

# Introduction: Hinduism in Time and Space

## PREVIEW

As a phenomenon of human culture, Hinduism occupies a particular place in time and space. To begin our study of this phenomenon, it is essential to situate it temporally and spatially. We begin by considering how the concept of Hinduism arose in the modern era as a way to designate a purportedly coherent system of beliefs and practices. Since this initial construction has proven inadequate to the realities of the Hindu religious terrain, we adopt “the Hindu traditions” as a more satisfactory alternative to “Hinduism.” The phrase “Hindu traditions” calls attention to the great diversity of practices and beliefs that can be described as “Hindu.” Those traditions are deeply rooted in history and have flourished almost exclusively on the Indian Subcontinent within a rich cultural and religious matrix.

**As strange as** it may seem, most Hindus do not think of themselves as practicing a religion called Hinduism. Only within the last two centuries has it even been possible for them to think in this way. And although that possibility now exists, many Hindus—if they even think of themselves *as* Hindus—do not regard “Hinduism” as their “religion.” This irony relates directly to the history of the concept of Hinduism. A brief overview of this history will help prepare us for our study of the diverse array of phenomena that we include in that concept. Appreciating the origin of the idea of Hinduism and the context in which Hinduism thrives will allow us to approach our subject in the proper frame of mind, with expectations appropriate for a cultural reality that is considerably different from that to which most Westerners are accustomed.

## The Temporal Context

Through most of the millennia of its history, the religion we know today as Hinduism has not been called by that name. The word *Hinduism* (or *Hindooism*, as it was first spelled) did not exist until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when it began to appear sporadically in the discourse of the British missionaries and administrators who occupied colonial India.<sup>1</sup> Within a few decades of its creation, *Hinduism* became more widely accepted by both Westerners and Indians. But before the word was invented, there was no specific name in any language to refer to the religion of the Hindus. The indigenous phrase that most closely approximates what is now called Hinduism is *sanātana dharma*, a Sanskrit expression that might be translated as “eternal

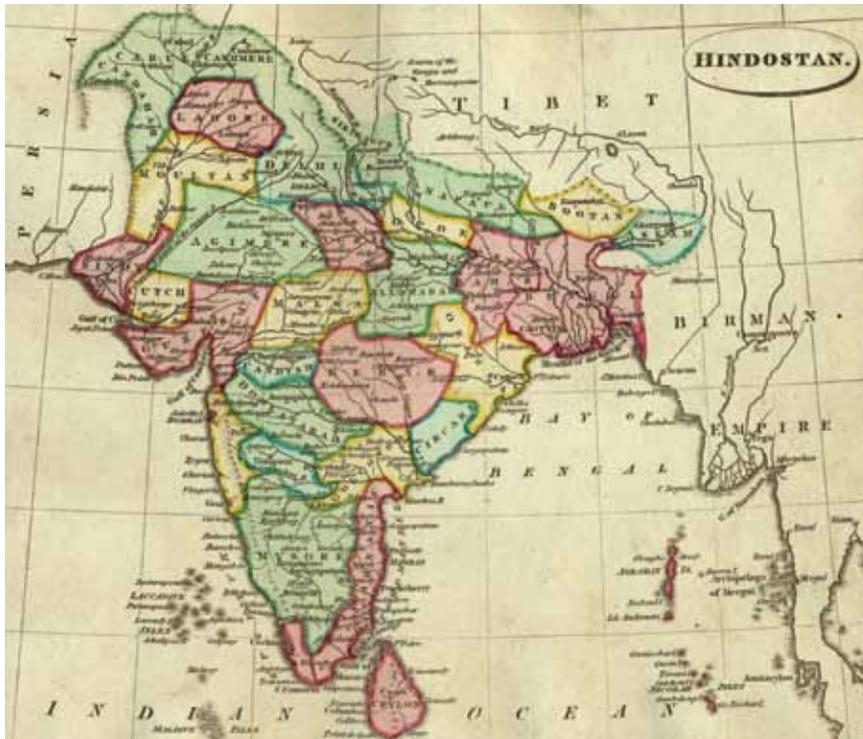
religion.” But this translation is not completely satisfying because the word *religion* as used in the West is not an adequate equivalent to the Indian concept of *dharma*. The indigenous languages of India, in fact, lack a word equivalent to the English word *religion*.

## The Hindus

Although there was no special term for their religion, there had long been people known as Hindus. *Hindū* was an Old Persian word that initially appeared around the twelfth century C.E. to identify the inhabitants of the area flanking the Indus River, which was called the **Sindhu** in Sanskrit. This region, in what was once northwestern India and is now Pakistan, was known as **Hindustan**.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, *Hindustan* became a common name for all of northern India and, later, for India and the subcontinent

as a whole (figure Intro.2). Thus, in its original sense, *Hindu* had no religious connotations at all; it meant nothing more than what we today would mean by “Indian.”

Sometime between 1200 and 1500 C.E., however, the word *Hindu* also came to refer to a person with a particular religious orientation.<sup>3</sup> It was almost always used to identify those inhabitants of India who were not Muslims. Even so, the meaning of *Hindu* was ambiguous. It was sometimes used to indicate religious identity, sometimes geographical identity, and sometimes both. Yet even when intended in a religious way, the specific meaning of the term was far from clear. Because it was primarily a way to distinguish non-Muslim Indians from Muslims, what it meant to be “Hindu” was not readily apparent, even to those who might be identified in that way. There was no central core of teachings, scriptures, creeds, communities, or



**Fig. Intro.1**  
Indian Subcontinent  
in the nineteenth century.

This early nineteenth-century map displays the political divisions of what was then called Hindustan. Today, this region comprises the modern nations of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. (Photo courtesy of [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hindustan\\_1814.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hindustan_1814.jpg).)

practices that could be specified as forming the essence of Hindu identity. As other terms—particularly the word *Indian*—came to designate geographical identity, *Hindu* came to be an exclusively religious designation. But the specific meaning of *Hindu* as a religious identity remained no clearer.

### The Invention of “Hinduism”

As Western cultures developed greater interest in India—especially as the British sought control of India’s commerce beginning in the eighteenth century—understanding the Hindus and their religion became more important to the West. Both Western administrators and Christian missionaries considered it necessary to their work to describe and comprehend this religion. By the nineteenth century, efforts were under way to ascertain the essential nature of Hindu beliefs and practices. The British relied on their own observations, as well as information provided to them by upper-caste Hindus, to shape their conception of this “religion.” Lacking a suitable indigenous word, they began to refer to *Hinduism*, an English neologism formed by adding the anglicized Greek suffix *-ism* to the Persian *Hindū*. Hinduism thus joined Judaism as one of the only world religions named for a place.

The British tended to think of this “Hinduism” in much the same manner as they thought of their own religion. Christianity, especially its Protestant manifestation, thus served as the largely unconscious prototype for the way they imagined Hinduism. From the British point of view, a religion was fundamentally a unified set of doctrines pertaining to belief in god and a code of behavior based on this belief. Religions had sacred books on which these doctrines were founded and creeds in which they were set out

systematically. A clearly identifiable clergy was responsible for interpreting these texts to the laity, who gathered at temples for meetings to understand and express their faith.

With these assumptions, the British and other Europeans involved in studying and managing colonial India created a conception of Hinduism that met their expectations. They identified a system of thought that constituted what they took to be the core of Hinduism. That essential philosophy was **Advaita Vedanta**, a highly influential system formulated by the great south Indian **pandit Adi Shankaracharya** (see chapter 8). They identified a sacred set of texts, the *Vedas*, which they took to be the scriptural source of this philosophy. And they identified an ecclesiastical hierarchy, the **Brahmins**, members of the priestly and intellectual caste, whom the Europeans considered Hinduism’s religious authorities and interpreters.

### The Hindu Adoption of “Hinduism”

Once created, this conception became widely influential, governing the way not only Westerners but also many Hindus thought about Indian religion. Indian adoption of the idea of Hinduism meant that, to some degree, Hindus relied on Europeans to tell them what Hinduism was. For instance, before the eighteenth century, only a small number of upper-caste Indians had much acquaintance with the Vedas, the Upanishads, or even the Bhagavad Gita, some of the most important texts in Indian history. But when these texts were translated by Europeans and heralded as Hindu scripture, other upper-caste Hindus became aware of these books for the first time and accepted them as the sacred sources of their religion. With these texts in hand, they began to take pride in the historically ancient but newly

identified Hinduism—at least as they believed these books presented it.

In an important step toward solidifying the concept, some Hindus began to present to Western audiences an interpretation of Hinduism that was substantially informed by the British construction. The foremost symbol of this act was the renowned appearance of Swami **Vivekananda** at the 1893 **World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago**.<sup>4</sup> In his keynote address to this assembly of representatives of religions from around the world, Vivekananda declared Hinduism to be “the mother of religions,” the faith that taught universal tolerance and acceptance to the world. Following his warmly received speech, Vivekananda subsequently toured the United States and England, teaching a particular Hindu tradition—Advaita Vedanta—as the authentic form of Hinduism. Advaita Vedanta fit the Western expectation of a religion very well: it was a systematic exposition of ideas about the one god. Vivekananda was so successful that many Westerners—as well as Hindus—accepted his interpretation as the expression of genuine Hinduism. Vivekananda's view did in fact describe a genuine form of Hinduism, but in presenting it as the *essence* of Hinduism he neglected the great diversity of Hinduism, omitting those aspects of the ancient traditions that Western audiences might have found less attractive. Nevertheless, Hindu intellectuals who adopted this negotiated, homogenized conception of Hinduism became its global representatives, teaching to the West a version of indigenous Indian religion that was substantially articulated by Westerners.

### The Problems with “Hinduism”

What we have begun increasingly to appreciate is how impoverished—and distorted—this

original conception is when compared to the vast empirical reality of the Hindu religious terrain. As we begin our study of this territory, it is vital for us to examine the ways in which this initial construction of Hinduism skews the actual religious experience of Hindus. Exploring the distortions of this construct will not only provide us with key information about the history of Hinduism in the modern era; it will also help dispel problematic expectations we ourselves may have as we approach a religious complex that defies our expectations at virtually every turn.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Western construction of Hinduism was the way it imagined the Hindu traditions as a system of beliefs or doctrines about god. Conceiving of religion in this manner was a legacy of the Enlightenment, which was reaching its zenith among European intellectuals near the time the British were first colonizing India. So influential was this view that even today many still define religion as a set of beliefs about god. Whether or not this characterization is suitable for other religious traditions, it is clearly inappropriate for defining Hinduism. This is not to suggest that the Hindu traditions *lack* beliefs about god. On the contrary, Hindus believe almost everything that is possible to believe about the ultimate reality. From various points of view, Hinduism contains elements of **monotheism**, **polytheism**, **henotheism**, **animism**, **pantheism**, **panentheism**, **monism**, and even **atheism**. But as this list suggests, these beliefs do not comprise a uniform set or integrated system that can be defined as the essence or foundation of Hinduism. An individual Hindu or a particular Hindu community may hold a reasonably coherent set of views about the divine, but no such system or coherence characterizes the entirety of the Hindu religious structure. There

are, therefore, no creeds or statements of faith to which all Hindus—or even most—would subscribe.<sup>5</sup> It is hard to overstate the tremendous range of ideas and practices embraced by the Hindu traditions. One scholar calls India a “veritable laboratory of religion: everything imaginable seems to have been tried out, and nothing ever completely rejected.”<sup>6</sup> There is probably no theological conception or religious observance that cannot be found in Hinduism. Traditions and ideas are preserved and incorporated into the larger whole without an attempt to make the various parts consistent with one another. Hinduism is highly individualistic and encourages its practitioners to structure their spiritual lives in ways that best suit their individual needs and temperaments.

It would be misleading to think, furthermore, that the Hindu traditions are essentially concerned with belief and doctrine. While belief and doctrine have been extremely important for practitioners of the **Abrahamic traditions**, this is not the case with the traditions originating in India. Hindus not only *believe* many different and sometimes contradictory things, but the significance they assign to belief itself also varies widely. For some Hindus, belief is an impediment to the complete realization of life’s ultimate reality. For these Hindus, beliefs must be transcended altogether if one is to attain the highest level of spiritual awareness.

Nor do the Hindu traditions have a sacred, canonical scripture that functions like the Tanakh, the New Testament, or the Qur’an of the Abrahamic religions. True, there are sacred texts in Hinduism—indeed, more texts than one finds in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But these books are not read by the vast majority of Hindus, and those for whom these texts are meaningful—mainly the Brahmins—do not function principally as interpreters for the

laity. The Brahmins often serve as priests and ritual specialists, particularly in temples. They are chiefly concerned with the sacred texts for the purpose of ceremonial recitation, not exegesis and explanation. Furthermore, Brahmins are not the only ones who serve as priests. In homes, the center of religious life for most Hindus, the senior woman of the family usually functions as *pujari*, or ritual leader.

Since the Hindu traditions lack a single scripture or ecclesiastical hierarchy, admit no single creed, and embrace an immense array of beliefs and practices in an unsystematic fashion, discovering an essence of Hinduism—something that characterizes all Hindus—seems well-nigh impossible. Novelist E. M. Forster said it well: “The fissures in the Indian soil are infinite: Hinduism, so solid from a distance, is riven into sects and clans, which radiate and join, and change their names according to the aspect from which they are approached.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet Hinduism’s conservatism and pluralism have produced (or perhaps have been produced *by*) an attitude that is possibly as close to a characteristic Hindu quality as we may find. That outlook is the belief that there are many *valid* viewpoints, each partially correct. A justly famous passage from the oldest Hindu scripture makes this point: “The wise speak of what is One in many ways,” states the *Rig-Veda*.<sup>8</sup> Hindu traditions, at their best, honor all seekers after this truth and recognize that different persons require different ways of relating to and thinking about ultimate reality.

## Hinduism Today

Today in India, the concept of Hinduism is increasingly accepted by the communities who were identified religiously by the West as Hindus. In the last several decades, there has been

an increase in the use of the word *Hindūtvā*, which translates as “Hinduness.” We might call this a rise in Hindu consciousness, and it has been accompanied by an upsurge of participation in Hindu festivals, rituals, and pilgrimage.

But the idea of Hinduism by no means enjoys universal acceptance in India. Rather than regarding themselves as practicing Hinduism, most Hindus consider themselves as devotees of a particular god or goddess, such as **Shiva**, **Vishnu**, or **Durga**, or as members of a community dedicated to a specific deity. They are more likely to classify themselves as “Shaivite” (a follower of Shiva), “Vaishnavite” (a follower of Vishnu), or “Shakta” (a follower of Devi, the goddess). Devotion to a particular god rather than to a religion called “Hinduism” is symbolized by forehead markings called *tilaks*, which are frequently one of the first things Westerners think of when they hear the word *Hindu* (box Intro.1; figure Intro.2). Yet thinking of Hinduism as comprising these many religions is potentially misleading if we conceive of these forms of devotion as discrete entities. Vaishnavites might on occasion worship the goddess or Shiva, and Shaivites might venerate the spirits of a sacred tree, Jesus Christ, or a Muslim saint. As these examples indicate, on the everyday level of practice, many Hindus are simply not much concerned about precisely defining their religious identity.

Although a case can be made for retaining *Hinduism* as an umbrella term for these religions and philosophies, throughout this book we shall prefer the expression “Hindu traditions.” By this phrase we mean the complete array of religious communities, systems of belief, spiritualities, mores, ethics, and social structures related to and constituent of the historical complex that has come to be known as Hinduism. The term *Hinduism* may be fine as long as its

problematical character is kept in mind. But “Hindu traditions” is more forthright in drawing attention to the pluralistic nature of Hindu practices and serves to disrupt any temptation to assume that Hindus share a core set of doctrines and practices.

## The Spatial Context

While the salient features of some religious traditions can be grasped with little or no reference to their geographical contours, such is not the case with the Hindu traditions. Just as the study of Judaism requires appreciation of the land of Palestine and its meaning for Jews, an adequate understanding of the Hindu traditions must include acquaintance with its South Asian context and, most especially, the land of India. The best way to acquire this familiarity, of course, is travel. Literary descriptions of India, no matter how accurate and beautifully written, simply cannot substitute for the experience of being there. The colors and forms, the sounds and textures, the tastes and smells that are vital components of the Hindu traditions simply defy language. E. M. Forster understood this when he wrote of Hinduism, “Study it for years with the best of teachers, and when you raise your head, nothing they have told you quite fits.”<sup>9</sup> But short of a journey, we can still provide some essential impressions for understanding the Hindu context.

### Where Hindus Live

One of the reasons India is so important to the Hindu traditions is that 95 percent of all Hindus live there. Most of the remaining 5 percent live in the other countries of South Asia, the areas immediately adjacent to India (figure

**Box Intro.1 SYMBOLIZING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

A *tilak* is a special marking frequently used to indicate religious identity in Hinduism. Many Hindus wear the *tilak* for worship only, but some wear it every day. Its basic function is to symbolize the “third eye,” the organ of spiritual insight. Particular markings may further symbolize the deity to whom one is especially devoted. Devotees who apply horizontal stripes across the forehead using *vibhuti*, or sacred ashes, indicate their allegiance to the god Shiva. They may also apply a dot made with sandalwood paste or *kum-kum* (colored turmeric or saffron powder) to the center of the forehead. The *tilak* for Vaishnavites, those dedicated to the worship of the god Vishnu, comprises thin vertical lines connected at the bridge of the nose in a U shape. Clay from a sacred river or sandalwood paste is used to make this design. Worshipers of Devi wear a single red dot or a vertical line made of *kum-kum*. The *tilak* is principally a religious marking that should not be confused with the *bindi*, a forehead emblem wore by women for ornamentation (see chapter 6). Although Hindus may principally identify with devotion to a specific deity, this identification does not preclude their worship of other gods.



**Fig. Intro.2 Tilaks.** These Brahmin priests wear forehead markings to indicate the deity to which they are devoted. (Photo courtesy of India Cultural Center and Temple, Eads, Tennessee.)

**Fig. Intro.3****India in the Twenty-First Century.**

The Indian Subcontinent is home to the overwhelming majority of Hindus. This map displays the current political divisions of the region, including the states of the Republic of India. (Mapping Specialists.)

Intro.3). Approximately twenty million Hindus live in Nepal, the only nation where Hinduism is the state religion. Although Indians are perhaps the most religious people on earth, the Republic of India is officially a secular nation and prides itself on being the world's largest democracy. There are about fifteen million Hindus living in the Muslim states of Pakistan and Bangladesh, which were part of India prior to its independence from Great Britain. On the island of Sri Lanka, just south of India, Hindus make up about 15 percent of the total population and number near two million. Beyond the Indian Subcontinent, smaller populations of Hindus may be found across Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Over 90 percent of the inhabitants of the Indonesian island of Bali are Hindu and practice a religious form quite different from varieties of Hinduism in other parts of the world. Immigrants from India have also established

Hindu communities in the West. At the end of the twentieth century, the Hindu population in the United States and Europe was estimated at two million, and the vast majority of these were Indian immigrants. Because the Hindu traditions lack a proselytizing impulse, they have not, as yet, taken root in a major way outside the land of their origins, unlike other major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.

Today, the term *India* is usually taken to refer to the political entity known as the Republic of India, which came into existence in 1950. But prior to that time, *India* included not only the Republic of India but also the nations now known as the republics of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Throughout most of this book, the India we shall study is the India prior to its partition into three separate states. Interestingly, although the name *India* has gained wide currency among the English-speaking population of the subcontinent, the older, indigenous term for India—*Bhārata*—is still very common.<sup>10</sup>

### Box Intro.2 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF INDIA

At present, the Republic of India lists twenty-two official languages. English, which has become a lingua franca for many Indians, is not one of them.

Assamese	Konkani	Sanskrit
Bengali	Maithili	Santali
Bodo	Malayalam	Sindhi
Dogri	Manipuri	Tamil
Gujarati	Marathi	Telugu
Hindi	Nepali	Urdu
Kannada	Oriya	
Kashmiri	Punjabi	

## People

With more than one billion people, the Republic of India is the second most populous country in the world, next to China. If current trends continue, India will surpass China by 2030.<sup>11</sup> Indians derive from a host of racial and ethnic stocks. Accordingly, there is no standard Indian appearance. Indians manifest many different colors of skin and many different physical characteristics.

## Languages

The many languages spoken in India further compound and complicate this cultural richness. According to the government of the Republic of India, there are twenty-two official languages with at least one million native speakers each (box Intro.2). In addition, there are hundreds of dialects, which raise the count to an estimated 850 languages in daily use. These languages, furthermore, do not all derive from the same language groups.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, basic communication between Indians from different regions is often difficult at best. Increasingly, English is often used as a lingua franca among educated Indians.

## Religions

When it comes to religion, the Republic of India is one of the most pluralistic of all places in the world. Besides the Hindus, who currently comprise about 80 percent of the population, Indians profess a wide variety of religious traditions and practices. Each of these non-Hindu traditions has a historical relationship with Hinduism. Sometimes that relationship has involved friction and conflict; sometimes it has been one of competition; sometimes it has been a relationship of mutual enrichment.

Muslims make up about 13 percent of the Indian population. The Republic of India has the world's third-largest Muslim population, next to Indonesia and Pakistan. In many ways, Islam is diametrically opposed to Hinduism theologically, and this difference has been the source of much conflict between practitioners of those religions. Most Muslims live in Northern India. When we study modern Hinduism, we shall explore the relationship between Hinduism and Islam in greater detail (chapter 12).

Concentrated in the region known as the **Punjab, Sikhism** is a religious tradition that



**Fig. Intro.4 Tomb of Jesus.** Some believe this tomb in Kashmir is that of Jesus of Nazareth. (CREDIT LINE TO COME CREDIT LINE TO COME CREDIT LINE TO COME.)

brings together elements of both Hinduism and Islam. Founded in the fifteenth century in an area that has seen a great deal of Hindu-Muslim conflict, Sikhism initially sought to reduce those frictions. Today, Sikhs constitute about 2 percent of the Indian population.<sup>13</sup>

Many are unaware that Christianity is a tradition long established in India, especially in the southern part of the subcontinent. According to legend, the Christian faith was brought to India by “Doubting” Thomas, one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. Thomas was martyred and buried near the city of Chennai. Other legends suggest that Jesus himself studied in India with Buddhists and Hindu sages before his public ministry in Palestine; after his crucifixion (which he survived, according to some accounts), Jesus returned to India with his mother, Mary, and died there. There is even a tomb in Kashmir reputed to be that of the Christian messiah (figure Intro.4). Presently, Christians comprise about 2 percent of the total Indian population.

Although founded in India, **Buddhism** has only a small following there today (figure Intro.5). Buddhism arose during a time

of intense religious ferment in the middle of the first millennium B.C.E., the same cultural upheaval that precipitated the formation of the classical Hindu traditions and Jainism (chapter 4). In the late ancient and early medieval periods of Indian history, Buddhism flourished and even threatened to eclipse Hinduism as the dominant religion of the country. But in the late medieval period, Buddhism’s following on the subcontinent was brought nearly to the point of extinction. Although Indian Buddhists number around only three or four million today, there has long been a close relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism, such that distinguishing the two is not always easy. The two traditions share common ideas and practices. Many Bud-



**Fig. Intro.5 The Buddha.** This image from the Gupta period (fifth century C.E.), now on display at the Sarnath Museum, recalls the important role played by Buddhism in the religious history of South Asia. (Photo courtesy of Creative Commons, Tevaprapas.)

dhists pray to Hindu gods (although Buddhists do not consider the gods “Hindu”), and many Hindus revere the Buddha as a manifestation of god and regard Buddhism as a denomination of Hinduism.

**Jainism** is not as widely known in the West as Buddhism, but it has much in common with it—and with Hinduism. Some Hindus think of Jainism, like Buddhism, as another Hindu religion. Though small in numbers (about two million), the Jains significantly influenced Indian life in general and Hindus in particular. The Jain practice of absolute nonviolence (*ahimsā*) helped foster the customs of cow protection and vegetarianism in the Hindu traditions and had a profound effect on Mohandas Gandhi’s philosophy.

To round out this picture of religious diversity in India, let us mention the Jews and the **Parsis**, practitioners of the ancient Iranian religion known as **Zoroastrianism**. Both religious traditions developed in India as their followers fled persecution in their homelands. Zoroastrianism is based on ancient teachings very closely related to the foundations of Hinduism (see chapter 12). The Parsis began to leave for India in the eighth century C.E. to avoid Mus-

lim control in Iran. Small Jewish communities have existed in India for at least 2,500 years. India’s high toleration of religious diversity has meant that Indian Jews have suffered almost none of the anti-Semitism they have experienced in other parts of the world. There are more than thirty synagogues throughout India, although not all of them are active. Today, several hundred thousand Indians belong to the Jewish and Parsi communities.

## Conclusion

By considering the development of the idea of Hinduism and its problematic aspects, and by introducing the cultural contexts of the Hindu traditions, we are better prepared to discuss how and what these traditions came to be. We have seen that we should not too readily assume that the Hindu traditions fit Western expectations of what a religion ought to be. Most importantly, we should resist the temptation to impose a coherence and consistency on these traditions as a whole. Such a “Hinduism” would not be Hindu.

### ◆ KEY TERMS

Abrahamic traditions

animism

atheism

*Bhārata*

Brahmins

Buddhism

Durga

Hindustan

*Hindūtvā*

henotheism

Jainism

monism

monotheism

panentheism

pantheism

Parsis

pandit

polytheism

*pujari*

Punjab  
*Rig-Veda*  
*sanātana dharma*  
 Shankaracharya, Adi  
 Shiva  
 Sikhism  
 Sindhu  
*tilaks*  
 Vedas  
 Vishnu  
 Vivekananda  
 World's Parliament of Religions  
 Zoroastrianism

#### ◆ QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Explain the development of the idea of Hinduism.
2. Why is "Hinduism" a problematic concept? Why might "the Hindu traditions" be considered a more adequate alternative?
3. Why do most Hindus live in India?
4. What aspects of Indian culture may have contributed to (or been produced by) the Hindu appreciation of diversity and tolerance?

#### ◆ QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Why might persons interested in controlling others be concerned with understanding their religion?
2. Why might Hindus have lacked a specific word for their religion prior to the creation of the word *Hinduism*?
3. What is the value of determining a religion's "essence"?
4. Can a single religion embrace monotheism, polytheism, and atheism?

#### ◆ FOR FURTHER STUDY

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