invaded in the 16th century A.D. and ruled until the British



influence became dominant in the middle of the 18th century. The Moguls were also Muslims. One Mogul ruler, *Shah Jahan*, built the famous *Taj Mahal* at Agra, India, in 1654. The Taj Mahal, a tomb constructed for Jahan's wife, is the most famous example of Muslim architecture in India.

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### *Section Review:*

1. Which conqueror made India part of the world's first great empire?
2. Which king was responsible for most of India becoming Buddhist?
3. What view did the Muslims who invaded India about A. D. 700 take toward Hinduism?
4. Who built the famous Taj Mahal?

### *British Rule*

Beginning in the 15th century A.D., European nations established trading posts along India's west coast. The Portuguese were the first to arrive.

### **Words to remember:**

**King Darius I**

**Alexander the Great**

**Chandragupta Maurya**

**Asoka**

**Huns**

**Muslim Arabs**

**Moguls**

**Shah Jahan**

**Taj Mahal**

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They were followed by the Dutch, the French, and the English. In time the English, represented by a trading company known as the *British East India Company*, seized control of most of the Indian subcontinent in the 1750s. This was made possible by the weakness of the Mogul ruler and the feuds between rival Indian princes.

The British East India Company ruled India until 1858, when the British Crown took over. In many ways, India thrived under English rule. Roads, bridges, railroads, and schools were built. Agricultural methods were improved and law and order prevailed. The English also did away with such ancient Hindu customs as suttee. (Refer back to the section entitled "Funeral Customs" in Chapter Seven.)

In spite of such progress, Indians were not happy under English rule. A movement demanding self-government emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. It was led by a spiritual and political leader, named *Mobandas Karamchand Gandhi*. Gandhi came to be called *Mahatma*,

meaning "Great Soul." He encouraged non-violence as a means of obtaining Indian independence. His methods also included fasting and *boycotting* (refusing to buy) English goods. He was arrested and thrown into jail many times. But after years of struggle, his efforts paid off. In 1947, Great Britain granted India its independence.

Independence did not end India's problems. In the years leading up to it, bloody fighting between Hindus and Muslims in India's largest cities had taken place. Massacre followed massacre, and millions of people were killed. One solution to the violence was to partition (divide) India into two separate countries. Most of the subcontinent remained Hindu, but the new nation of Pakistan was established for the benefit of the Muslims.

Until 1972, Pakistan was separated into East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In that year, East Pakistan became the nation of Bangladesh.

**Words to remember:**

**British East India Company**

**Gandhi Mahatma boycotting**

In 1919, Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a leader of the Indian independence movement. He promoted non-violent resistance as a means of bringing about political change.



### Section Review:

1. Which European nation was the first to establish trading posts in India?
2. Which trading country had gained control of most of India by the 1750s?
3. What methods were used by Mohandas Gandhi to attain Indian independence from Great Britain?
4. In what way was India partitioned in 1947?
5. What was East Pakistan called after 1972?

### Hinduism Elsewhere

As was pointed out in the Overview, there are more than 700 million Hindus in the world. Most are in India, but there are also large numbers elsewhere. Many Hindus have migrated to eastern Africa and to such countries as Nepal, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. There are also Hindus in Guyana and Surinam in Latin America, and Bali and Fiji in Indonesia. A few have moved to Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States.

In America, many Hindus belong to a sect called the *Hare Krishna* movement. *Hare* means "God who forgives your wrongdoings." Members of this sect worship Krishna, one of the forms of the god Rama. The full name of the group is

the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It was founded in 1966 by *Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*. At first the Hare Krishnas



were looked upon as nothing more than a hippie cult. In time, however, it was grudgingly accepted as a form of Hinduism by more orthodox Hindus.

### Section Review:

1. Name several countries to which Hinduism has spread.
2. Who are the Hare Krishnas?

Most Hindus live in India. In America, a Hindu sect that has not been readily accepted by orthodox Hindus is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness commonly known as "the Hare Krishnas."

### For Further Thought:

1. Research and write a two-page report on the life of Mohandas Gandhi.
2. How were the methods used by Dr. Martin Luther King during the American civil rights movement of the 1960s similar to those preached by Gandhi?
3. Read about the Hare Krishnas in an encyclopedia or some other source. Why do you think people at first saw them more as a hippie group rather than as a religious movement?
4. Make a time line of Indian history from the invasion of the Persians in ancient times up through the period of British rule.
5. In this chapter, you read about the violence that took place between Hindus and Muslims before and after India was granted independence by Great Britain. In your opinion, are wars and massacres committed in the name of religion ever justified? Why or why not?

### Words to remember:

**Hare Krishna**  
**Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada**