

21st Century India

India was suppressed by centuries of Muslim and British foreign rule. But after independence in 1947, its founders succeeded in welding together the ancient land into a strong, united, modern nation. The Hindu religion survived intact and thrives today in the world's largest democracy.

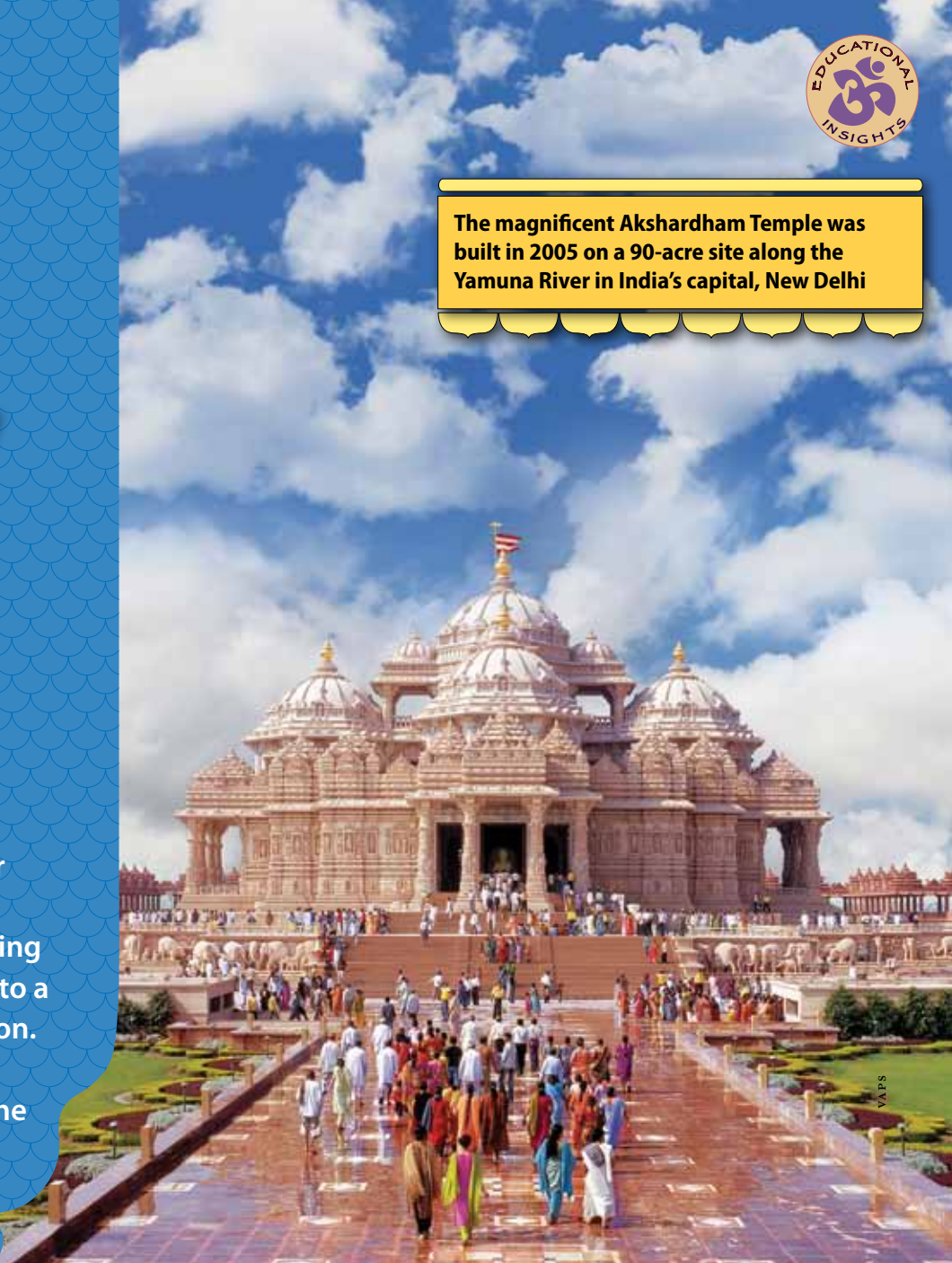
Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is the fifth and final chapter in our series on Hindu history for use in US primary and secondary schools. In these few pages, we give a broad overview of India since independence. Reporting on recent history is always a challenge since historians lack the chronological and emotional distance to impartially judge key people, trends and events. But clearly, the foremost accomplishment is that India has remained a united, democratic country since 1947. It escaped the fate of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and neighboring Pakistan, each of which split up. It is also notable that modern India continues to be

what India has always been: a deep source of wisdom and practical spirituality valued by societies around the world. This lesson was written and designed by the editorial staff of HINDUISM TODAY in collaboration with Dr. Shiva Bajpai, Professor Emeritus of History, California State University, Northridge.

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The magnificent Akshardham Temple was built in 2005 on a 90-acre site along the Yamuna River in India's capital, New Delhi



The World's Largest Democracy Is Born

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. India's independence in 1947 was accompanied by the violent Partition.
2. India is a sovereign republic and is the largest democracy in the world.
3. States were formed largely along linguistic lines.
4. India has remained a voice for freedom and peace despite border wars with Pakistan and China.



The Big Idea

India is a unified, democratic, progressive nation with a strong central government.



HINDUISM TODAY'S Teaching Standards

This column in each of the three sections presents our subject outline for India and Hinduism from 1947 to the present.

1. Identify consequences of India's independence for the Indian people and for other colonized peoples.
2. Describe difficulties in unifying a nation with many distinct political and linguistic regions.
3. Describe the Indian constitution and political system.
4. Explain the causes and results of India's military conflicts since Independence.

If this were YOU...

It is 2004. Your family is part of a clan of blacksmiths who have lived in the same village for 1,000 years. You have learned the trade. But you did well in school and can go to college and take up a new profession. You would make more money, but would have to move to the city, breaking with tradition and leaving your parents alone in their old age.

Would you stay in your village or go to the city?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: From the first elections in 1951, every Indian citizen has had the right to vote, regardless of race, color, creed, gender or social standing. In 1913, Norway was the first country to allow all its citizens to vote. France only allowed women to vote in 1946. In the US, African Americans were not guaranteed voting rights until 1965.

Ending the Colonial Era

“At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom,” proclaimed India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in India's Parliament on August 15, 1947. “A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds **utterance**.” That moment set 370 million people free from two centuries of colonial rule.

Independence was accompanied by tragedy in the **Partition**. Pakistan was split off from India to form a Muslim-majority Islamic nation of 70 million people. West Pakistan lies adjacent to Afghanistan. East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, is at the mouth of the Ganga near Burma. Fifteen million people moved from Pakistan to India or vice versa in a dramatic and often violent population exchange. Over a million Hindus and Muslims died in riots and attacks that lasted months.

Newly free India led a worldwide movement to end colonialism. By 1954, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and then Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam were freed. Independence soon came to Africa, once under near complete European domination. First Libya, in 1951, then Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and so on. By the mid-1960s nearly all of Africa was liberated.

(left to right) Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel consult in 1946 on the shape of India's new government



ADITYA ARYA ARCHIVE/KULWANT ROY

The Princely States

Newly independent India was diverse: 800 languages and dialects were spoken among 2,000 ethnic groups. Bringing unity to the ancient land after Partition was an amazing accomplishment by India's leaders.

Within India's borders were 17 provinces formerly under direct British rule and 562 virtually independent "princely states." These states were also granted independence in 1947. In theory, each could have become a new country. In practice, however, those within newly-formed Pakistan were expected to join it, and the rest to become part of India.

With Mahatma Gandhi's blessings, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel took on the job of negotiating with the princely states. Patel contacted each prince or princess and explained the options: join India or stay independent. He then offered them all the time in the world to think about it—so goes the popular story—as long as he had their decision by that evening! The rulers had little choice. They had only held power because of British backing. The citizens of their realms were expecting the same freedoms as the rest of the country. In the end, the few who resisted were compelled to join.

The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in northwest India was a different matter. Maharaja Hari Singh, the Hindu ruler of this Muslim-majority state, delayed in making a decision about which country to join until after independence. On October 22, 1947, militant Muslim tribals and Pakistani troops invaded the state. On October 26, Maharaj Singh agreed to join India. The Indian army was sent to defend Kashmir against the invaders, beginning the first of India's several indecisive wars with Pakistan.

India's Constitutional Structure

In 1947, a committee was formed to create India's constitution. It was headed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar of the Mahar caste (an "Untouchable Community"), who was one of India's foremost legal scholars. The constitutional committee carefully studied the British, US and French governments, as well as traditional Indian political systems, choosing elements they felt were suitable for modern India. They unified the country by establishing a strong central government and setting a single pattern for state and local governments. They sought to ensure social equality and justice for every citizen.

The committee's draft was debated and revised over the next two years and finally adopted on November 26, 1949. At 400 pages, it is the longest national constitution in the world, because it includes many laws that in other countries were set by their legislature or courts after a constitution was adopted.

The preamble begins: "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **sovereign, socialist, secular**, democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status



Partitioned India

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

utterance

expression, a voice to speak

partition

"divide into parts;" when capitalized, the separation of Muslim-majority Pakistan from the rest of British India

sovereign

independent

socialist

in this context: equal economic opportunity for all

secular

not based on religion; treating all religions the same under the law

and of opportunity; and to promote among them all **Fraternity** assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.”

By comparison, the US constitution fits on four large pages, setting out only the spirit of the nation and the basic structure of the federal government. Individual US states have their own constitutions. India’s constitution details the structure of government right down to the village *panchayat*, or ruling council. The powers and responsibilities of government are assigned either to the **Central Government** or to the state governments, or shared. Powers not specifically given to the states are kept by the Central Government. In contrast, in the US Constitution, powers not specifically given to the federal government are kept by the states.

At both central and state levels, India’s government follows the British parliamentary system. The president is head of state, elected by the parliament. He or she serves for five years. The position is largely ceremonial, like that of the British **monarch**.

In India, elections are held every five years. The leader of the political party that commands a majority of seats in parliament

becomes prime minister and forms a government with the approval of the president. If the party loses its majority, the “government falls” and new elections are called.

Establishing India’s States

A key power of India’s constitution permits the Central Government to merge or divide states as it sees fit. It used this power to reorganize the nation along **linguistic** lines. Areas where most of the people spoke the same language became one or more states. For example, the Tamil-speaking area of South India became Tamil Nadu. The Hindi-speaking region was split into several states. Having a single language made governing each state much easier. Today India has 28 states. It also has seven “Union Territories,” which are ruled directly by the Central Government.

International Relations

India was a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of nations. These nations, mostly of Asia, Africa and Central and South America, sided with neither the US nor the Soviet Union during the decades-long “Cold War” after World War II. Prime

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

fraternity
friendship and support within a group

Central Government
India’s term for what is called the “federal government” in the US

monarch
a royal head of state, especially a king, queen or emperor

linguistic
having to do with language

separatist
a person or group seeking to separate one territory from another, usually based on ethnicity or religion

autonomy
self government

Timeline: 1947 to 2010

1947
India gains independence from the British Empire on August 15, after a long, mostly nonviolent struggle

1950
India’s constitution goes into force on January 26, India’s Republic Day

1950s
India launches land reform to redistribute to farmers hereditary holdings of large landowners



Ravi Shankar (at right) and **George Harrison**

1960s
Sitarist Ravi Shankar’s tours in the West help popularize Indian music

1947 CE

1948
Gandhi is assassinated by a Hindu fanatic over payment of huge sums of money to Pakistan as agreed to at the time of Partition

1950
China occupies, then effectively colonizes Tibet; the Dalai Lama flees to India in 1959

1950

1954
A.L. Basham publishes *The Wonder That Was India*—still one of the best histories of early India

1960

1960s
Indian swamis begin coming to the West to teach meditation and hatha yoga



Swami Chinmayananda

1962
Border war with China causes India to modernize and strengthen its military

Minister Nehru was respected worldwide as one of NAM's strongest voices for peace and freedom.

But peace was a challenge on India's own borders. The hasty Partition left the subcontinent unstable. Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir in 1947 led to two years of open war with India. India's appeal to the UN resulted in a cease-fire. Since then, Kashmir has been divided by the "Line of Control," separating Pakistan-occupied territory from India's Kashmir. War broke out again in 1965 and also ended in stalemate. In 1989 Pakistan-backed Islamic **separatists** and infiltrators resumed violent attacks and riots. Since then, they have driven hundreds of thousands of Hindus out of Kashmir and worsened the security situation in the state.

In 1962 India lost a brief war with China over their disputed and ill-defined border in the Himalayas. The war was a deep personal shock to Nehru. He had taken at face value the Chinese government's promise not to attack, even when warned by members of NAM to not be so trusting. India was badly prepared to defend against the Chinese and had to appeal to the US for support, which was a humiliating compromise of NAM principles.

India's failure in the Chinese border war caused a complete rethinking of military strategy. Nehru's successors, especially his daughter Indira Gandhi, turned India into a major modern military power armed with missiles and nuclear weapons.

Bangladesh

Since independence, citizens in Bengali-speaking East Pakistan felt neglected by their rulers, who were mostly Urdu-speaking people based in West Pakistan. East Pakistan demanded economic and political **autonomy**. A nationalist upheaval followed. West Pakistan responded in 1971 by sending 100,000 troops to brutally put down what they regarded as an outright revolt. Civil war followed. Ten million refugees fled to India forcing India to come to East Pakistan's aid. In December, West Pakistan's forces surrendered to the Indian army. East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh, and the refugees returned.

Section 1 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. **Define:** What event in India's history is called the Partition? Why is it called the Partition?
2. **Explain:** How was Kashmir different from other states at independence? What has occurred as a result?
3. **Compare:** How does India's government differ from that of the US at the federal and state levels?
4. **Explain:** How did India reorganize its states? How did the strategy help improve state government?

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. **Analyze:** What was the Non-Aligned Movement? How was India involved in NAM?

1969

India becomes self-sufficient in food as its population reaches 500 million

1974

India explodes nuclear device in test at Pokhran

1990

300,000 Hindus flee Kashmir region as Muslim militants seek separation from India

1991

India begins economic reforms to loosen state management of its economy

1998

India develops a nuclear strike force

2010

US government report ranks India as the world's third most powerful nation

1970

1980

1990

2000

1971

East Pakistan declares independence as Bangladesh



Indira Gandhi

1984

Indira Gandhi is assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in revenge for army's attack on Sikh separatists in the Golden Temple



Bathing at Kumbha Mela

2001

World's largest religious gathering ever: Kumbha Mela with 60 million pilgrims at Prayag, the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna rivers

Building a Unified Nation

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. India is a successful democracy.
2. The Indian nation carefully managed its economy for steady growth.
3. India is a secular country, but the various religions are not treated the same under the law.
4. Pilgrimage is a popular religious practice that helps unify India.

The Big Idea

India's unity and social and economic development have made it a major world power.

Key Terms

democracy, p. 1-6
 secular, p. 1-8
 pilgrimage, p. 1-9



HINDUISM TODAY'S
TEACHING STANDARDS

5. Discuss the elements that have kept India a unified nation.
6. Examine India's political, technological, economic, social and secular developments since 1947.
7. Explain the concept of pilgrimage and how it impacts the nation.

If this were YOU...

It is April 2010, and your parents have brought you to Haridwar from New York for the Kumbha Mela. You feel odd having to take a "bath" in the freezing Ganga surrounded by tens of thousands of strangers. But as you approach the river, those around you suddenly are like family. And after the bath, you are all talking together and laughing.

What creates such feelings among strangers?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: India's constitution provides for "reservations" for members of the lower castes and tribes—historically disadvantaged people. A quarter to half of the seats in higher educational institutions and the jobs in government are set aside for these groups. Without such quotas, many would not qualify for the school or job.

Planning for Progress

Newly independent India faced a host of problems—political, military, economic, social and religious. To maintain national unity, Nehru and the other great minds who oversaw the country's early years focused on running a good government. They had two key strategies: 1) to keep India democratic by ensuring that every citizen had the opportunity to be part of the political process; 2) to modernize the nation through educational, economic and social development.

The World's Largest Democracy

In all Indian general elections, the participation of the people has been enormous. Without a doubt, the democratic system has kept the country stable and united. But political parties quickly learned to win elections by creating "voting blocs," groups of people who always vote for the same party. A party seeks to convince a group that only it can truly serve the group's interests. Unfortunately, such appeals often run along narrow religious, **ethnic**, linguistic or caste lines. Issues that could otherwise be settled in a friendly manner are kept alive and used for political and occasionally **treacherous** ends.

There remains one internal threat to the democratic order: communist-inspired local uprisings in India's eastern states running from Bihar to Andhra Pradesh. Poor and tribal people support these

Pilgrim's India



SHUTTERSTOCK

Famous Pilgrimage Destinations:

- ◆ Hindu
- ▲ Jain
- Buddhist
- Sikh

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

treacherous

having hidden and unpredictable dangers

ethnic

of a specific place, race, culture or religious origin

nationalize

government takeover of a business, such as a bank or railroad

import duty

a tax on goods brought into the country

infrastructure

the basic facilities of a nation such as roads, dams, bridges, phone systems, airports, railways

armed separatist movements because they have seen little economic improvement in their region. Local police and government forces struggle to control these militant groups.

Economic Development

During India's first decades, the economy was a mixture of state control and free enterprise. Prime Minister Nehru began a series of "five-year plans," setting economic goals for agriculture, manufacturing, etc., to be met

with government support. To prevent excessive profit-taking, the government set maximum prices for important goods. A few key industries were **nationalized**, such as banks. Heavy industries requiring large capital investment, such as steel and military arms manufacturing, were established and run by the government.

Overseas investment was regulated. India's years as a colony made her wary of letting foreign investors control any vital industry. **Import duties** were kept high, making it expensive to bring in foreign goods. India wanted to be self-sufficient and build its own economic **infrastructure** to meet the demands of its growing cities and villages.

A major issue was food. India was not producing enough to feed her ever-increasing population and had to import nearly ten million tons of food yearly from the US. The technological advancements of the

THE IMPACT TODAY

For some Indian states, such as Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, the economic activity generated by pilgrimage is a significant percent of the state's total economy.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

urban
cities and towns, in contrast to villages

virtually
almost or nearly the same as

pilgrimage
travel to a holy place for a religious purpose

labyrinth
a complex network of passageways

lore
knowledge and belief held by a group and passed on by word of mouth

“Green Revolution” resulted in India’s complete self-sufficiency in food by 1969.

India’s growth for the first 30 years was slow, but the economy was stable and **urban** unemployment low. By the 1980s and 90s, however, the world had changed. International trade and cooperation had increased. Countries with totally state-controlled economies—such as the Soviet Union and China—started having serious problems. In 1991, the Soviet Union broke up into many countries. Seeing a similar threat to its own economy, India began easing restrictions on industries and encouraging private business, free trade and foreign investment.

The results were dramatic (see chart below). India’s rate of growth went from a low 3.5% to a healthy 7.5%. Its middle class rose from less than 5% of the population in 1950 to more than 17% today. The middle class is projected to reach 40% in 2025. India has evolved into a major world power through scientific and technological advancement, development of industries and defense build-up.

Religious and Social Development

India today is 81% Hindu, 13.4% Muslim, 2.3% Christian and 1.9% Sikh. It has the third largest population of Muslims in the world—161 million, after Indonesia and Pakistan. Relations between religions are generally peaceful, especially at a personal level. However, several religious riots and attacks have occurred at great loss of life.

India’s constitution proclaims the country a secular state. Yet India does not treat all religions the same, as other secular governments do. For example, Indian state governments seized management of Hindu temples and control their income, yet they allow other religions the freedom to manage their own places of worship, including mosques and churches. The resulting oddity is that Hindu temple priests are **virtually** government employees. In addition, the laws regarding inheritance, marriage, divorce, adoption and other family issues are different for Hindus, Muslims and Christians. (For legal purposes, the term *Hindu* is defined to include Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists—all religions founded in India.) In truly secular nations, all religions follow the same laws and freely manage their own religious property. The unequal treatment of religions in India is an ongoing source of conflict. It is ironic that Hinduism, the majority religion, has fewer rights than minority faiths.

The Power of Pilgrimage

One religious practice unites India as a nation: **pilgrimage**. There are hundreds of national pilgrimage destinations across India, and thousands at the regional level. The holy city of Varanasi welcomes 100,000 pilgrims a day, and a single temple, Tirupati, hosts 50,000 and more each day. Pilgrimage to religious sites is so popular that families plan their vacations around them. In India a vacation is not only for relaxation and fun; it is also a religious experience and opportunity for cultural interaction.

Throughout Indian history, the movement of pilgrims has had significant impact on the religious and cultural unity of the country. Pilgrims create a continuous religious conversation as they travel about the land. Religious discussions form a bond among travelers and promote a sense of belonging

INDIA’S PROGRESS	1950	2010
Population (millions):	300	1,027
Life Expectancy (years):	30	61
Percent of World Income:	3.8%	6.3%
Annual Rate of Growth:	3.5%	7.5%
Living in Poverty:	50%	27%
Percent in Middle Class:	<5%	17%
Literacy Rate (adults over 15):	12%	68%
(15 to 24 years old):		82%

PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY



RAMESWARAM

The huge Rameswaram temple near the southern tip of India is a prime pilgrimage destination for Hindus of all sects. Here Lord Rama established a shrine to Siva upon Rama's successful rescue of his wife Sita in Lanka, as recorded in the *Ramayana*.

The central practice here is ritual bathing, a common practice at many pilgrimage destinations—Haridwar and Varanasi, for example. This doesn't mean bathing with soap, but immersing oneself fully clothed in a river or lake as a blessing. Ritual bathing is found in Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religions. The bath-

ing may be full immersion, sprinkling or washing hands and feet.

At Rameswaram, there is not just one ritual bath, but 22, beginning in the nearby ocean. From that salty dip, you and your fellow pilgrims walk, completely soaked, to the temple. There a temple helper leads you to a courtyard inside the entrance where he drops a bucket 20 feet into the first well, pulls it back up by a rope and pours the holy water over your head. He then leads you rapidly, sometimes running, from well to well. You lose all sense of direction as you zig-zag through the stone corridors and courtyards of this ancient, **labyrinthine** temple. Despite the wells being so close together, their waters are of different tastes and temperatures. According to temple **lore**, the water of each cleanses the pilgrim of a specific sin. Devout pilgrims hold a past transgression firmly in mind while being doused by each bucketful of water, which they believe cleanses them of that particular karma. Skeptics are present, naturally, even among pilgrims. But few depart the 22nd well without a feeling that something quite extraordinary and purifying has happened to them during those two hours.



to the country and religion. Such interactions are repeated at thousands of destinations each year.

The map on page seven shows the most important Hindu pilgrimage sites in India, as well as those significant to Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs. Prominent sites, such as Varanasi, Mathura, Ayodhya, Ujjain and Rameswaram, attract huge crowds year around. Most sites, however, are crowded with devotees only during annual festivals. For example, hundreds of thousands attend the summer festival at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha. Three huge chariots carrying the temple Deities are pulled through the streets by crowds tugging on ropes a foot in diameter. Similarly, devotees of Lord Krishna flock to the towns of Vrindavan and Mathura during Krishna Janmashtami and other major festivals.

Several pilgrimages require serious effort,

such as Amarnath Cave. It is located 12,700 feet high in the Himalayas, in Jammu and Kashmir. Every summer 400,000 pilgrims walk on a narrow, rocky trail for four or five days to reach this sacred shrine to Lord Siva.

Section 2 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. **Explain:** How did India's economy change in the 1990s? Why?
2. **Evaluate:** Is life for the average Indian better today than it was before independence? Provide several examples.
3. **Elaborate:** Why do you think family laws are different for Hindus, Christians and Muslims in India?
4. **Describe:** What do pilgrims do at Rameswaram temple? How does it affect their lives?

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. **Analyze:** How does the practice of pilgrimage help unify India's diverse peoples?

The Impact of Hindu Ideas Today

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Hindu ideas and ideals are changing the way people all over the world think and act.
2. Hindu metaphysical concepts have been well known in the West for about 200 years.
3. Yoga, meditation, ayurveda, even Indian food and movies are increasingly popular.

The Big Idea

India's profound spiritual knowledge and yoga practices influence the world.

Key Terms

hard and soft power, p. 10
 metaphysics, p. 11
 hatha yoga, p. 12
 meditation, p. 12
 holistic, p. 12



HINDUISM TODAY'S TEACHING STANDARDS

8. Define "soft" and "hard" power and apply these concepts to India.
9. Analyze the influence of Hindu metaphysics, theology, yoga and meditation in the Western world today.
10. Describe how Indian culture found its way to the West, including medicine, movies and food.

If this were YOU...

You have had a persistent cough for many months. A Western doctor has given you medicine to control the symptoms, but it won't cure the underlying illness. You go to an ayurvedic doctor, who prescribes certain healing herbs and a better diet. It is more work on your part, and it will take time for his remedy to make you well.

Do you try ayurveda or stay with your first doctor?

BUILDING BACKGROUND: In this section we discuss India's "soft power" as opposed to its "hard power." Hard power is a nation's military and/or economic strength used to impact international affairs. Soft power refers to the influence of a nation's ideas, culture and values on the way others believe, think and act.

Dharma and the Future

In our modern world, Hindu ideas have spread far and wide from their origin in India. In Chapter Four (covering 1850 to 1947), we spoke of two of these ideas: respect for all religions and political change by nonviolent methods. In 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a poll in which they asked Americans about their belief in a few "Eastern" concepts. The results showed that 24% believe in reincarnation, 23% in "yoga not just as exercise but as a spiritual practice" and 26% in "spiritual energy located in physical things like mountains, trees, crystals." This is nothing new: polls of Americans show similar numbers of believers, at least in reincarnation, as far back as the 1950s.

When did these ideas come to America? Many Native American tribes believe in reincarnation and spiritual energy located in physical things. While traveling in the American West in the 1890s, Swami Vivekananda was astonished to meet a cowboy who said he firmly believed in reincarnation. He may have learned the idea from the Native Americans, or perhaps discovered it on his own.

These spiritual concepts shared by many faiths throughout the world tend to be identified as Eastern or specifically Hindu, because it is within the Hindu tradition that they are logically and clearly explained and their **theological** foundations clarified. In this section

we will explore how Hindu metaphysics (the study of reality beyond our five senses) came to the West. Hindu **theology**, **yoga**, meditation and **ayurveda** found a receptive audience.

Hindu Ideas Spread to the West

Hindu metaphysics arrived in America and Europe early in the 19th century in translations of Hindu scriptures—the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Scholars, writers and poets immediately found value in the concepts of karma, dharma, reincarnation and the divinity of the soul. They marveled at the Hindu concept of God as not only personal, but also immanent, (pervading all nature and humanity) and transcendent (beyond the physical universe).

America's 19th-century freethinkers deeply appreciated the Hindu openness to many religious paths and its freedom to choose one without condemning others as wrong. All these ideas are prominent in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. They influenced generations of writers and scholars, notably

Herman Melville, William James, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood.

Hindu teachers first came to the West in the late 19th century. Many were prominent, but Swami Vivekananda (see Chapter Four) was by far the most influential. He and other swamis and yoga teachers were popular with the educated and artistic communities, including famous scholars and actors. In the 1940s and 50s, Swami Prabhavananda translated the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* with the help of American devotees who were skilled writers. His clear and approachable books became popular, bringing these Hindu texts to millions in the West. Paramahansa Yogananda's classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*, published in 1946, introduced the idea of a life of spiritual striving and experience in story form.

The 1960s brought a wave of Hindu teachers to the West. Their teachings were eagerly welcomed by the youth of the **New Age**. Since then, karma, reincarnation and other Hindu ideas have become common in the songs, movies, art and novels of the West.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

theology

the systematic study of the nature of God and religious belief

yoga

"union," physical and mental practices intended to awaken spiritual qualities

ayurveda

India's ancient medical science

New Age

a Western spiritual movement drawing on Eastern thought

HOW HINDU THOUGHT AND PRACTICE CAME TO THE WEST



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF S. CALIF. ARCHIVES



(Clockwise from above) Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), writer and Transcendentalist philosopher; Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976), translator of Hindu scripture; Swami Satchidananda (1914-2002), religious teacher and hatha yogi, addressing the famed Woodstock music festival in 1969; Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1912-2008), teacher of Transcendental Meditation; B.K.S. Iyengar (born 1918), influential yoga master

Yoga

Central to Hindu ideas is the discipline of yoga. Hatha yoga, a system of physical postures, is the most widely recognized form of yoga in the West today. Generations of movie stars and dancers, back to the early 1900s, have helped publicize its benefits. In the West, hatha yoga is mostly promoted as a form of exercise in the West. But in India, it is part of a broader practice called *ashtanga yoga*, literally “eight-limbed yoga.” Hatha yoga is the third of the eight limbs. The first two limbs are ethical ideals and religious practices, including nonviolence, chastity, honesty, piety and worship.

Hatha yoga poses have fun names such as downward dog, cobra, plough and lotus, which describe the shape the body takes in the position. Poses are done in series to quiet the mind and emotions and relax the body. To Hindus, hatha yoga is not just a form of exercise, but an essential preparation for meditation and development of spiritual consciousness.

Meditation

The fourth through eighth limbs of ashtanga yoga relate to meditation. The initial objective of meditation is to quiet the mind and emotions in order

to move awareness to the higher chakras. This is done in part through hatha yoga, which calms the body, and in part through breath control, which calms the emotions and quiets the thinking mind. One breath control method is to breathe in nine counts, hold one count, breathe out nine counts, hold one count and repeat. After a while, you can do the counting on your heartbeat. The object of meditation is not to sit and think, but to go beyond thinking into higher consciousness.

Ayurveda

India has one of the world’s oldest systems of medicine, already described in Chapter One. Called ayurveda, “science of life,” it is gaining popularity in the West. It is a **holistic** system which deals with the causes of disease, not just the symptoms. Ayurveda emphasizes a healthy diet, especially not overeating, and regular exercise and massage. It makes use of thousands of herbs, including common spices such as pepper, cinnamon and turmeric. Indian cooking uses the knowledge of ayurveda. The spices are used for their medicinal effects as well as for taste. A key practice of ayurvedic doctors is “pulse diagnosis,” analyzing the patient’s pulse to identify any imbalances or disease in the body.

Culture

India’s Bollywood films, with their rhythmic dancing and singing, are popular worldwide. The word *Bollywood* mixes *Hollywood* with *Bombay* (now Mumbai), center of India’s huge film industry. While they are not designed to promote religion or culture, these films convey the charming flair and flavor of Hindu lifestyles to people everywhere.

India is known for its varied and mostly vegetarian cuisine. It is commonly ranked among the top four, along with French, Chinese and Italian. The main ingredients of Indian cooking are rice, wheat flour, beans and a wide variety of vegetables and spices. Some Indian foods are notoriously hot, but most are mild. Indian restaurants abound in the West, especially in the UK, which has over 9,000!



DIANA KRAS/WWW.AYURVEDA4ALL.CO.UK

In ayurvedic pulse diagnosis the doctor doesn't just count the number of beats per minute. He feels for subtle variations in the pulse which give clues about the state of the patient's health.



SURYA NAMASKARA

Hatha means “sun-moon” and is the name of the popular yoga exercises so common around the world. The name comes from the aim of balancing the male (the “sun” part) and female (the “moon” part) currents, mentioned in our next section on chakras. Each pose has a specific effect

upon the nerve system. The most famous set of poses is Surya Namaskara—the Sun Salutation, or greeting the Sun God. It tunes mind and body, while being a good workout! In India you can see people alone or in groups performing Surya Namaskara to the rising Sun.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Following independence, India rebuilt itself. It succeeded, improving its economy, halving the rate of poverty, doubling life expectancy and improving literacy six-fold. India is still a developing nation but is on track to be a superpower in the decades ahead.

India’s heritage of spirituality and religious thought continues to dramatically influence the world, as it has for centuries. Scholar Stephen Cohen said, “India has become a global cultural superpower. Its soft power is second to none. Whether at the highest level of philosophy or the lower level of Bollywood, Indian culture is spreading.”

Even in terms of hard power, India is already impressive. According to a 2010 report by the US government, India is today the third most powerful country in the world in terms of gross domestic product, defense spending, population and technology. The

report says that as of 2010 the US holds 22% of global power, China 12% and India 8%. Japan, Russia and Brazil each hold less than 5%. By 2025, the report predicts, US power will decline to 18%, China’s will rise to 16% and India’s to 10%. The future of modern India appears bright as she overcomes centuries of suffering to resume her historic position as a leading nation in the world.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

holistic

based on the idea that the parts of a whole are interconnected

Section 3 Assessment

REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- List:** What key Hindu concepts are popular in the West?
- Explain:** How did Hindu ideas come to America in the 19th and 20th centuries?
- Describe:** How do hatha yoga and meditation impact the body? What is the purpose of breath control?

FOCUS ON WRITING

- Debate:** A few students want to start a yoga class as part of phys-ed. Others object, arguing that it is a religious practice which should not be allowed. Which side do you take? Why?

The Seven Chakras

Metaphysics is the inner scientific study of reality beyond our five senses. Many religions believe in the existence of the soul, heaven, God and God's love for man. These are metaphysical concepts because we cannot hear, see, smell, taste or touch any of them.

The system of chakras is a key metaphysical concept in Hinduism. The Sanskrit word *chakra* means "wheel." A chakra is a center of energy and **consciousness** in our spiritual body, or soul. There are seven chakras, located from the base of the spine up to the top of the head. Through the lower three chakras, we interact with the world of our five senses. Through the higher four chakras, we perceive and interact with the reality beyond our five senses—the world of metaphysics.

Great Hindu saints have seen and described these energy centers, though not all in the same way. According to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (founder of HINDUISM TODAY), the seven chakras govern the faculties of: 1) memory; 2) reason; 3) willpower; 4) **direct cognition**; 5) divine love; 6) divine sight and 7) **enlightenment**. **Mystics** tell us that the chakras look like lotus flowers of different colors and numbers of petals.

The chakras are always active, but most people only experience the first three. As they evolve spiritually, they become aware of the higher ones. A great writer may use the fourth chakra's power of direct cognition. A person filled with love for all mankind is experiencing the fifth chakra. Someone seeing into the future through the power of divine sight is experiencing the sixth chakra. Through the seventh chakra, we can directly experience God and awaken miraculous powers.

Weaving through the chakras in the spiritual body are three *nadis*, or energy channels, which flow through the spine. The *ida nadi*, associated with the moon, is pink, emotional and feminine in nature. The *pingala nadi*, associated with the sun, is blue, logical and masculine in nature. Most women function mainly in the *ida* current. Most men function mainly in the *pingala* current. The yellow *sushumna nadi* is the channel of pure spiritual energy, flowing through the center of the spine. A highly spiritual person seeks to balance the *ida* and *pingala* and live in the pure energy of the *sushumna*.

Word Help

consciousness

thought, awareness, perception

direct cognition

knowing something immediately through intuition, rather than through the senses or reason

enlightenment

the highest human experience; realization of Divinity

mystic

a person who lives in the chakras of higher consciousness, seeking direct knowledge of God

A painting of the three nadis and the seven chakras, showing their location and the associated letter/sound of the Sanskrit alphabet. Within and behind the man are the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and space.



Understanding Chakras and Nadis

1. **Discuss:** Is the belief in angels a metaphysical concept? What about UFOs? Examine beliefs such as global warming, hell, karma, reincarnation, the Golden Rule, evolution and freedom of speech. Which are metaphysical? Why?
2. **Analyze:** Review your day and assign your actions and

- thoughts to the appropriate chakra and nadi. What does this say about how you live and think?
3. **Explain:** Why do you think it is necessary to balance the masculine and feminine nadis to live in the pure spiritual current?

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION AND CIRCLE THE LETTER OF THE BEST RESPONSE

1. Which were consequences of the Partition?
 - A Pakistan attacked Kashmir
 - B 15 million people moved to or from Pakistan
 - C One million people died in riots and from hardships
 - D All of the above
2. How were the states of India reorganized?
 - A Following the boundaries of the princely states
 - B On the basis of population
 - C On the basis of linguistic groups
 - D Along important rivers and mountain ranges
3. A state has what powers in the Indian political system?
 - A Only those specified in the national constitution
 - B All those not granted to the Central Government
 - C The same powers it had as a princely state
 - D Those granted by its state constitution
4. What did India's early leaders emphasize?
 - A Making every citizen part of the political process
 - B Achieving national economic self-sufficiency
 - C Guaranteed higher education opportunities and jobs for lower castes and tribes
 - D All of the above
5. How did India change its economic policies in the 1990s?
 - A Raised import duties on foreign goods
 - B Eased restrictions on industries and encouraged private business and foreign investment
 - C Became self-sufficient in food which made it possible to spend those funds within the country
 - D Invested in foreign markets
6. How has the poverty rate in India changed since 1947?
 - A From 50% to 10%
 - B From 50% to 25%
 - C From 50% to 40%
 - D Not at all
7. What is one way India's secularism is unlike the West's?
 - A State governments control Hindu temples
 - B Government officials must belong to one religion
 - C Only members of some religions can vote
 - D State governments control all religious sites
8. What unites India as one religious landscape?
 - A Control by one denomination of Hinduism
 - B Pilgrimage destinations throughout the country
 - C Everyone speaks the same language
 - D Everyone is of the same ethnic group
9. What is the purpose of bathing at Rameswaram's wells?
 - A To find release from past misdeeds
 - B To guarantee entry to heaven
 - C To be entered into the Hindu faith
 - D To cleanse the body
10. Which of the following is not governed by a chakra?
 - A Divine sight
 - B Willpower
 - C Sushumna nadi
 - D Memory
11. Soft power is defined as:
 - A Spiritual energy and force
 - B Economic influence
 - C Diplomacy
 - D Cultural influence
12. What fraction of Americans believe in reincarnation?
 - A one-sixteenth
 - B one-eighth
 - C one-quarter
 - D one-half
13. What spiritual leader brought Hindu ideas to the West?
 - A Swami Prabhavananda
 - B Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
 - C B.K.S. Iyengar
 - D All of the above
14. How does India rank in power among the world's nations?
 - A Second
 - B Third
 - C Fourth
 - D Sixth

Internet Resources: Go to www.hinduismtoday.com/education/ for a PDF version of this chapter, as well as Chapters One through Four. There you will also find additional teaching resources and letters of endorsement

from academics and community leaders. To order printed copies of this Educational Insight, go to www.minimela.com/booklets/.