



Origins of Hinduism

The origins of Hinduism have been traced to the Indus River Valley in the Indian sub-continent and the peoples who lived there. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and there is evidence of the existence of Hinduism dating back 4,000 years. By 1500 BCE, Hinduism had already reached a high state of philosophical and religious development which has been sustaining it to the present.

What has come to be called the Hindu faith, tradition, or religion is the result of a rich blend of human civilization, including many different practices and expressions of religious life. Many religious cultures, who spoke many languages and held many different concepts about the nature of the Divine, have contributed to its development and evolution.

Within Hinduism, there are a vast array of practices and beliefs. As such, defining Hinduism is challenging. The three other Indian religions—Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism—have their roots in Hinduism and have close associations both historically and conceptually.

Unlike many other religions, Hinduism cannot be traced to a single founder, single scripture, or commonly agreed upon set of teachings. Throughout its long history, there have been contributions by many important figures who had different teachings and different philosophies, and who wrote many holy books. Therefore, some writers think of Hinduism as being a way of life or a family of religions rather than a single religion.

The term Hindu was historically used to identify people with a geographical and cultural connection to South Asia or who were indigenous to that region. It was only later that it became a religious identifier. By the 16th century, the term began being used to refer to the peoples who resided in the subcontinent who were not Turkic or Muslim. It is thought that, at that time, the term may have simply indicated groups that shared certain cultural practices such as the cremation of the dead and their styles of cuisine.

A more precise and widely used term for describing this belief system is *Sanatan Dharma* or *Hindu Dharma*. *Sanatan* means eternal, ever-present, universal, and unceasing; *Dharma* is harmony, compassion, truth, or natural law. *Sanatan Dharma* means eternal path, never beginning or ending. *Sanatan Dharma* places spiritual experiences above religious issues and cultural practices. The term *Hindu* is thought to have derived from the name of the river or river complex in northwest India, the *Sindhu*. *Sindhu* is a Sanskrit word used by the inhabitants of the region. Other groups who arrived in the land used the name in their own languages for the land and its peoples.

Although defining Hinduism is a challenge, it is correct to state that Hinduism has its roots in India. Most Hindus have a principal body of sacred scriptures known as the *Vedas* and share a common system of values known as *dharma*. Because of the antiquity of Hinduism, as well as its inclusiveness and acceptance of diverse expressions and beliefs, an extensive array of philosophical doctrines and dogmas has evolved. This has resulted in the appearance of additional scriptural texts, such as the *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, among others.

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

Indus Valley Civilization Period	
2500–1500 BCE	<p>The Indus River Valley civilization developed and flourished in the basin of the Indus River which flows through present-day Pakistan. The civilization had developed by about 2500 BCE, although its origins go back further. By 1500 BCE, the civilization had largely faded away. Evidence of early Hindu practice is archaeologically dated to this vanished culture.</p> <p>The civilization was extensive, located from the eastern foothills of the Himalayas, to Lothar on the Gujarat coast, and to Sutgagen Dor near the Iranian border. Some cities of the Indus valley culture have yet to be excavated.</p> <p>Two major cities have been uncovered, Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, which has given us the alternative name of Harappan culture.</p> <p>The Indus civilization did not develop as a result of contact with other civilizations such as Sumer or Egypt. It was an indigenous development growing out of earlier, local cultures.</p>
Vedic Period	
1500 BCE	<p>There has been some debate about this period and the nature of the civilization. The two major theories about the early development of early south Asian traditions are as follows:</p> <p>The Aryan migration thesis is that the Indus Valley groups calling themselves Aryans (noble ones) migrated into the subcontinent and became the dominant cultural force. Hinduism, on this view, derives from their religion recorded in the <i>Vedas</i> along with elements of the indigenous traditions they encountered.</p> <p>The cultural transformation thesis is that Aryan culture is a development of the Indus Valley culture. On this view there were no Aryan migrations (or invasions) and the Indus valley culture was an Aryan or Vedic culture. Recent genome-based studies and other research suggests that this is the more likely development.</p>
1500–1200 BCE	The Vedic Age in which the <i>Rig Veda</i> is written.
800 BCE	The eleven major <i>Upanishads</i> are written around 800 BCE and become fundamental texts of Hinduism. These texts introduce the ideas of reincarnation and <i>karma</i> , and that those who are righteous in the current life will be reborn in a better life until they eventually reach <i>moksha</i> , or the holy bliss.
600–500 BCE	Buddhism and Jainism break away from the main flow of Hinduism.
Epic, Puranic, and Classical Age	
500 BCE	This period, beginning from around the time of Buddha (died around 400 BCE), saw the composition of further texts. The <i>Epics</i> and <i>Puranas</i> are written in approximately 500 BCE. The <i>Epics</i> , which chronicle the history of mortal men, and the <i>Puranas</i> , which chronicle the history of celestial figures, are written around 500 BCE. These signal the beginning of devotional Hinduism, in which followers commit themselves to one deity, particularly Shiva or Vishnu, though Devi is popular as well.

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400 BCE–800 CE	The Hindu response to Buddhism and Jainism results in further changes to the main teachings of Hinduism.
326 BCE	Alexander the Great brings his army and the influence of Hellenic culture and ideas into the northern most regions of India. The Indian Mauryan Empire is created to counter this Hellenic influx of culture and ideas.
268–232 BCE	<p>Ashoka became Emperor of the Mauryan Dynasty covering North India and Afghanistan to the Deccan plains to Mysore, except the coastal territory of Kalinga. The conquering of Kalinga was one of the bloodiest conflicts of ancient history. It caused a change in Ashoka's outlook as a ruler and a man. As a ruler, he renounced war and conquest by violence and, as a man, he became a follower of Lord Buddha. He ruled from 268 BCE to 232 BCE. Although he is believed to have been reborn to a Jain or Hindu family after embracing Buddhism, Ashoka promoted the living of a nobler life according to the laws of <i>Dharma</i> which had a great impact on both Buddhism and Hinduism. He distributed wealth, built monasteries, sponsored festivals, and brought peace and prosperity.</p> <p>He turned a tradition into an official state ideology and his support of Buddhism began its long transformation into a world religion.</p> <p>Buddhism and Jainism had a profound impact on Indian and Hindu culture. They discouraged caste distinctions, abolished hereditary priesthoods, made poverty a precondition of spirituality, and advocated the communion with the spiritual essence of the universe through contemplation and meditation.</p>
52 CE–500 CE	The date of the first presence of Christianity in India is debated. Christianity is believed to have been introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who is reported to have visited Muziris in Kerala in AD 52. Generally, scholars agree that Christianity was definitely established in India by the 6th century CE. The Christian presence included some communities that used Syriac liturgies. Therefore, it is possible that Christianity's connection to India extends as far back as the purported time of St. Thomas' arrival.
200 CE	Hindu laws are codified.
320–500 CE	<p>The Gupta Empire is founded in approximately 320 CE. Maharaja Sri Gupta founded the Gupta Empire, which covers much of the Indian subcontinent. It ushers in an era of peace and prosperity that allows Hindu culture to stabilize and spread.</p> <p>The rise of the Gupta Empire (320–500 CE) saw the development of the great traditions of <i>Vaishnavism</i> (focussed on Vishnu), <i>Shaivism</i> (focussed on Shiva), and <i>Shaktism</i> (focussed on Devi).</p> <p>Many elements from this period, such as <i>Bhakti</i> (devotion) and temple worship, are visible in present-day Hinduism. The Gupta Empire saw the development of poetic literature. These texts were composed in Sanskrit, which became the most important element in the shared culture.</p>
400–500 CE	Hinduism returns as the dominant religion of India. Temples and monuments are built to honour Hindu ideas, gods, and beliefs. This is the era of the Hindu Renaissance.

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

Medieval Period	
500 CE	The Gupta Empire fell in approximately 500. Overrun by the invading Hun, the Gupta Empire fragmented into various weaker entities around 500.
788 CE	This is the year of the birth of Adi Sankaracharya—Hindu <i>guru</i> , philosopher, and scholar.
800–1000 CE	<i>Bhakti</i> movements rise. The <i>Bhakti</i> movement emphasized devotion to god and was an Indian response to various pressures, including the challenge that appeared in the form of Islamic religion, the pressures for conversion, the need for social change, and the need to attend to the ills prevalent in Hindu society at that time. The <i>Bhakti</i> movement's goal was the purification of Hindu religion and the freeing of the people from the monopoly and injustices of the priestly classes.
900 CE	Shankara brought the concept of one Brahman or one god, introducing significant monotheistic beliefs into Hinduism.
950 CE	Queen Sembiyan Madhavi spent her life building Hindu temples and monasteries.
600 CE–1100 CE	<p>Around the 7th century CE, when Arab traders arrived at coastal Malabar and Konkan-Gujarat, Islam first came to the western coast of India. Cheraman Juma Mosque in Kerala, built in 629 CE by Malik Deenar, is believed to be the first mosque in India. As well, in the 7th century CE, immigrant Arab and Persian trading communities from South Arabia and the Persian Gulf began settling in coastal Gujarat.</p> <p>Ismaili Shia Islam was introduced to Gujarat in the second half of the 11th century, when Fatimid Imam Al-Mustansir Billah sent missionaries to Gujarat in 1073 CE.</p> <p>In Northern India, Islam arrived in the 12th century via the Turkic invasions. Since the 1100s, Islam has become a part of India's religious and cultural heritage.</p>
Pre-modern Period	
1400–1700 CE	Europeans arrived in India to pursue colonization and commercial goals within the Hindu world.
1542 CE	Mogul emperor Akbar, being religious, reformed efforts to unite Muslims and Hindus.
1600 CE	The Hindu Renaissance began in approximately 1600. Scholars focused on modernistic interpretations of the sacred texts and social reform.
1605 CE	Jahangir became emperor of India; Jahangir followed both Muslim and Hindu teachings.
1669 CE	Mogul emperor Aurangzeb outlawed Hindu worship in India forcing many Hindus to convert.

Development of Hinduism Timeline Chart

British Period	
1757 CE	<p>Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey (1757) led to the end of the Mogul Empire and the rise of British supremacy in India.</p> <p>At first, the British did not interfere with the religion and culture of the Indian people, allowing Hindus to practice their religion unimpeded. Later, however, missionaries arrived preaching Christianity and actively promoting conversion.</p>
1861 CE	<p>British Raj, under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, criminalized sexual activities that were deemed to be "against the order of nature", which included homosexual activities.</p>
1894 CE	<p>Paramahansa Ramakrishna (1836–1886) inspired the Ramakrishna Order of monks and is regarded as the spiritual founder of the Ramakrishna Movement (<i>Vedanta</i> Movement). After the death of Ramakrishna in 1886, the monastic disciples formed the first <i>Math</i> (monastery) at Baranagore. Swami Vivekananda, a Ramakrishna monk, was a delegate at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions. The following year he founded the first <i>Vedanta</i> Society in New York, United States of America. He returned to India in 1897 and founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. The <i>Vedanta</i> Society sought to introduce Hinduism to the West and revitalize the Hindu traditions of service, volunteerism, and education. Swami Vivekananda urged his followers to be true to their faith but also respect all religions of the world as his <i>guru</i> Paramhansa Ramakrishna had taught that all religions are pathways to god.</p>
1903–04 CE	<p>Immigration to Canada of people from India or of Indian origin began in 1903–1904. The census records of 1911 list a total of 1758 persons of Hindu or Sikh origins. Early Hindus fought to maintain their religious traditions in a mostly hostile environment which viewed 'coloured' immigrants, such as Hindus and Sikhs, as a threat to the British culture and way of life at the time. The male Canadian pioneers could not bring brides from India up until the 1930s, and did not have the right to vote in Federal elections until 1947.</p>
1908 CE	<p>Through the "continuous journey" legislation, the Canadian government effectively banned further Hindu and Sikh immigration by requiring South Asians to purchase a ticket for a through passage to Canada from one's country of origin. The discriminatory immigration policies blocked immigration from the Indian subcontinent and other places for over 50 years.</p>
1919–1947 CE	<p>The era of Mahatma Gandhi has a profound influence on Hinduism and India.</p> <p>Indian lawyer Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi launches a two-year campaign of non-cooperation beginning in 1920. He encourages Indians to leave British institutions, return British honours, and practice self-reliance. While Gandhi is forced to stop the campaign upon his arrest and imprisonment in 1922, he goes on to become the most recognized leader of the Indian nationalist movement and is given the title of Mahatma (great soul).</p>

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1947 CE	In August 1947, after three hundred years of rule, the British make a hasty and poorly planned, departure from India. Their decision to partition the former colony before departing created major upheaval in the Indian subcontinent and led to a period of severe conflict and violence. In spite of opposition, including opposition from Gandhi, they decided to partition the colony into two independent nation states; a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. The partition led to a chaotic mass migration of people within the land. Millions of Muslims attempted to leave India for West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while millions of Hindus and Sikhs tried to move in the opposite direction. The resulting chaos led to religious sectarian violence and mutual genocide across the continent. Communities that had coexisted relatively peacefully for centuries began to attack each other. Violence was especially intense in Punjab and Bengal provinces which were on the border with the new Pakistani territories. By 1948, more than fifteen million people had been displaced, and between one to two million had been killed. The partition, chaos, and conflict that followed had a deep and lasting impact on the peoples of the Indian sub-continent.
Post Indian Independence—Modern Period	
1955 CE	During this period, a number of Hindu beliefs and practices were incorporated into the laws in India. The Hindu Marriage Act was enacted by the Parliament of India. Three related acts were also enacted as part of the Hindu Code Bills during this time: the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956), and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956). These acts apply to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs as well.
1960s CE	From the 1960s onwards, Hindu Indians migrated to Britain and North America, including Canada. <i>Gurus</i> travelled to the West to support and nurture these new Hindu communities, sometimes starting missionary movements that attracted Western interest. Transcendental meditation achieved worldwide popularity, attracting the attention of celebrities such as the Beatles. Perhaps the most conspicuous was the Hare Krishna movement, whose male followers' sported shaved heads and saffron robes.
1966 CE	Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India. She served two terms, from 1966 to 1977 and from 1980 to 1984. Indira was the daughter of the First Prime Minister of India (after independence), Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.
1979 CE	The Hindu Society of Manitoba opened its first Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre in Manitoba at 854 Ellice Avenue, in Winnipeg.
1990s–Present	Hindu communities became well established in many nations throughout the world. Excelling socially, economically, and academically, they have built many magnificent temples (such as the Swaminarayan Temple in London, United Kingdom) and solidified their communities.

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1997 CE	<p>Deepak Obhrai became the first Hindu-Canadian elected to Canada's Parliament. Obhrai was born on July 5, 1950, in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) to a Hindu family.</p> <p>K. R. Narayanan, of <i>Dalit</i> ('untouchables') origins, is appointed President of India. Narayanan was born in the southern state of Kerala and grew up in the 1930's. It was a time when <i>Dalits</i> were commonly denied many rights and faced many restrictions such as the right to enter Hindu temples, draw water from wells (reserved for <i>Brahmins</i> and other members of the higher castes), or walk along some village pathways. As well, <i>Dalits</i> from the 1850s onward experienced consistent denial of access to education in India. Despite the obstacles he faced, he was an excellent student and managed to overcome many of the challenges. When he was appointed, he had a long and distinguished career as a scholar, diplomat, and cabinet minister who once served as India's Ambassador to the United States.</p>
1998 CE	<p>Shabnam Mausi became the first transgender person to be elected to public office in India. Shabnam served as a member of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly from 1998 to 2003.</p>
2001 CE	<p>The Kumbh Mela Festival becomes the largest religious gathering in history. In the 2001 Canadian census, 297,200 persons declared Hinduism as their faith.</p>
2007 CE	<p>In July 2007, the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir was consecrated in Toronto. It is the largest of its kind in Canada and was constructed according to guidelines found in ancient Hindu scriptures. The grounds spread over 18 acres and include a <i>haveli</i> and a heritage museum.</p>
2007 CE	<p>Pratibha Patil becomes the first woman President of India.</p>
2011 CE	<p>Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized in India; however, in 2011, the court granted legal recognition to a single same-sex marriage, involving two women.</p>
2014 CE	<p>The Supreme Court of India recognized <i>hijras</i> and other transgender groups as an official third gender.</p>
2015 CE	<p>The Rajya Sabha passed the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, guaranteeing rights and entitlements to transgender persons; for example, reservations in education and jobs, legal aid, pensions, unemployment allowances, and skill development for transgender people. As well, provisions prohibit discrimination in employment and prevent abuse, violence, and exploitation.</p>
2016 CE	<p>Ontario legislature passed a bill proclaiming October as Hindu Heritage Month annually in the province.</p>
2017 CE	<p>India's Supreme Court provided the LGBT community the freedom to safely express their sexual orientation.</p>