

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginnings



Unlike such religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, Hinduism does not have a recognized “founder.” There is no Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, or Buddha in Hindu history. Instead, Hinduism evolved over many hundreds of years. When it finally materialized, it was a mixture of the religious beliefs of India’s earliest civilization with those of northern invaders who entered the country about 1700 B.C.

Civilization in the Indus Valley

You have perhaps read that humans first established civilized communities about 6,000 years ago. Do you know what it means to become “civilized”? Simply put, it means that people stopped being hunters and gatherers after they “discovered” agriculture and learned to domesticate animals. When people learned to grow their own food, they could then settle down and stay in one place. This in turn led to the development of communal life, along with its accompanying laws, government, and culture.

One of the earliest civilizations sprang up in India. Sometime around 4000 B.C., dark-skinned peoples known as the *Dravidians* and the *Nagas* established a well-developed culture in the Indus River Valley. Archaeologists have unearthed two of their magnificent cities—*Mohenjo-Daro* and *Harappa*. Both could boast of solid brick houses and shops several stories high that sat on wide, well-kept streets. Many of these houses and shops had running water with bathrooms that emptied into modern-like sewage systems. The same water system also served a Great Bath

that featured a large, asphalt-lined bathing pool. The civilization that grew up in the Indus Valley may have been superior to the civilizations that appeared about the same time in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

So, you might ask, what does all of this have to do with the development of Hinduism? Plenty. *Artifacts* (objects people have left behind) found at the ruins of both Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa include clay statues of gods and goddesses that Hindus worship today. These finds indicate that Hinduism had its roots in the civilization that sprang up in the Indus River Valley more than 6,000 years ago.

Section Review:

1. What distinguishes a civilized society from one that is uncivilized?
2. Around which river valley did civilization develop in India?
3. What two ancient Indian cities have been unearthed by archaeologists?
4. What archaeological finds link the Hindu religion to early Indian civilization?

Enter the Aryans

No one knows for certain what happened to the great Indian cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Some historians think they may have been destroyed by either floods or volcanoes. But there was another disaster that occurred sometime around 1700 B.C. (dates vary) that seemed to have much to do with their destruction. That was the invasion from the north of a light-skinned people who called themselves *Aryans*. The name derives from a word in the language of the invaders (*Sanskrit*)

Words to remember:

Dravidians
Nagas
Mohenjo-Daro
Harappa
artifacts