

# Hinduism Endures: 1100 to 1850

India responded to centuries of Muslim invasion and rule and later British colonization by both armed resistance and spiritual resolve. The country remained overwhelming Hindu despite foreign domination and religious oppression. India was one of the very few ancient societies to survive into modern times with its religion and social structure largely intact.

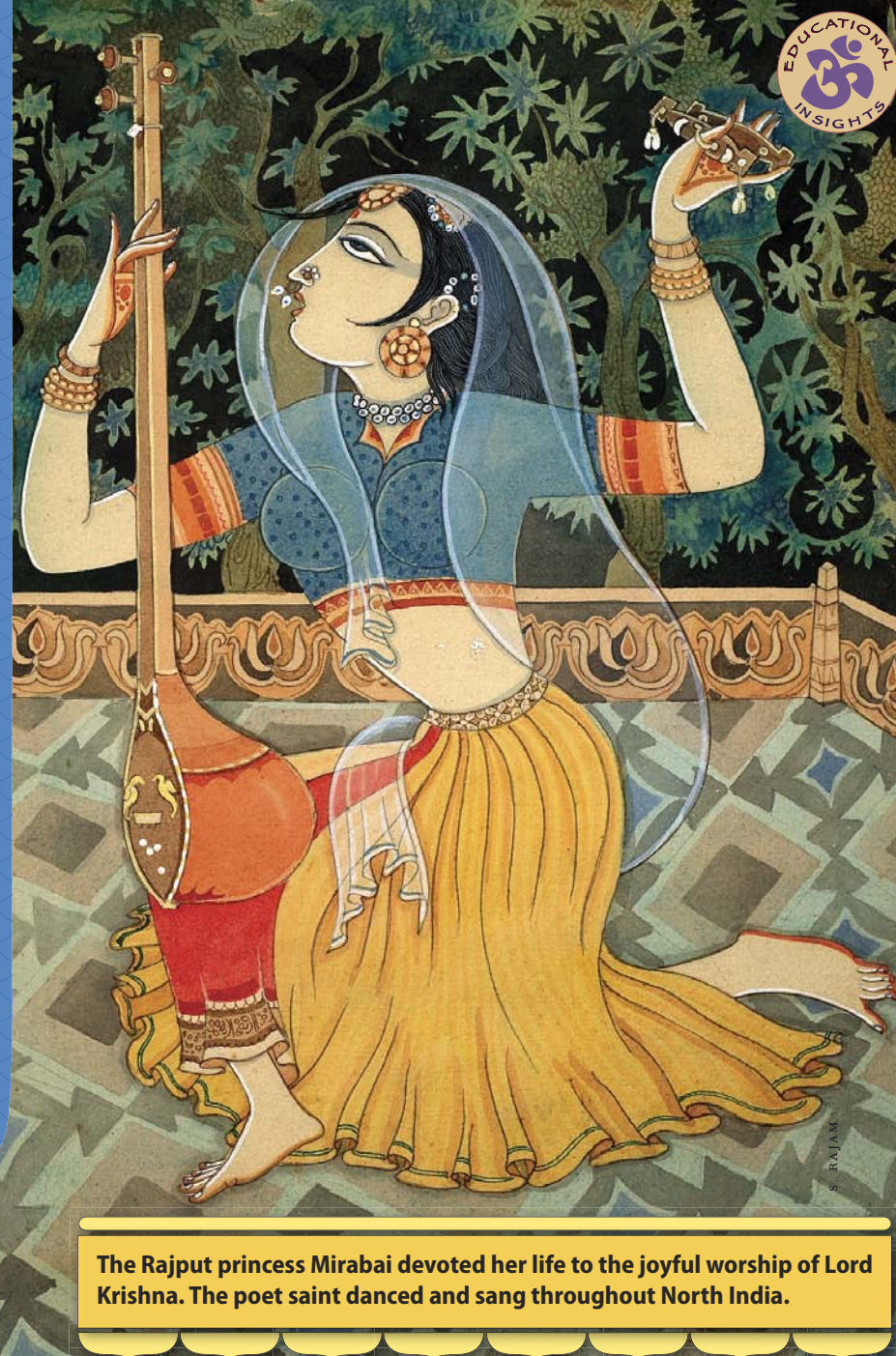
## Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is the third chapter in our series on Hindu history intended for use in US primary and secondary schools. Most textbooks presenting Indian history between 1100 and 1850 focus on the Muslim and British rule. They tend to ignore the adverse material and religious impact of this rule on Hindus, who made up 80% of the population during most of this period. This chapter is intended to fill this gap and serve as a supplement to other texts, not as a comprehensive overview of all events of this time. It is meant to explain what happened under India's foreign invaders and protracted alien rule and how Hindus, their religion and way of life survived this violent and op-

pressive time. This is a difficult part of history to teach, but necessary for a proper understanding of our modern world.

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The Rajput princess Mirabai devoted her life to the joyful worship of Lord Krishna. The poet saint danced and sang throughout North India.

# The Invasion Centuries

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. People today must come to terms with violent times of the past.
2. From the eighth to the eighteenth century, Muslims invaded and then ruled much of India.
3. By the nineteenth century, the British East India Company went from being traders in India to being rulers of India.

### The Big Idea

India's Hindus suffered but survived centuries of Muslim and British rule.

### HINDUISM TODAY'S Teaching Standards

This column in each of the three sections presents our subject outline for India and Hinduism from 1100 to 1850 ce.

1. Explain the difficulty in discussing violent historical events that continue to impact us today.
2. Describe successive invasions of India by Arabs, Turks and Mughals and the unyielding Hindu resistance.
3. Explore the founding of the Mughal Empire, its expansion and ultimate decline.
4. Explain the origins of the East India Company and how it gained control of India.

## If YOU lived then...

Outside invaders have conquered the kingdom next to the one you live in. The king calls for young men to join his army. Your father decides to take the family and flee to another kingdom, away from the fighting. You may either join the army or go with the family. Your father leaves it up to you.

### What do you do, and why?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND:** Horses thrive in Central Asia, Iran and Arabia, but they do poorly in the hot climate of the Indian plains. Invaders on horseback armed with swords and bows had an advantage over the foot soldiers and even the elephants of the Indian armies. Later, Indian kings imported horses yearly for their armies at great cost.

## Understanding a Violent Past

We now enter what historians call a “difficult period” of Indian history. The difficulty is not due to any lack of knowledge. The Muslims’ invasions of India were carefully chronicled by their own historians. The British also kept exacting records of their **subjugation** and exploitation of the subcontinent. We have a great deal of information, but of a disturbing nature. Muslim historians recount in detail the destruction of cities, sacking of temples, slaughter of noncombatants and enslavement of captives. British accounts reveal the mismanagement and greed that led to **famines** that killed tens of millions of people and ruined the local industry during their rule.

Nearly every country on our planet has a dark period of history it would like to forget or deny. It is difficult to study such unpleasant pasts in a way that leads to understanding, not hatred. Hindu-Muslim discord has been a fact of Indian history for over a thousand years. At the same time, there have been long periods of friendly relationship, especially at the village level. For Hindus and Muslims, coming to terms with their collective past remains a “work in progress.” True **reconciliation** comes when people honestly face the past, forgive misdeeds, learn to truly respect each other’s religious beliefs and traditions and promise to move forward in peace.

## The Gradual Conquest of India

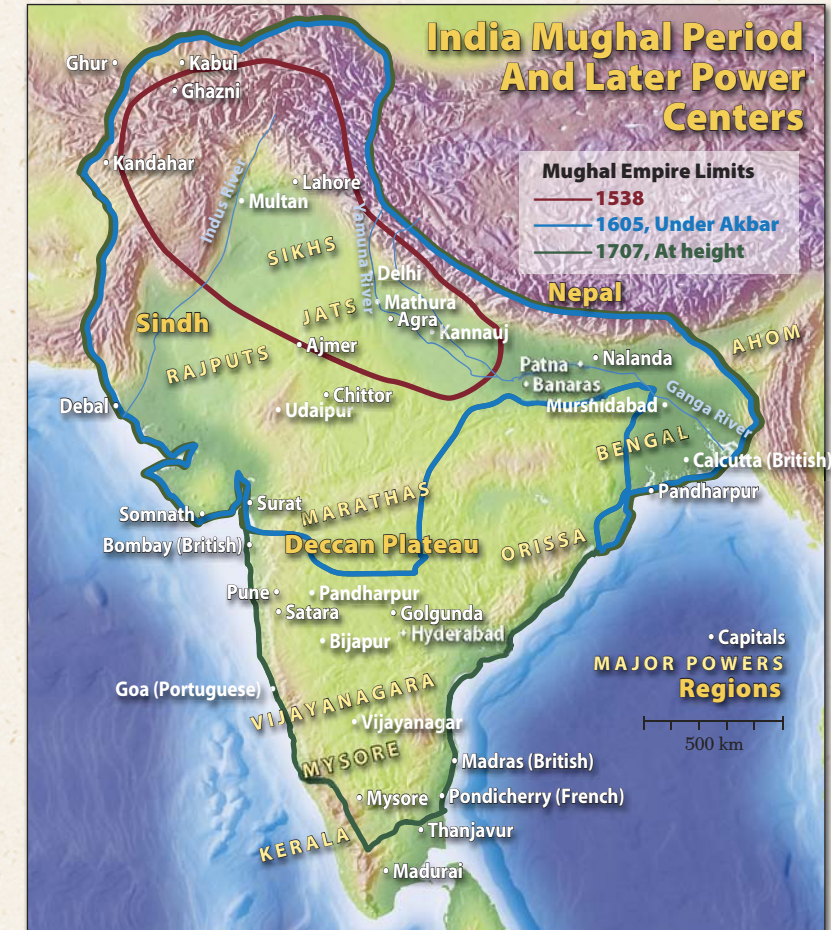
Muslim Arab attacks upon India began in 636 ce, soon after Islam was founded. The first successful conquest was of the Sindh region in 712, with the fall of the temple towns of Debal and Multan. By 870, Arabs conquered the Hindu kingdoms of south-western Afghanistan, then were stopped by the kings of north and northwest India.

There were three types of conquerors during this time. Some simply raided a city, robbed its wealth and left. Others defeated a kingdom, reinstated the defeated king and ordered him to pay regular **tribute**. The third and most effective conquerer annexed the captured territory to his own kingdom.

The next wave of invasions began around 1000. These attacks were not by Arabs, but by Turks from central Asia who had converted to Islam. One Turkic leader, Mahmud of Ghazni, raided India 17 times between 1001 and 1027. In each city, he looted and destroyed temples, and killed or enslaved inhabitants. Mahmud’s successors periodically raided northern India, but generations of Rajput rulers denied the invaders a permanent foothold.

One of the great historians of India, A.L. Basham, wrote that warfare among Hindus was governed by “a chivalrous and humane ethical code, which discouraged such ruthless aspects of war as the sacking of cities and the slaughter of prisoners and noncombatants.” The Islamic invasions introduced a brutal form of warfare which destroyed, killed and enslaved enemies at will.

In 1192, Muhammad of Ghur, also Turkic, finally succeeded in defeating Hindu rulers of the Delhi-Ajmer region and the Ganga valley. This conquest led to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206. By 1300, the Sultanate had secured stable rule around their main strongholds of the North, and sent armies to raid as far



south as Thanjavur and Madurai. But these regions were not annexed. Hindu rule generally continued in Rajasthan, Gujarat and thrived in the entire South, notably within the Vijayanagar Empire (1336-1665). Areas with natural protective boundaries, such as Kashmir, Nepal, Assam, Orissa and Kerala, were less subject to raids.

By 1220, the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan had created the largest empire the world had ever seen, conquering Asia from China to Iran. In 1398, a Muslim descendant, Timur, attacked Delhi because he felt its Muslim ruler was too tolerant of

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

#### subjugation

to bring under control by force

#### reconciliation

to restore friendly relations

#### famine

extreme shortage of food

#### tribute

payment made by one ruler to another

Hindus. In just one instance alone, he killed 100,000 Hindu captives. In 1504, Babur, a descendent of both Genghis Khan and Timur, seized Kabul. This gave him a base to attack India. He overwhelmed both the sultan of Delhi (in 1526) and the Rajput confederacy (in 1527) to found the Mughal Empire. His army was the first in India to use **matchlocks** and field cannons.

Babur's grandson, Akbar, became emperor in 1556. He expanded the Mughal Empire over northern India and part of the Deccan by entering into alliances with Hindu kings, particularly the fierce Rajputs. Akbar's rule was noted for its religious harmony. Unfortunately, his successors did not inherit his tolerance. Akbar's great-grandson, Aurangzeb, destroyed temples and reimposed the *jizya* religious tax on Hindus.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire had declined. The Sikhs, Jats, Rajputs, Marathas and the Empire's own provincial governors (called nawabs) had asserted their independence, leaving no strong central government in India. The regional Muslim rulers continued to oppress Hindus, but less harshly than the centralized Muslim governments of Delhi had.

### The Colonial Period

In 1600 a group of English merchants set up the East India Company to buy and sell goods between Britain, India and other eastern countries. They arrived in India as businessmen, not conquerors, and built major trading posts at Surat, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. Over time, they **fortified** their posts and developed private armies for defense, paid for with the immense profits of their trade. They hired Hindus and Muslims as soldiers, called *sepoys*, who served under British officers.

Emboldened by their strength, the British proceeded to **meddle** in local politics. They gained power and profit by playing one rival against another. The French, especially in South India, did the same. If one king was supported by the French, the Company would back his rival as a way of weakening the French position. But they wanted still more. Robert Clive, commander of the Company's army, conspired to overthrow the Nawab of Bengal, which led to the Nawab's defeat in the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

Mir Jafar, the new Muslim ruler of Bengal rewarded Clive's support with huge gifts and a promise to favor the Company. But things

#### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

##### matchlock

an early type of rifle

##### fortify

to build walls, towers and gates to protect from attack

##### meddle

to interfere in someone else's affairs

##### alliance

an agreement to work together

##### puppet ruler

a state ruler who is actually controlled by another ruler

did not go well, and following the battle of Buxar in 1764 the Company gained control of Bengal's revenues. A few years later they became the direct rulers and ruined the region with heavy taxes, unfair trade restrictions and corrupt practices.

The Company seldom launched a direct attack to conquer a region of India. Rather, they entered into treaties, **alliances** and other deals with local rulers, exploiting the divisions among them. Along the way, they defeated several heroic kings, such as the Muslim king Tipu Sultan of Mysore, and eventually conquered the powerful Marathas and Sikhs after many battles. In this manner, by 1857, they achieved direct rule over much of India and controlled the rest through **puppet rulers**.

### Why Did the Muslims and the British Win?

Most historians agree that the Hindu kings simply failed to realize the danger they faced and thus did not mount a common defense. Historians also blame the caste system, saying that people relied solely on the warrior caste to do the fighting. Basham shows this explanation to be inaccurate, as all castes were present in Indian armies. Also, he points out, Muslim kingdoms themselves were overrun by subsequent invaders, such as Timur and Nadir Shah, putting up no better defense than the earlier Hindu kings.

Basham explains that each new invader succeeded by virtue of superior military organization, strategy, training, weapons, horses and mobility. With these they overpowered the large but cumbersome Indian armies, Hindu and Muslim alike, which failed to adapt to new methods of warfare. The British also possessed great military skill and modern weapons, a result of their wars in Europe at the time. The Indian rulers failed to recognize and counter the brilliant British strategy and tactic of conquering a region by exploiting internal divisions among its rulers and only occasionally using its own armed forces in an outright invasion.

## Section 1 Assessment

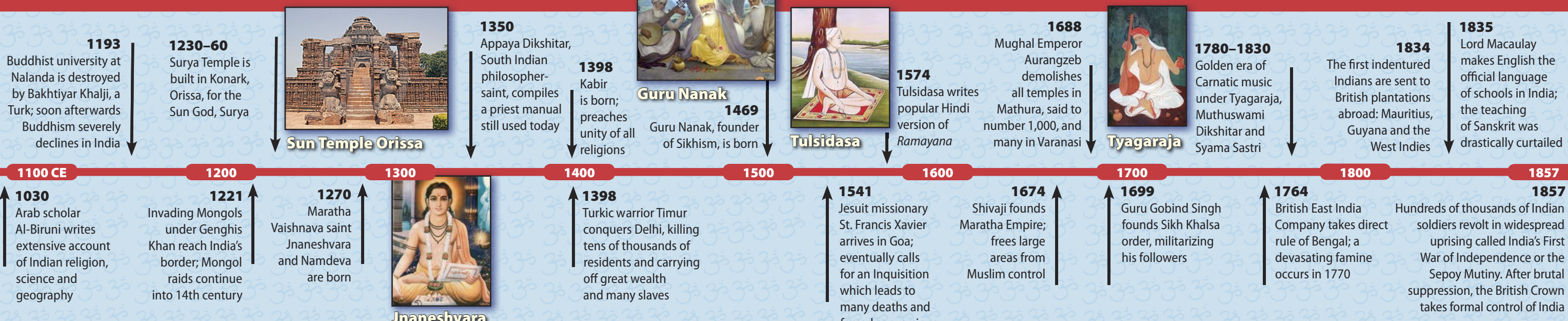
### REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

- Explain:** How do we know so much about the destruction in India under the Muslims and British?
- Describe:** What are three different ways that invading forces could profit from their conquests?
- Contrast:** How was the Muslim style of warfare different from that of the Hindus?
- Synthesize:** How could Indian kings have better fought the Muslim invaders and the British empire builders?

### FOCUS ON WRITING

- Analyze:** How can studying the history of violence in India be useful in helping to bring about a more peaceful world today?

## Timeline: 1100 to 1850 ce



# Surviving a Time of Trial

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Most Muslim rulers were intolerant of other religions, with a few exceptions, such as Akbar.
2. Muslims and Catholics alike worked to convert India's Hindus.
3. During this difficult era, Hinduism remained strong due to the influence of culture and saints.

### The Big Idea

Most Hindus remained passionately devoted to Hinduism despite centuries of persecution

### Key Terms

polytheism, p. 1-8  
Sufism, p. 1-9  
*Ajlaf*s, p. 1-9



5. Describe how the saints of the Bhakti Movement were able to inspire Hindus to new levels of religious devotion.
6. Give examples of how religious loyalty and devotion inspired Hindus to resist conversion and alien rule.
7. Analyze the rationale and strategies behind attempts to forcibly convert Hindus to Islam and Christianity.

## If YOU lived then...

An army of the Muslim emperor Aurangzeb has just destroyed the temple in your Hindu village. The emperor has also reimposed a heavy tax on Hindus. Your father must always carry a receipt showing he paid the tax or else he could be punished. If your family converts to Islam, he won't be forced to pay the tax.

### Do you think your family should convert?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND:** The Roman Catholic Inquisition took place in the Portuguese trading colony of Goa from 1560 to 1812. Church officials arrested, tortured, tried and executed Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Catholics for breaking Church laws, including restrictions against practicing any religion other than Roman Catholicism.

## Hinduism Under Non-Hindu Rule

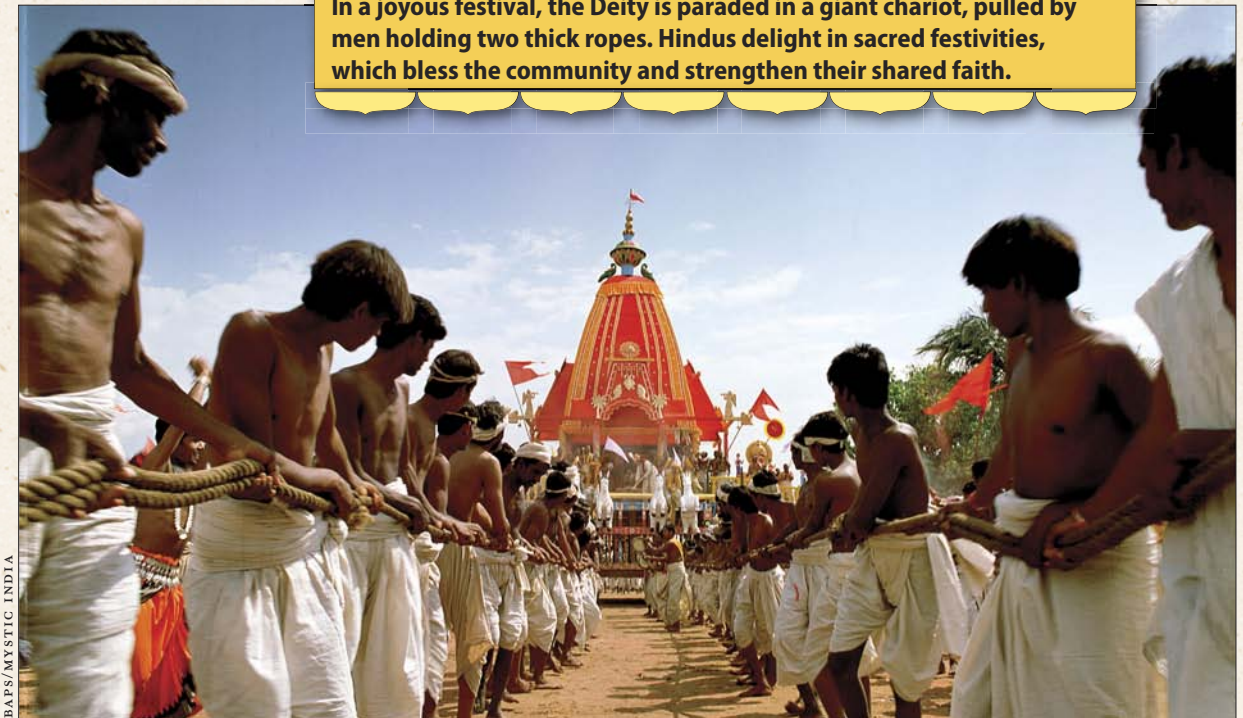
In about 1030, the Muslim scholar Al-Biruni wrote, "The Hindus believe with regard to God that He is eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all-wise, giving life, ruling, preserving." He explained, "According to Hindu philosophers, liberation is common to all castes and to the whole human race, if their intention of obtaining it is perfect." He described Hindu beliefs, scripture and practices that were little different than those of today. He observed that Hindus were not inclined to war with others for religious reasons and praised India's religious tolerance.

Al-Biruni noted, with approval, that the Muslim raids had "utterly ruined the prosperity of the country." Historians today estimate that between 1000 and 1100 ce, 20 million Indians—ten percent of the population—perished. By the 16th century, tens of millions more died through war and famine, while tens of thousands of temples had been destroyed. Hindus survived this long period of adversity through devotion to God and continued loyalty to community and tradition.

### Responding with Devotion

The Bhakti Movement, explained in Chapter Two, was a powerful force throughout our period all over India. It stressed one's personal relationship with God and offered many spiritual practices individu-

In a joyous festival, the Deity is paraded in a giant chariot, pulled by men holding two thick ropes. Hindus delight in sacred festivities, which bless the community and strengthen their shared faith.



BAEPS/MYSTIC INDIA

als could perform on their own. By sitting alone under a tree and chanting the name of Rama, singing bhajana or meditating on God, the common Hindu could find the spiritual strength to endure hardship and **persecution**.

The great philosophers Madhva (1017-1137) and Ramanuja (1238-1317) were forerunners of popular saints during our period who strengthened Hindus and discouraged conversion. An early Vaishnava saint, Jayadeva (c. 1200), wrote the famous *Gita Govinda*, popular in Orissa and Bengal. Among the Vaishnava saints from Maharashtra were Jnaneshvara (1275-1296), Namdeva (1270-1350), Eknatha (1548-1600), Tukarama (1598-1649) and Samarth Ramdas (1606-1682).

In North India, Swami Ramananda (ca 1400-1470) promoted the worship of Lord Rama, praising him as "Hari," a name of Vishnu. Ramananda discouraged caste, saying, "Let no one ask about another's caste or with whom he eats; he who worships Hari is Hari's own."

Two traditions arose from Ramananda's popular teachings. One group, including Nimbarka (13th century), Chaitanya (1486-1534), Surdas (1483-1563), Mirabai (1503-1573) and Tulsidas (1532-1623), emphasized worship

of the personal God. They were enlightened persons filled with a sense of divine **ecstasy**. Vaishnavas especially revere Chaitanya and Mirabai as divine beings.

A second tradition began with Ramananda's disciple Kabir (1398-1518). He was adopted as a child and raised by a low-caste Muslim, a weaver. He wrote hundreds of spiritual poems in Hindi, the language of the people (rather than Sanskrit). His poems are easy to understand, even today, and millions still follow his teachings. Kabir's philosophy, mostly drawn from Hinduism, was simple and direct. It appealed both to Hindus and Muslims. He rejected the caste system and ridiculed many Hindu and Muslim religious practices. Seeking to promote religious harmony, Kabir taught that there is only one God for all religions.

The Sikh religion was also a powerful force. Its founder, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), taught, "Realization of Truth is higher than all else. Higher still is truthful living." He emphasized the continuous recitation of God's name and declared that meditation is the means to see God, who

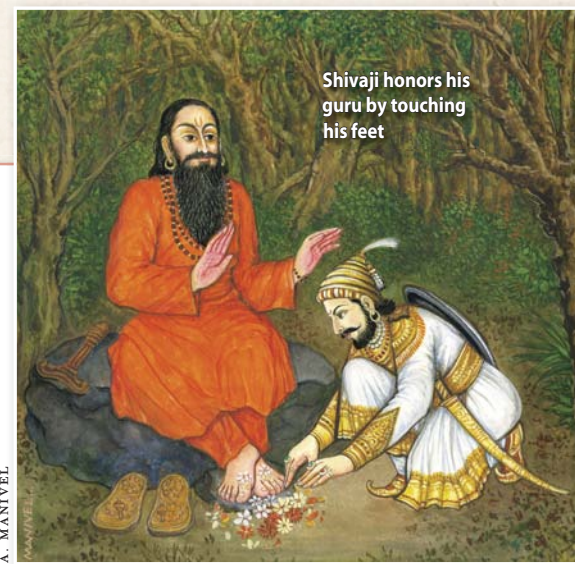
### THE IMPACT TODAY

Tolerance for religious differences has greatly increased around the world in modern times, in part because of the growing influence of Hindu ideals.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**persecution**  
to be treated with hostility because of one's beliefs

**ecstasy**  
feeling or expressing overwhelming joy in God



Shivaji honors his guru by touching his feet

## BIOGRAPHY

ghal Emperor Aurangzeb, who sent a series of large armies to attack him. But Shivaji's smaller, fast-moving and well-armed forces proved difficult to overcome. Unlike earlier Hindu kings, Shivaji made use of modern means of warfare and even developed a navy. In 1674, he founded the Maratha Empire. Seventy years after his death in 1680, the Maratha armies pushed Mughal forces out of much of central India, leaving the Mughal Empire permanently weakened.

Shivaji's guru, Samartha Ramdas, gave him spiritual advice and helped inspire the Maratha people toward freedom. Ramdas had 1,100 disciples, each an excellent preacher, including 300 women. Ramdas taught devotion to Lord Rama, especially through chanting the mantra "Shree Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram"—"Victory to Lord Rama." By one account, Shivaji offered Ramdas his entire kingdom, which Ramdas returned to him to rule in the name of Lord Rama.

German scholar Max Weber wrote in the 19th century, "Shivaji was no bigot and allowed equal freedom to all faiths. He was served as zealously by the Muslims as by the Hindus. He built a mosque opposite his palace for the use of his Muslim subjects." While Shivaji was not above sacking an enemy's city if he needed the money, he did not kill noncombatants, take slaves or damage Muslim holy sites.

## SAINT AND KING

At the time of Shivaji's birth in 1627, the Marathas had been under Muslim domination for hundreds of years. At age 17 this courageous Maratha warrior led his first military campaign, capturing the Torna Fort from the Bijapur Sultanate in 1645. Within ten years, he gained control of enough territory to alarm Mu-

is **omnipresent**. Like Kabir and Ramananda, Guru Nanak discouraged ritual worship and caste discrimination.

Nine Sikh gurus followed Nanak. The eighth, Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), was executed by Aurangzeb for defending religious freedom. His son and successor, Gobind Singh, transformed the Sikhs into a warrior community called the Khalsa. Gobind Singh decreed that he was the last Sikh guru and after his death the *Guru Granth Sahib*, their holy scripture, would be the guide. From that time forward, the Sikhs have been an influential political and military force in North India.

As you have studied, South India largely escaped the oppressive Muslim domination of North and Central India. To this day the South retains the most ancient Hindu culture and has many grand temples. Influential saints of the time include Meykandar, Arunagirinathar, Tayumanavar, Vallabhacharya and Kumaraguruparar.

Other religious movements also

**flourished** during this period such as Kashmir Saivism, Natha saints and the Gorakha Panthi yogis. They all were part of India's ongoing vibrant religious spirit.

### The Conqueror's Religious Goals

The Arab and Turkic Muslim invaders who swept across the Middle East, Africa, Central and South Asia were intent on religious domination, demanding conversion from those they conquered. They made an exception for "People of the Book," Christians and Jews, because certain parts of the *Torah* and the *Bible* are regarded as revealed scripture by the Muslims as well. They did not force Christians and Jews to convert, but humiliated them and imposed the *jizya* tax.

The Muslims treated Hindus as *kafirs*, lowly non-believers. The Christians judged Hindus to be **polytheists**, and some, as in Goa, used violence to convert them. Muslims and Christians both consider monotheism (the belief that there is only one God) to be the right conviction. As explained in

Chapter One, Hindus see no contradiction in believing in One Supreme God while also worshiping the Gods and Goddesses. But this is unacceptable to Muslims and Christians, and resulted in dreadful persecution and killing during this period.

### Centuries of Conversion Attempts

Before the Arabs, all foreign invaders, including the Greeks and Huns, were eventually absorbed into mainstream Hindu society. This was also true of many tribal communities within India. The Muslim rulers—with the exceptions of Akbar and some others—made great effort to convert their Hindu subjects. They used persuasion, heavy taxes, legal discrimination and force, but had only limited success.

Christian conversion efforts in India, though sustained and sometimes vigorous, were not very successful. The East India Company found missionary efforts bad for business and did not encourage them.

At their worst, invaders and later rulers destroyed Hindu temples and killed those who would not convert. According to the Muslim accounts of the time, thousands of temples were looted and torn down, including hundreds at major **pilgrimage** destinations, such as Somnath, Mathura, Vrindavan and Varanasi. Many mosques were built on the same sites from the temple materials.

Among the Muslims, the Sufi preachers were most responsible for making converts. Sufism is a **mystical** tradition within Islam, with some elements similar to the Bhakti Movement. Sufism was much stronger during this period than it is today. Sufis worked closely with Muslims rulers and helped secure their rule by converting conquered people to Islam. Many persons captured and enslaved during raids on Hindu towns and villages converted to Islam knowing they would be treated better or even released.

The caste system was a main obstacle

to conversion. It guaranteed to Hindus a secure identity and place in their community, which they would lose by converting. Also, other religions did not appeal to them either philosophically or culturally. Some low-caste Hindus were tempted to convert to improve their social status. But, in fact, converts to both Christianity and Islam retained their caste position.

Even today, Indian Muslims who claim foreign ancestry—the descendants of Arabs, Turks, Afghans, etc.—are called Ashrafs and have a higher status than Hindu converts, who are called Ajlafs. The Ajlafs are divided into occupational castes, just as are Hindus. Likewise, Christian converts retained their caste status. The lowest, such as Untouchables, or Dalits, even have separate churches and graveyards.

### The Common Man's Plight

Altogether, the common Hindu did not fare well during this time. He faced military attacks, discrimination as a *kafir*, oppressive taxes and sustained pressure to convert. Hindu rulers collected from farmers a tax of one-sixth of their crop. Under Muslim and British rule, taxes soared to as much as one-half, plunging the people of the once wealthy country of India into poverty.

## Section 2 Assessment

### REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE

1. **Explain:** What evidence do we have that Hinduism in 1030 was similar to today's Hinduism?
2. **Analyze:** What are some reasons for Kabir's continued popularity in India?
3. **Explain:** How did Shivaji's faith and religious tolerance help him lead the Maratha people against the Mughals?
4. **Analyze:** Why do Hindus see no contradiction between worshiping the Supreme God and revering many Gods?

### FOCUS ON WRITING

5. Even when threatened, many Hindus refused to convert to another religion. Why did they choose to resist?

### THE IMPACT TODAY

Religious tension still surrounds some sites where mosques were built over destroyed temples, such as in Varanasi, where the Gyanvapi Mosque was built atop the demolished Kashi Vishwanath Temple in the 11th century.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

#### mystical

concerned with the soul or spirit, rather than material things

#### pilgrimage

to travel to a special religious place



A. MANIVEL

MANIVEL

# Hindu Games Snakes and Ladders

The Western childrens game Snakes and Ladders, or Chutes and Ladders, comes from the Indian game for adults called Gyan Chaupar, the "Game of Knowledge." Gyan Chaupar teaches the Hindu spiritual path to moksha, which is liberation from reincarnation. There are 72 numbered squares on the board listing various virtues, vices, states of consciousness and planes of existence. The ladders start from squares with virtues, such as devotion, and move the player up the board. Snakes are found on squares of vices, such as jealousy, and take the player back down the board.

Play begins at square one in the lower left corner. In the old days, the player threw six cowrie shells on the floor. The number of shells that landed upright indicated the number of squares to

move forward. Nowadays dice are used. If the player lands on a ladder, he jumps to the square at the top of the ladder. If he lands on the head of a snake, he slides back down the snake to a low square. The object of the game is to land exactly on square 68, the center of the top row. This square represents liberation from rebirth and entry into heaven. If he lands past 68, he continues to play until he reaches 72, which takes him back to 51 for another try. The game is an entertaining way to learn about making progress on the spiritual path. By cultivating a virtue, such as devotion, one advances. By falling prey to egotism, one goes backwards.

Play the game online or download the board and full instructions at [www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/snakesandladders](http://www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/snakesandladders).

# Music, Art, Dance and Architecture

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. India has rich artistic traditions of music, dance, drama, painting and architecture.
2. These arts are closely tied to the Hindu religion.
3. Muslim rule brought Persian influence to Indian painting and architecture.

### The Big Idea

Islamic culture influenced some forms of Indian art, while others remained largely unaffected.

### Key Terms

*bhajana*, p. 12  
*katha*, p. 13  
*raga*, p. 13  
*tala*, p. 13  
*mudras*, p. 15

### HINDUISM TODAY'S TEACHING STANDARDS

8. Describe the relationship between Hinduism and traditional forms of Indian art, including music, dance, drama, painting and architecture.
9. Explain how the Muslim conquests in the subcontinent influenced the painting and architectural styles of northern and central India.

## If YOU lived then...

Your father is an artist hired by Mughal Emperor Akbar in Delhi. The emperor has brought great painters from Persia. He wants to develop a new art style. You have been an apprentice to your father for several years now, but now you both must learn a new artistic style. Your father thinks it will be valuable to learn from the Persians.

### How do you feel about learning the new art form?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND:** The arts, such as painting, music, dance and architecture, are essential parts of every culture. Flourishing civilizations develop new artistic styles over time. Fresh ideas appear and blend with old traditions, allowing artists to express the culture, thoughts and emotions of the time in beautiful, uplifting works.

## Artistic Achievements

Art within Hindu India was already highly developed prior to the Arab, Turkic and Mughal invasions. Some art forms, such as music and dance, were less affected by these invasions, especially in the South where Hindu rule was the norm. In the North, Persian building design, with its arches and domes, became common, and in painting, the Mughal emperors stimulated a harmonious blending of composition and method, thus creating the Indo-Islamic art style.

## A Rich History of Music

India has always had an extraordinarily diverse musical scene. This ranges from the complex works of the classical tradition to the villagers' simple work songs and devotional hymns in local languages. Temple stone workers, for example, sing together to coordinate the effort of moving a heavy stone. At a certain point in the song, all apply perfectly timed force to their iron pry bars. In this way, stones weighing tons can be moved by hand. To this day, Hindu men and women sing devotional songs to accompany and ease their daily tasks.

There is within Hinduism a long tradition of *bhajana* and *kir-tana*, call-and-response devotional singing of simple songs, usually in small groups with musical accompaniment. *Katha* is a popular form of storytelling, occurring in multiple sessions, often spanning many

days. A highly skilled storyteller will recount episodes from sacred texts, such as the *Ramayana*, then lead the audience in singing related *bhajanas*.

Alongside these basic musical traditions is India's classical Carnatic music. Three great innovators of this ancient system lived in South India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. They **systematized** and improved upon the existing framework of raga and tala, the essentials of Indian music. Hindustani is a related musical system that arose in the North as musicians blended Persian elements into the Indian tradition.

First, the composer selects a raga in which to write his song. A raga is a pattern of notes upon which a melody is made. Ragas include notes from the seven-note Indian scale (*sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni*) as well as micro-tones, which are like the sharps and flats of Western music, only more numerous. This multiplicity of tones allows for the creation of thousands of ragas. Next, the composer selects a tala, or rhythmic pattern. Talas

range from the simple and most common eight-beat *Adi tala* to elaborate rhythms such as the *Dhamar tala*, composed of 14 beats divided as 5, 2, 3 and 4.

Songs were written in Sanskrit and increasingly in the regional languages, such as Hindi, Telegu and Tamil. Singers and musicians **improvise** upon the basic melody while keeping within the chosen raga and tala. The results are always creative, akin to the improvisations in Western jazz. This is one key way that Indian classical music differs from Western classical music, which is usually played exactly as it was composed.

## A Meeting of Art Styles

The Mughal emperors were responsible for a major advancement in painting which eventually influenced much of India. Earlier Muslim rulers started the process by bringing artists to India to illustrate the elaborate handwritten books of the time (see top left on page 14). These painters had been influenced earlier by Chinese artists who were brought to Persia by conquering Mongols.

### THE IMPACT TODAY

Modern *katha* performers attract crowds of thousands in the US and England, and hundreds of thousands in India.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**systematize**  
to arrange in an orderly fashion

**improvise**  
in music, to create and perform spontaneously

## INDIA'S MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Cymbals, drums, horns and stringed instruments commonly accompany the singer in the various types of Indian music. In concerts, the singer and the drum or horn player will engage in a kind of duet, with each improvising upon the other's melody line and rhythm.



Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. At left is the Saraswati Vina, with 24 frets, four playing strings and three drone strings. The other two instruments are the four-stringed tambura. In the background are the Divinities of music.

The double-sided drum, *mridangam*, is popular in South India



The *shehnai*, a popular, oboe-like, North Indian reed instrument, is similar to the larger *nadasvara* of South India



V&A MUSEUM

EHRENFELD COLLECTION

The Mughal Emperor Akbar, trained in art as a child, encouraged a true synthesis of forms. He commissioned craftsmen by the hundreds in an almost factory-like setting under his Royal Bureau of Books. This enterprise, headed by the great Persian artists, Khwaja Abdus Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, resulted in major artistic innovations.

As the Mughal Empire declined, this huge community of artists lost their rich patronage. The last emperor, Aurangzeb, dismissed the artists and banned music and dance. He judged their work contrary to Islamic teachings that prohibit the depiction of religious themes in any art form. Hindu and Muslim artists turned to independent local rulers across India for support. Many applied the new techniques to Hindu subjects, especially illustrating the *Mahabharata* and stories of Lord Krishna.

Indian painting before this time was two-dimensional, as seen in the example at top left. The new style adopted typical Indian colors, used delicate brush lines (some made with a brush of a single squirrel hair) and introduced better lighting effects. Advancements were also made in the preparation of pigments and paints, allowing for a greater range and depth of color.

During the British rule, a blending of painting styles was attempted between Indo-Islamic and European art. The result, called Company style, tended toward realism, and was later displaced by the invention of photography.

**Architecture**

In South India during this period, the art of temple building reached its peak. In fact, Hindu temples today are still built according to the styles developed at this time, following principles from the ancient *Agama* texts. In North India, Hindu architecture was eventually strongly influenced by Persian design, especially the use of the dome and arch. The most spectacular construction during the period was the Taj Mahal, among the world's most elegant buildings. Built in white marble by Shah Jahan to entomb his beloved wife, the Taj, with its immense domes and towering minarets, is Persian

**RELIGION THROUGH MOVEMENT**

Bharatanatyam and the related dances Kuchipudi and Odissi come from the ancient temple dances of South India, described in the 2,000-year-old *Natya Shastra*. Originally, dance, accompanied by classical Indian music, was one of the sixteen offerings made during the ritual worship called puja. Indian dance is not simply entertainment, but a religious experience both for the dancer and the audience. Early dance tradition used improvisation, as does Indian music, but today the choreography is usually set. Most dances are depictions of religious stories, told through poses, movements and dozens of meaningful hand gestures called mudras.

When the first Bharatanatyam dancers came to Europe in 1838, a reviewer wrote, "The dancers of all Europe dance with their feet, but that is all. The Indians dance in a different manner. They dance with their whole frame. Their heads dance, their arms dance. Their eyes, above all, obey the movement and fury of the dance. Their feet click against the floor; the arms and the hands flash in the air; the eyes sparkle; their mouths mutter; the whole body quivers."



COURTESY, KANISHKA PATEL

A Bharatanayam dancer in the pose of Siva Nataraja; (left) hand gestures, called mudras: picking flowers, greeting, lotus



in design with many Hindu elements. Completed in 1653, it took 20,000 craftsmen working 22 years to build and was a great drain on the treasury. Shah Jahan was overthrown and imprisoned by his son, Aurangzeb, shortly after its completion.

not break down under the alien rule, so the social structure remained stable. Most Hindus did not convert to Islam, despite heavy pressure. The arrival of the East India Company changed the political situation. By force and skillful tactics, the British slowly gained complete control of India.

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY**

**Nataraja**  
"King of Dance," a form of Lord Siva

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Beginning in 1100, Muslim armies conquered vast regions of India. Despite repeated defeats, the Rajput and other Hindu rulers refused to surrender. South India, far from the Muslim capitals of Delhi and Agra, escaped the unceasing warfare and foreign dominance that beset North India, suffering only periodic raids. Wherever Hindus were conquered, resistance continued, mainly on a social and religious level. The caste system did

**Section 3 Assessment**

**REVIEWING IDEAS, TERMS AND PEOPLE**

- Describe:** What are the roles of raga, tala and improvisation in Indian classical music?
- Analyze:** What were some of the advancements made in painting under the Mughals? What made these advancements possible?
- Contrast:** How did the architecture of this period differ in North and South India and why?

**FOCUS ON WRITING**

- Synthesize:** How does the mixing of cultures result in new artistic styles? Give examples from your society.



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

1. We need to understand even unpleasant history because:
  - A We can then punish the people responsible
  - B It helps us learn to live in peace today
  - C It helps us see that some religions are bad
  - D We should never forgive our attackers
2. What military advantage did Muslim invaders have?
  - A Support from people in the invaded regions
  - B Many more soldiers than the Indian kings
  - C Bigger elephants and more of them
  - D Horses, better weapons, tactics and training
3. Why is the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar remembered as exceptional?
  - A He destroyed many Hindu temples
  - B He created the largest empire in the world
  - C He was tolerant of other religions
  - D He formed strong alliances with British merchants
4. How did the British East India Company gain control of India?
  - A They set up puppet rulers under their control
  - B They created their own army
  - C They played one ruler against another
  - D All of the above
5. How did the Bhakti Movement help preserve Hinduism?
  - A It strongly supported the caste system
  - B Followers were exempt from the religious tax (jizya)
  - C Its devotional practices made each Hindu strong
  - D It organized military resistance to the Muslims
6. Converts to Islam and Christianity found themselves
  - A Welcomed as equals
  - B At the same social level as before their conversion
  - C Still subject to the religious tax
  - D All of the above
7. When Shivaji offered his guru the kingdom, the guru
  - A Took over the kingdom and moved into the palace
  - B Told Shivaji to rule it in the name of Lord Rama
  - C Refused to accept it
  - D Divided the kingdom among his followers
8. Which of the following was NOT a hardship endured by Hindus during this period?
  - A The heavy religious tax
  - B The destruction of temples
  - C The powerful Bhakti Movement
  - D Being regarded as kafirs
9. Why did the British East India Company not encourage missionary efforts to convert Hindus?
  - A They found these efforts to be bad for business
  - B They considered Hindus to be 'People of the Book'
  - C They found the missionaries' methods unethical
  - D They thought Hinduism was a better religion
10. The game of Gyan Chaupar was intended to:
  - A Teach the path to spiritual liberation
  - B Be entertaining for children
  - C Convert Hindus to Christianity
  - D Show that going to heaven is not the goal of life
11. When did Hindus make and enjoy music?
  - A In formal concerts with musicians
  - B During their work day
  - C At the special events called kathas
  - D All of the above
12. What terms best describe Indian music?
  - A Improvisation
  - B Raga
  - C Tala
  - D All of the above
13. Which Indian art forms changed during Muslim times?
  - A Music and dance
  - B Painting and architecture
  - C Music and painting
  - D All of the above
14. Why did India remain mostly Hindu?
  - A The caste system
  - B Loyalty to the Hindu religion
  - C The personal nature of Bhakti worship
  - D All of the above

**Internet Resources:** Go to <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/education/> for a PDF version of this chapter, as well as Chapters One and Two with clickable links to resources. Also at the same URL are additional teaching

resources and letters of endorsement from academics and community leaders. To order additional copies of this Educational Insight, go to <http://www.minimela.com/booklets/>.