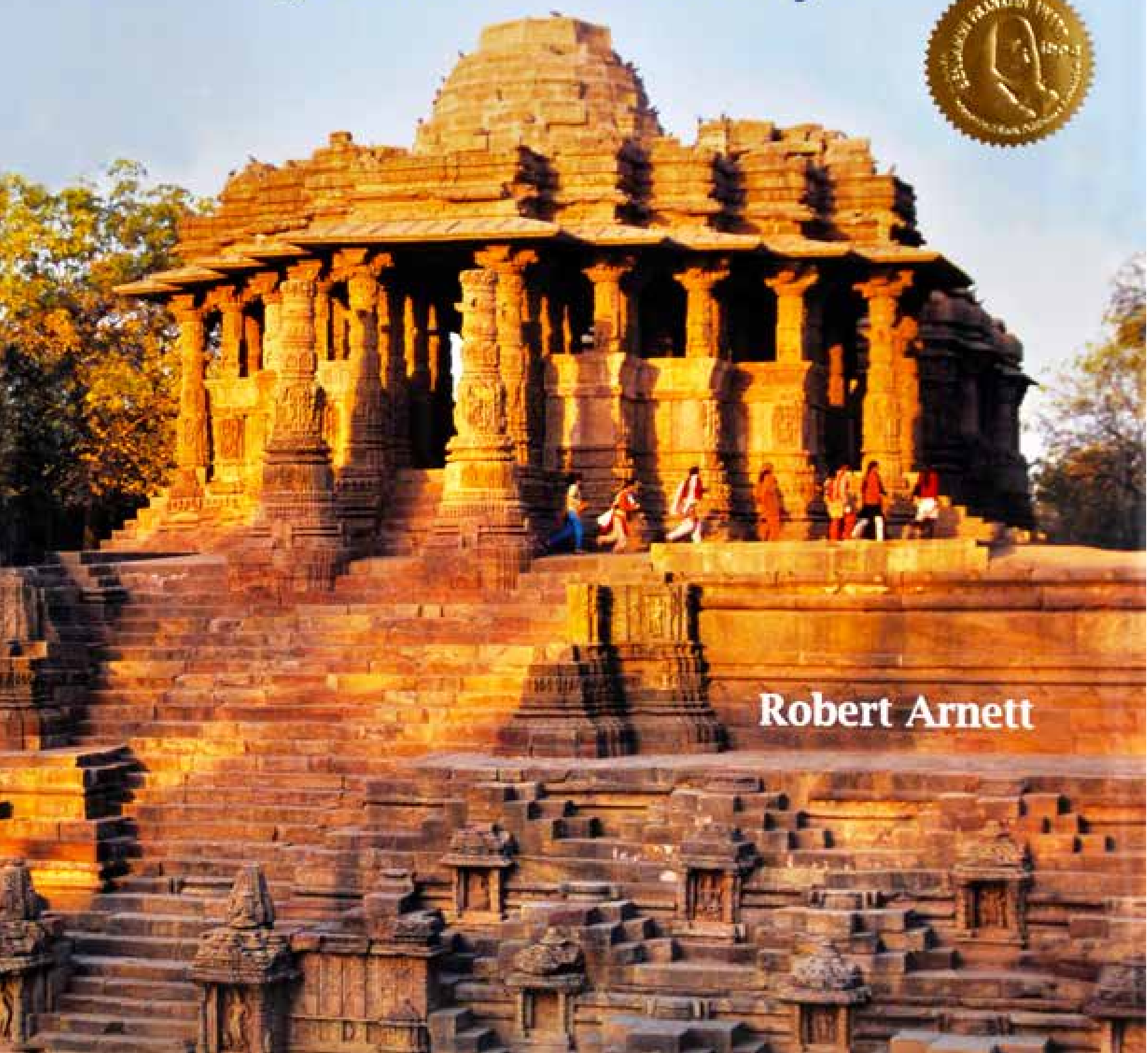


India Unveiled

Spirit, Tradition, People



Robert Arnett



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Preface



On a business trip to Detroit, Michigan, when I was in my late twenties, I met a young man at an exhibition of Far Eastern art. Our conversation turned to a discussion of Indian philosophy, about which I had very little knowledge. The exchange intrigued me, and, as I would realize later, I was at a crossroads on my life's journey. My new acquaintance suggested that I read *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a book I found captivating. He invited me to accompany him to a Yoga service the following Sunday at the Detroit Institute of Arts. My first meditation experience brought me to a level of consciousness which I had never known. That experience was the impetus for my in-depth study of Indian philosophy and the sacred science of Raja Yoga, an ancient path that teaches that scientific meditation is the basis for God-realization. The more I learned, the more I sought to know. I felt very strongly that I needed to return to a place where I had never been, and destiny set my path towards India.

Without itinerary or expectations, I began the first of six journeys that totaled almost two years, during which I traveled the length and breadth of India. The German philosopher Goethe said that to live in another's country and to speak another's language increases one's knowledge tenfold. Little did I realize at the time how much those trips would change my life.

This book is a tribute to the traditional values of modern India, which were already mature in the 5,000-year-old Indus-Sarasvati civilization. One of these concepts is Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the world as one family. Another is the concept that God is One, even though the paths that lead to Him are many. A third is the principle of dharma, or righteous action, which is expected from all people under all conditions.

Although Indian culture has had the resiliency to withstand over 300 years of Mughal conquest, I wondered if contemporary India could survive the effects of Western materialism on its growing middle class. I now know that my concerns were unfounded. My travels throughout India revealed that Hindu values are deeply ingrained in its society. Not only will India be able to assimilate Western technology into its own culture, but it will be stronger for it. Long after the modern buildings in cosmopolitan Mumbai (Bombay) have been reduced to rubble by time and the elements, the eternal verities of India will be as vibrant as ever.

Of all the countries in the world, India is the most spiritually blessed. More and more people in the West are realizing that materialism does not give lasting satisfaction and are turning to India for spiritual guidance. Our shrinking world makes it easier today than ever before to adopt the best from all civilizations. Certainly no nation or religion has a monopoly on truth. East and West have much to share. It is my belief that the United States and India can give the world a new direction: a materially efficient democracy that is spiritually guided. If each of us does our part, peace and harmony will prevail on earth. By changing ourselves, we will change the world.

Robert A. Amell

Above

*Intricately carved chariot wheel. Surya Temple.
Konarak, Odisha. Eastern Ganga dynasty. 1240.*

Introduction

India is one of the oldest river-valley civilizations in the world and is one of the few countries whose original culture, language, and religious beliefs still exist. Scholars acknowledge that India is home to a continuous civilization that is over 5,000 years old, but its origins can be traced back long before that.

The term “Indian” applies equally to a Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi, Jew, or anyone who is a citizen of India. The word “Hindu” refers only to a follower of Hinduism, the name given to a collection of the ancient scriptures of India, the Vedas, whose four books are known as India’s Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion. The name “Hindu” came from the Greeks, who invaded northwestern India under Alexander the Great. They designated the inhabitants on the banks of the Indus River as Indoos, or Hindus.

With over 1.3 billion inhabitants who live in a space about one-third the size of the United States, India is the world’s largest democracy. It has the second largest population in the world and is home to about 17% of the world’s people. Although it has over 45 cities with a population of over a million, about two-thirds of the population still lives in rural areas. In the villages, life is unhurried, and only changing seasons mark the passing of time.

Over the centuries, India has witnessed the rise and fall of many empires and invasions by people of various races and cultures. The Muslims began invading northern India as early as 1000 CE. Their political domination ultimately fell to the British, who ruled India from 1858 until India’s independence on August 15, 1947.

When India was conquered by Western colonial powers, it was the wealthiest country in the world. References to India’s riches are found in the Bible and in ancient Greek, Roman, and Chinese literature and prompted Christopher Columbus to look for a shorter European trade route to India, leading to his discovery of the Americas. India’s wealth was so great that she became “the brightest jewel” in the crown of the British Empire. However, the systematic transference of vast amounts of India’s resources and wealth to England during British colonialism devastated its economic structure.

Modern India

Contemporary India, with more than 65 percent of its population below the age of 35, has the spirit to propel the nation back onto the world stage. Present-day Indian culture is a melting pot of time-honored tradition and modern technology. Like much of the world, India is in a state of major transition as her people grapple with the enormous task of balancing the inner peace of the soul with science and technology. Changing rapidly from its agrarian roots, modern India is poised to be one of the world’s leading economies of the twenty-first century.

There is still widespread poverty, but with an affluent middle class that is larger than the population of the United States, India is now one of the largest markets for consumer goods in the world. India is recognized internationally as a world leader in information technology. In addition to being a major industrial and nuclear power, India has already sent a rocket to the moon and has launched its first Mars orbiter spacecraft.

India’s computer technology and cell phone applications are made available to its population at little or no cost. Inexpensive computing devices have been developed to empower even the poorest segment of society. India is a major producer of wind power and is spending a sizable percentage of its energy program on solar power. The country is heavily investing in infrastructure, the major factor preventing its growth at an even faster pace. Other than infrastructure, India has the required capital, natural resources, trained labor force, entrepreneurial talent, and national will needed to be a formidable economic power. As a result, there is a large influx of international investments pouring into the country.



Cultural Diversity

More than any other nation in the world, the diversity of India's religions accounts for much of its cultural richness. It has been home to people from almost every religion, philosophy, and cultural heritage who have lived together harmoniously for thousands of years. They have mingled to create India's vibrant tapestry comprising more than 2,000 ethnic groups. Innumerable monuments, exquisitely carved temples, stupas, mosques, churches, forts, and palaces dot the country's landscape. Its ancient heritage intertwines with modern development and has given India its unique identity.

Even within India's state boundaries, there are myriad ethnological differences encompassing religion, language, customs, celebrations, and food. Because of its diversity, India has been referred to as a "continent within a country."



Languages

National homogeneity is virtually unknown, which is not surprising in a country with no national language. The constitution recognizes 22 languages, with Hindi and English being designated as official languages. It is difficult for a Westerner to comprehend how a country can have over 1,650 languages that are considered mother tongues, the language spoken in a person's home! Most of the languages have their own script. Even trying to decipher Indian body language can be perplexing. In parts of India, if someone shook his head horizontally from side to side, the mannerism meant "yes."

Hindi is the language spoken predominantly in the north. It is the primary tongue of less than a third of India's people and has little similarity to the Dravidian languages of the South. Opposition to Hindi in the South is not unexpected, and naturally, each region prefers to use its own language and have its children study in the language in which its literature is written. The absence of a common Indian language partially accounts for the fact that English, introduced by the British, is still widely used, even though India became independent from the British in 1947. English is an important language in national politics, and many top officials still address their colleagues in English. English also is the language of business communications, and tour guides often speak English in addressing Indians from other regions. In fact, India has the world's second largest English-speaking technical workforce.

The school systems in most states in India teach three languages: English, Hindi, and the vernacular of that particular state. In addition, some students learn the ancient Sanskrit, the classical literary language of the Indian scriptures and the world's oldest surviving language. Western linguists concur that Sanskrit (which consists of 50 letters, each with a fixed, invariable pronunciation that prevents mispronunciations) is the most perfect phonetic language in the world. George Bernard Shaw agreed. He wrote a wise and witty essay urging the adoption of a new English alphabet with 16 additional characters, which would approximate the phonetic perfection of Sanskrit, even if "it cost a civil war!" Because of Sanskrit's pleasing sound and meter, I usually could distinguish it from Hindi or the local dialects. Often, hearing prayers chanted in Sanskrit would evoke a tingling sensation within me, as if it was resonating in my inner core.



Religion

India is the birthplace of four major religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism) and is an important home to Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest surviving religions. Hindus make up about 80 percent of the population of India. Muslims are India's largest minority and account for about 14 percent of the nation. The earliest documented Christian community, the Syrian Orthodox, was established by 190 CE, though it is said that the Apostle St. Thomas landed in Kerala in 52 CE and spent his last years preaching in India. Jews have lived in India for over 2,900 years, having come with King Solomon's merchant fleets.

Hinduism, India's majority religion, is greatly misunderstood in the West. Most occidentals do not realize that Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, in which God is beyond time, space, and physical form. The entire pantheon of gods and goddesses are symbolic representations of God's numerous qualities and His intelligence functioning in every aspect of creation. The One Unmanifested Supreme God is called Brahman (not to be confused with Brahma, the first part

of the Hindu Trinity, or with *brabmin*, a Hindu priest). The Rig Veda, a Hindu scripture, clearly states: “Though men call it by many names, it is really One.”

Hinduism created a different deity for each of God’s numerous qualities to make God seem more real and approachable. I noticed that in the villages, many women preferred to worship Lord Krishna in the form of a baby rather than as a man, probably because it made it easier for them to share their maternal feelings for the Lord.

Another gross misconception about Hinduism that probably dates back to early European missionaries is that Hindus worship “idols.” The Sanskrit word for the statue Hindus pray before is *murti*. To a Hindu, a *murti*, usually made of stone, metal, or wood, is a representation of a deity that serves as a means to focus one’s thoughts and devotion when worshipping divinity. “*Murti*” should be translated as “embodiment” or “manifestation” of the deity to whom they are praying. The *murti* is not the object of worship and is more than an inert image. The object of worship is the divine whose presence is not limited to the image.

Hinduism has many scriptures, the earliest of which are the Vedas. These texts were passed down orally and were only transcribed during the last millennium. The corpus of the religion’s sacred writings also includes the ancient allegories the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the world’s longest epic poems. Their complex symbolism represents the physical, mental, and spiritual battles each of us must fight and win in our daily lives. Contained within the *Mahabharata* is the Bhagavad Gita, Song of the Spirit, the most beloved and sacred scripture of India. Its verses recount the sublime wisdom given by Lord Krishna to his disciple, Prince Arjuna.

Hinduism contains various approaches to achieve its ultimate goal, oneness with God. It can take a lifetime of study just to master even one of its many paths to God. It has been said that every metaphysical thought that ever was, is, or ever will be has already been expressed in Hinduism.

Hinduism embraces the doctrine of reincarnation, which declares that our unfulfilled material desires force us to return again and again to earth until we consciously attain oneness with God. Even the early Christian church accepted the principle of reincarnation, although that doctrine was declared a heresy in 553 CE by the Second Council of Constantinople.

Hinduism is a very tolerant religion. It does not claim the true God exclusively for itself, but instead acknowledges that God took many human embodiments on earth, including saviors of other religions. A divine incarnation is called an avatar, one who has attained union with Spirit and then returned to earth in human form to help humankind. Hindus consider Christ, Krishna, and the Buddha to be avatars. A Hindu sage and poet wrote, “I know Thou hast delighted, and wilt ever delight, in revealing Thyself in different forms...but Thou hast only one Nature: Perennial Joy.”¹ Hindus also recognize the divine inspiration of prophets such as Moses and Muhammad. In the non-sectarian worship of God as the One Father of all, Hinduism lives at peace with all religions.

India has the third largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. Muslims believe that the Qur’an, the sacred scripture of Islam, contains revelations from Allah (God) that were conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Jabril (Gabriel). Islam shares common origins with Judaism, including the belief that creation began with Adam and that Ibrahim (Abraham) is an important prophet. The religion also recognizes as prophets Nuh (Noah), Musa (Moses), and Isa (Jesus). One of the pillars of Islam is that Muslims should make a pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca), known as hajj, once in their lifetime.

Sikhs number about two percent of India’s population. Sikhism was founded in 1469 by Guru Nanak. Traditional Sikhs do not cut their hair, smoke tobacco, or drink alcohol. The men are easily recognizable by the distinctive style of their turbans and thick, full beards.

Like the United States, India is a constitutionally secular country with separation of church and state. India celebrates the main observances of most major religions of the world as national holidays.

Descriptions of Buddhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism will be discussed in their respective chapters.





Symbolism in Hinduism

As a monotheistic religion, why does Hinduism have so many gods? It just appears that way. Hinduism has only one God who transcends material existence and is without shape or form or beginning or end. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. Most people do not have the intellectual capacity or the calmness of mind to comprehend the vastness, power, and intelligence of the Creator.

The seemingly endless gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon personify the numerous functions or qualities of the One Unmanifested Supreme God, such as God as love, God as strength, God as wisdom, or God as protector and sustainer.

The above picture tells a story from the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. Hanuman, a human-like monkey with supernatural powers (a *vanara*), is the embodiment of devotion, loyalty, service, humility, strength, and wisdom. He has revealed that there is nothing in his heart except the thought of Rama and Sita, who in Hinduism represent the wisdom and purity of God. Hanuman is the perfect devotee of God. He represents what Jesus said was one of the two most important commandments in the Bible: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind...” (Matthew 22:37). Though symbols from Hinduism often appear strange in a Western cultural context, once the symbolism is understood, it becomes evident that certain universal principles are shared by all religions.

Devotion

What impressed me most about India was the peaceful demeanor of her people and their openly expressed devotion. The following incident illustrates both characteristics. After a four-hour bus journey from Chennai (Madras) to the South Indian town of Tirupati, our guide informed us that we would not be able to continue our trip to the nearby holy mountain of Tirumala, as a local labor strike prevented our going further. Tirumala is one of the most important Hindu pilgrimage centers in all of India. Hindus believe that prayer requests made standing before the magnificent statue of Sri Balaji in Tirumala will be granted, which explains why an average of 60,000 pilgrims visit it on any given day. The passengers on my bus were very disappointed at the possibility of the trip being canceled, but no one complained, and most were tranquil as we sat together waiting to see what would transpire.

I struck up a conversation with one of the passengers who saw the labor strike as a man-made adversity that could serve as a spiritual challenge for all of us. His insight inspired me, and I joined the others in praying silently that our pilgrimage to Tirumala would somehow be completed. At that moment, such peace came over me that I had no doubt



God would grant our request. Shortly after lunch, we were told that the strike had been canceled and the buses would transport us to the mountaintop. I believe the collective devotion of the pilgrims and their all-pervasive love changed the course of events. I learned a great lesson that day: prayer is more powerful than protest!

In a similar situation in other countries, most people would have complained vehemently, but not these pilgrims. Because of its value and the historical proof in Indian culture that prayer has worked for millennia, there was no discussion. It was a given that prayer was the natural and proper course of action.

Devotion expressed itself outwardly in various ways, including the strong sense of responsibility that individuals exhibited for their parents and members of their extended family. A man I met while traveling told me a poignant story. His mother had been in a coma in a Mumbai (Bombay) hospital. Against all hospital regulations, the man’s wife insisted on staying in the same room and even slept on the floor to be close to her mother-in-law, ensuring that she was bathed punctually and kept in clean clothing. Doctors and the husband’s relatives told her that her

mother-in-law would not survive. However, against all odds, she did! The mother had a total recovery and now lives happily again with her son and daughter-in-law. He commented, "Loving feelings can save a life."

The deep loyalty that exists between parents, children, and other family members serves as a living example from one generation to another. Children see their parents serve their grandparents, and in turn they will serve their parents, and their children will serve them. The elderly die peacefully in India, surrounded by their devoted families in the familiar setting of their own homes. They have a soft death and pass on fulfilled. To me, this is the quiet beauty of India.

I am impressed by the sincerity with which each family member accepts his or her familial responsibilities. Duties were not performed from a sense of obligation as if they were burdensome. An Indian I met on a bus explained: "Duty is performed from love and affection, like a mother taking care of her child." He said his mother and wife still serve in that spirit. Though there was some inconvenience caused by three generations living together in his home, he stated that his wife did not feel burdened by a house full of people and thrived on her selfless duties. He was emphatic that "action must be supported by feeling. Once it becomes a duty performed mechanically without feeling, the tradition ends!"

Righteous Action (Dharma)

It is impossible to understand India unless one understands the concept of dharma. Dharma has many meanings to the Hindus. No single English word can summarize all of its connotations. Within an individual's own life, it refers to one's inherent duty to live in harmony with the eternal principles of righteousness that uphold all creation. Thus, the social and moral implications of the Indian philosophy of dharma are reflected in the highest virtues expected from each member of the community. It is seen most clearly in village India.

In a small town in Rajasthan, a young boy saw me drop my wallet, which contained a huge sum of money. When he came to me to return it, I offered him a few rupees, but he would accept nothing. I asked someone nearby to explain to the boy that I wanted to give him something for his act of honesty. After talking to him, the man explained to me that the concept of accepting a reward for returning what was mine made no sense to the child. He returned it because it was the right thing to do and not because he expected to get a reward. Dharma is a noble act and needed no outside reward.

The Guest Is God (Atithi Devo Bhavah)

The Hindu tradition of treating guests as though they are God goes back millennia to the *Upanishads*, the summaries found in the ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas.

Though I come from an area of the United States where people pride themselves on their Southern hospitality, it could not compare to the gracious treatment I received in India. I would be served so much food at people's homes that I adamantly had to refuse it being placed on my plate. I was treated equally thoughtfully in all the homes I visited, whether rich or poor. On several occasions, in modest homes, my hosts insisted on sleeping on the floor so that I could use their bed. Even when my departure from a home was extremely early in the morning, the mother always insisted on preparing breakfast for me and made sure the children were awake and dressed properly to say goodbye.

Ancient India

For thousands of years, the basic cornerstones of Indian culture have changed very little. As a result, historians acclaim India as the oldest living civilization on earth. Modern excavations and scientific research reveal that Indic tradition has an unbroken cultural continuity that goes back at least 5,000 years.

Archeology and other evidence support the position that there was no Aryan invasion. Vedic India is one of the oldest documented civilizations on earth, and through its religion, culture, and Sanskrit language, it has had a profound influence on Europe and much of the world.

Excavations show that India's ancient culture equaled, if not surpassed, any civilization of the ancient world. India had a very high degree of town planning with wide streets, sophisticated sewage systems, public baths, reservoirs, and granaries.

Indian mathematicians invented the number system, algebra,



trigonometry, and calculus. One of their most important contributions was the development of the decimal system, including the invention of zero, which was used in India by 100 BCE. The value of pi was calculated in India by a sixth century mathematician as 3.1416, which is accurate to four decimals. Albert Einstein said, “We owe a lot to Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made.” Much of India’s early knowledge of mathematics was adopted by the Arabs during the ninth century and spread to other parts of the world.

The famous astronomer and mathematician Aryabhata (476-550 CE) wrote a compendium, *Aryabhattacharya*, of mathematics and astronomy that survives to the present day. He clearly stated that the sun is the center of the universe and propounded the heliocentric theory of gravitation. Aryabhata predated Copernicus, the first person to correct the erroneous medieval European belief that the sun revolved around the earth, by almost 1,000 years.

Ayurveda, a holistic system that puts emphasis on prevention, is the world’s earliest school of medicine and has been practiced in daily life in India for more than 5,000 years. Over 2,500 years ago, Sushruta, professor of medicine at the University of Benares, wrote a classic text on surgery, *Sushruta Samhita*. He performed complicated procedures such as brain surgery, cataract operations, caesarean deliveries, and skin grafts, created artificial limbs, and mended fractures. Ancient India’s achievements in mathematics, astronomy, physics, and medicine, to mention a few, were known all over the world, including Greece, China, Arabia, and Spain, countries whose medieval scholars acknowledged their indebtedness to India.

India’s Gift to the World

India’s spiritual heritage is legendary. Throughout the millennia, India has been blessed with more masters—persons who merged their souls with God during their lives—than any other country in the world. There are many well-documented stories of their miracles. The famous master Trailanga Swami, who lived in Varanasi (Banaras) during the late nineteenth century, weighed over 300 pounds, though he seldom ate. He displayed miraculous powers that cannot be dismissed as myth. Until recently, there were living witnesses to his amazing feats. Many persons witnessed him drink the most deadly poisons with no ill effects. Thousands of people saw him levitating in a sitting position on the surface of the Ganges River for days at a time. He would even disappear under the waves for long periods and reappear unharmed. The yogi never wore any clothing and, on several occasions, was arrested and locked in a cell by the police for his nudity. Each time, even with posted guards, he inexplicably escaped with his cell still locked.

For over 2,300 years, travelers from the most powerful countries on earth have come to India in search of her priceless spiritual wisdom. When Alexander the Great returned to Persia after his unsuccessful invasion of India, the most valued treasure he brought back with him was not gold, jewels, silk, or spices, but his guru (spiritual teacher), the yogi Kalyana, called Kalanos by the Greeks.

On a designated day in Susa, Persia, the sage Kalanos gave up his aged body by entering a funeral pyre in view of the entire Macedonian army. The soldiers were amazed that the yogi had no fear of pain or death and never once moved from his position while being consumed by flames. Kalanos embraced many of his close companions before leaving for his cremation, but refrained from bidding farewell to Alexander. To him, Kalanos simply remarked: “I shall see you later in Babylon.” Alexander died a year later in Babylon. The Indian guru’s prophecy was his way of saying that he would be with Alexander both in life and death.



When the Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang attended a huge religious gathering, the Kumbha Mela, in Allahabad in 544 CE, he recounted that Harsha, king of northern India, gave away his entire royal treasury to monks and pilgrims attending the event. When Hiuen Tsang prepared to return to China, he declined Harsha’s offerings of jewels and gold. Understanding that his spiritual development was more valuable than worldly wealth, he accepted instead 657 religious manuscripts. Likewise, through the science of Yoga, India has given the West a far more valuable gift than all the material wealth or technology the West could give in return. Even today, India offers great inspiration to those persons who are seeking oneness with God, and through Yoga, anyone can find the direction one needs to succeed. That is India’s gift to the world.

Timeline of India and the World

<i>India</i>		<i>World</i>	
Artifacts dating back 500,000 years found in India	Prehistory	Early human migration from Africa (1.8 million years ago)	
Indus Valley Civilization (Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro) (3300 BCE–1300 BCE)	3000 BCE	Narmer, First Pharaoh of united Egypt (ca. 3100 BCE) Sumerian civilization, Mesopotamia (ca. 2900 BCE)	
	2500 BCE		
Trade between Indus Valley Civilization and Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Persia	2000 BCE	Ziggurat at Ur (2100 BCE) Minoan palace, Knossos, Crete (1900 BCE)	
 Indus Valley cities abandoned	1800 BCE	Epic of Gilgamesh, Mesopotamia Early temple sites, Peru	
	1500 BCE	Olmec culture, Mexico (1500–400 BCE)	
	1000 BCE	Nok culture, Nigeria. Bronze castings (1000–300 CE)	
Siddhartha Guatama (historical Buddha) (563–483 BCE) Mahavira, founder of Jainism (540–468 BCE) Sushruta, Professor of Medicine at University of Banaras, performing brain surgeries	550 BCE	Persians destroy Babylon (539 BCE) Persepolis, Iran (518–460 BCE) Confucious, China (d. 479 BCE) Socrates, Greece (d. 399 BCE)	
	350 BCE		
Alexander the Great crosses Indus River (326 BCE) Victorious but homesick Greek army leaves India (324 BCE) Reign of Ashoka (ca. 272–231 BCE)	250 BCE	Qin Shihuangdi, first emperor, unites China (246–210 BCE)	
Ajanta caves constructed (ca. 200 BCE–650 CE)	200 BCE	Nazca culture, Peru (200 BCE–200 CE)	
	150 BCE	Rome destroys Carthage (146 BCE)	
	100 BCE		
Trade between India and Rome flourishes	0 BCE	Birth of Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 4 BCE)	
	200 CE	Roman empire at its height Classic Maya Period, Mexico and Central America (300–600 CE)	
	300 CE		
Gupta Empire (ca. 320–520)	400 CE	Ghana Empire, West Africa (350–1250) Teotihuacan culture, Mexico (350–650) Constantine divides Roman empire (476)	
	500 CE		
Pallava dynasty (ca. 600–900)	600 CE	Founding of Tang dynasty, China (600–906) Muhammad, founder of Islam, Arabia (570–632)	
	700 CE	Sila kingdom unites Korea (668)	
Birth of Adi Shankara (ca. 788)			

Timeline of India and the World

India

World



Chola Empire at Thanjavur
(907–1310)
Invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni

First Muslim Sultanate in Delhi (1206)
Marco Polo visits India (1288)

Tamurlane invades northwest India (1398)

Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism (1469–1538)
Vasco da Gama (Portugal) reaches Calicut (1498)

Reign of Akbar, Mughal emperor (1556–1605)
East India Company chartered, England

Shah Jahan begins Taj Mahal (1632)

Last Mughal emperor's reign begins (1837)
First Indian rebellion for independence (1857)
East India Company dissolved. British
assume direct control of India (1858)
Founding of Indian National Congress (1885)

Satyagraha movement begun by Gandhi (1930)
Muslim League founded (1940)

Creation of independent India and Pakistan (1947)



India's population reaches
one billion (2001)
Chandrayaan I, India's first
mission to moon (2008)
India's first interplanetary
mission to Mars (2013)

800 CE

Borobodur constructed, Java (ca. 850)

900 CE

Anasazi culture, southwest US

1000 CE

Norman conquest, England (1066)

1100 CE

Angkor Wat, Cambodia

1200 CE

Rise of Kingdom of Benin, Nigeria

1300 CE

1400 CE

Columbus discovers America (1492)

Moors driven from Spain (1492)

1500 CE

Sistine Chapel ceiling painted by
Michelangelo, Rome (1508–12)

1600 CE

William Shakespeare, England (d. 1616)

Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock, Virginia (1620)

1700 CE

United States Declaration of Independence (1776)

French Revolution begins (1789)

1800 CE

Atlantic slave trade abolished in England ((1807)

American Civil War (1861–65)

1900 CE

End of Qing dynasty in China (1911)

World War I (1914–18)

Russian Revolution (1917)

Pearl Harbor/US enters World War II (1941)

1950 CE

End of World War II (1945)

Civil Rights Act, US (1961)

Neil Armstrong becomes first man to land on moon (1969)

World's first personal computer introduced in US (1971)

Berlin Wall dismantled/ student protests in Beijing (1989)

2000 CE

Barack Obama elected president of US (2008)

2010 CE

Arab spring protests (2010–11)

Nelson Mandela dies, South Africa (2013)

Glossary

Aryans. A Sanskrit term incorrectly ascribed to a group of people who supposedly invaded India from Central Asia in the second millennium BCE. This theory of invasion originated from British scholarship based on limited excavations conducted from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Modern scholarship, however, has shown that the highly advanced culture that developed along the Indus River was the product of indigenous peoples already living in the region. In that context, what is today known as the Indus River civilization should in fact be called the Sindu-Sarasvati River Civilization, which was mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas. Satellite imaging, supported by limited excavations, has revealed that the ancient Sarasvati River existed.

The ancient Sanskrit word “Aryan” means “one who is noble and spiritually advanced.” It was also used as a title of respect for kings and had no racial connotation whatsoever. The Aryan culture was based upon the belief that the whole world is one family.

ashram. A spiritual residence. The Hindu equivalent of a monastery or hermitage.

Aum (Om). The intelligent cosmic vibration that is the basis of all creation has two properties, cosmic light and the cosmic sound of Aum. Aum of the Hindu Vedas became the sacred word “Hum” to the Tibetans, “Amin” to the Muslims, and “amen” of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians. Aum is the all-pervading sound emanating from the Holy Ghost and the Word of the Bible, and is the voice of God’s vibratory energy testifying to and witnessing the Divine Presence in every atom.

avatar. A soul who has attained union with Spirit and then returned to earth to help humankind; a divine incarnation.

dharma. The eternal principles of righteousness that uphold all creation; humankind’s inherent duty to live in harmony with these principles.

dhoti. A male garment knotted around the waist, similar to a lungi (sarong), but the cloth is pulled up between the legs.

Dravidian. A term applied today to the peoples and languages of four modern states of South India: Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. References to these regions occur in ancient Hindu literature such as the *Mahabharata*. These peoples have greatly enriched the literature, arts, and culture of India.

India had many principalities in the past, and their names have changed many times. The major language of the principality of Dravid was ancient Tamil. Calling the Tamil language “Dravidian” is a linguistic distinction of the nineteenth century.

In India, people were (and still are) referred to by the region’s name. The fact that the people were called Dravidian would seem to indicate that they were native to that area. There is no evidence that they were forced there from somewhere else.

ghat. Long rows of steps leading down to a river to facilitate devotees getting to the water.

guru. Spiritual teacher. When devotees are earnest in their search for God, the Lord sends them a guru. A guru is much more than just an ordinary teacher. He is a living manifestation of scriptural truths and is able to guide and direct his disciples to final realization. Without a guru, an ordinary person will never attain Self-realization. Today in the West, the word “guru” has been corrupted to mean “a teacher with a large following.”

Glossary

karma. Effects of past action. The law of karma is the effect of an individual's past actions, which may be from this life or previous lifetimes. Every religion in the world teaches a similar concept of action and reaction, cause and effect, or sowing and reaping. Any action a person commits, whether it be good or bad, sets in motion a similar pattern of occurrences that will inexorably return like a boomerang to the doer in the present or a future existence. Thus, each person becomes the creator of his or her own destiny. What the Western mind views as fate would be looked upon by Hindus as a moral consequence. Once one understands that karma is the universe's law of justice, an individual accepts responsibility for his or her circumstances and no longer harbors resentments against God or other people.

The collective actions of people within communities, countries, or the world create "mass karma," which produces local or global consequences, depending on the preponderance of the good or evil committed. The thoughts and actions of every person, therefore, are important and contribute to maintaining the well-being of the world.

Krishna. The eighth incarnation of Vishnu, and is the most popular Hindu deity. His skin is often depicted blue, the color of infinity. His counsel to his disciple Arjuna is given in the most beloved Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. The central message of the Bhagavad Gita is that men and women may attain liberation through love for God, wisdom, and performance of right actions in the spirit of non-attachment.

linga. A phallic shrine object, usually carved of stone, which represents Shiva's (the third aspect of the Hindu Trinity) creative role within the universe.

master. One who has attained self-mastery, as evidenced by his ability to enter at will the breathless state of *sabikalpa* samadhi or the higher state of immutable bliss of *nirbikalpa* samadhi.

Mughal. The Muslim dynasty of Indian emperors. The six greatest Mughal emperors were Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb. They ruled from 1527 to 1707, though the dynasty continued until 1858.

murti. A statue Hindus pray before, usually made of stone, metal, or wood, which represents the embodiment or manifestation of a deity and serves as a means to focus one's thoughts and devotion when worshipping divinity.

namaste. Hindu greeting for "hello" and "goodbye." In the ancient Sanskrit language, it means "the God in me bows to the God in you" or "my soul bows to your soul."

pranam. A ritual gesture of respect performed by placing the fingers and palms of both hands together and bowing the head slightly.

pranayama. The conscious control of prana, the currents of subtle energy flow in the body that activate and sustain life.

prasad. Food (sweets, fruit, etc.) offered to a deity or a living saint, which is sanctified because it has been blessed. It is distributed by priests in the temples and may be eaten there or taken away to share with others.

Raja Yoga. The Royal Road. The path to union with God considered by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita to be the highest path. Raja Yoga incorporates the most effective methods from the other Yoga paths and teaches that scientific meditation is the basis for God-realization. Raja Yoga leads to perfect development of the body, mind, and soul.

Glossary

reincarnation. A doctrine which states that human beings who die with unfulfilled material desires have to return to earth again and again until they are able to reclaim their divine status as children of God. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out” (Revelation 3:12).

The early Christian church accepted the principle of reincarnation, which was expounded by the Gnostics and by numerous Church fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and St. Jerome. The doctrine was first declared a heresy in 553 CE by the Second Council of Constantinople.

sadhu. An anchorite; one devoted to asceticism and spiritual discipline.

Sanskrit. The oldest surviving language and the most perfect phonetic language in use. It originated in India and is grouped in the Indo-European family of languages. Sanskrit has influenced many languages of modern Europe. It is the language of the ancient Hindu scriptures, the Vedas.

spiritual eye. Located at the point between the eyebrows, it is where meditators concentrate their attention when meditating. It is the entryway through which a yogi or a yogini passes his or her consciousness into the higher realms and experiences the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Jesus spoke of the divine light that is perceived through the spiritual eye when He said: “When thine eye is single [if the two physical eyes focus into the one spiritual eye], thy whole body also is full of light....Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness” (Luke 11:34–35). Hindu women mark the spiritual eye on their foreheads with a red spot which is known as a *bindi* or *tilak*. The spiritual eye usually is portrayed on the images of Hindu saints.

Sri. A title of respect which means “holy” or “revered” when used before the name of a religious person. In the South, the anglicized spelling becomes “Shree” and in West India, it is spelled “Shri.”

Sufism. The mystical teachings of Islam whose forms vary across the Islamic world.

swami. A monk who is a member of Hinduism’s most ancient monastic order, which was reorganized by Swami Shankara in the ninth century. A swami takes formal vows of poverty (renunciation of worldly possessions and ambitions), celibacy, and obedience to spiritual authority. He follows the path of meditation and other spiritual practices and dedicates himself to service to humanity. The Sanskrit word swami means “he who is one with the Self (Swa).”

Trinity. The threefold nature of Spirit when it manifests creation. The theologies of all major religions agree with the ancient Hindu interpretation that when Spirit manifests creation, It becomes the Trinity: Sat, Tat, Aum, or the Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Sat (the Father), in the impersonal sense, is God as the Creator existing beyond creation without form. Tat (the Son) is God’s omnipresent intelligence reflected in an undisturbed state throughout creation. Aum (the Holy Ghost) is the active vibratory creative power of God that objectifies or structures creation.

In Hinduism, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva represent the three aspects of God’s immanence in creation. God the Father manifests in the physical universe as Brahma, who creates through Cosmic Nature. Vishnu is the Sustainer or Preserver of the universe, and Shiva manifests everything into physical being and destroys or dissolves all things back into the One, Unmanifested Spirit.

Yoga. One of the six systems of Hindu philosophy. A technique of spiritual and physical training by which an individual soul may be united with the Unmanifested Spirit.

Quotes on India

“It is true that even across the Himalayan barrier, India has sent to the west such gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and above all numerals and the decimal system.”

—**Professor Will Durant, 1885–1981. American author and historian.**

“India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only.”

—**Mark Twain, 1835–1910. American author and humorist.**

“India has left a deeper mark upon the history, the philosophy, and the religion of mankind, than any other terrestrial unit in the universe.”

—**Lord Curzon, British statesman and viceroy in India from 1899 to 1905.**

“If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions, I should point to India.”

—**Max Muller, 1823–1900. German scholar.**

“The motion of the stars calculated by the Hindus before some 4500 years vary not even a single minute from the tables of Cassine and Meyer (used in the nineteenth century). The Indian tables give the same annual variation of the moon as discovered by Tycho Brahe – a variation unknown to the school of Alexandria and also to the Arabs who followed the calculations of the school. . . .The Hindu systems of astronomy are by far the oldest and that from which the Egyptians, Greek, Romans and even the Jews derived from the Hindus their knowledge.”

—**Jean Sylvain Bailly, 1736–93. French astronomer and mathematician.**



“It is obtuse to confuse Hinduism’s images with idolatry, and their multiplicity with polytheism. They are ‘runways’ from which the sense-laden human spirit can rise for its ‘flight of the alone to the Alone.’”

—**Huston Smith, 1919– . Author and Professor of Religion.**

“From the Vedas we learn a practical art of surgery, medicine, music, house building under which mechanized art is included. They are encyclopedia of every aspect of life, culture, religion, science, ethics, law, cosmology and meteorology.”

—**William James, 1842–1910. Father of American psychology, philosopher, physician, and author.**

A pilgrim praying in the holy Ganges River. Varanasi.

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