



INDIA THROUGH THE AGES / 1

The story of India is an epic tale of diversity and spirituality, achievement and tragedy. This timeline highlights a few key dates and events that helped shape modern India and looks at the country's mainly harmonious relations with its Jewish communities, although the question of where the Jews of India are originally "from" is a complex one. Indeed, part of India's magic is that it defies easy or precise answers, so keep in mind that many of the dates and figures here are approximate only.

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS AND THE RISE OF RELIGIONS

- 7000 BCE** Settled life emerges in Indus Valley (modern India-Pakistan border)
- 2500** Large cities established in Indus Valley, the cradle of Indian civilization
- 1500** Vedic Period begins. Hinduism, Sanskrit culture, and caste system are strengthened
- 800** The first Jews? Jews said to arrive in Kingdom of Cochin on Malabar Coast
- 722** Part of the Lost Tribes? Bene Israel said to arrive on Koncan Coast near Mumbai
- 500** Buddha spreads his teaching. Jainism also develops
- 326** Alexander the Great abandons efforts to extend power into India

THE FIRST GREAT INDIAN EMPIRE

- 321** The Mauryan Empire dominates Indian sub-continent
They create efficient trade and administration systems
Caste system, including untouchability, strengthens
Buddhism becomes India's main religion under powerful Emperor Asoka
- 232** Asoka's death starts decline of empire and weakening of Buddhism
Different tribes and local kingdoms come to control much of India
- 175** More Bene Israel said to arrive, fleeing Hellenistic rule in Israel

A GOLDEN AGE UNDER THE GUPTAS

- 319 CE** The Gupta Empire reaches its peak, ruling most of India
Major advances in trade, arts, and sciences
Hinduism revives, and becomes India's dominant religion



timeline

INDIA THROUGH THE AGES / 2

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- **510** Gupta army defeated by invading Hun from central Asia
Long period of regional rule with many separate Hindu kingdoms
- **550** Northern India, the traditional home of power and development
Southern culture and prosperity grow with trade with Egypt and Romans
- **900** Cochin Jews settle in their "Jerusalem," the city of Cranganore on Malabar Coast
- ISLAMIC RULERS, A DIVERSE POPULATION, A JEWISH "KING"**
- **1001** Muslim armies from modern Afghanistan begin great raids into Northern India
Cochin Jews flourish in coastal trade and enjoy close relations with local people
- **1069** Joseph Rabban considered a "king" or feudal ruler in Cochin / Malabar area
Copper plates record privileges granted to Rabban and his descendants
Cochin community tied to wider Jewish world and "mainstream" Judaism
- **1206** Based in Delhi, Muslim emperors dominate north and are influential in south
Allow Hindu majority and other groups to follow their own laws and customs
- **1236** Razi Sultana becomes first woman sovereign in Indian and Islamic history
Bene Israel have close relations with local Muslims and Hindus on Koncan Coast
They are largely isolated from wider Jewish world and "mainstream" Judaism
- TOLERANT MUGHALS, INTOLERANT PORTUGUESE**
- **1526** Muslim armies from Central Asia establish Mughal Empire
Rule over almost entire Indian subcontinent
Tolerate non-Islamic religions and local customs, align with local authorities
Paradesi (or foreigners), Sephardi Jews settle in Cochin and Cranganore
Portuguese, from enclave in Goa, harass non-Catholics, attack Cranganore
Jews flee south, to city of Cochin (Kochi) & welcomed by local Hindu ruler
- **1568** Paradesi synagogue built in Cochin
Cochin Jews gain reputation for knowledge and religiosity
- **1632** Construction of Taj Mahal begins, part of flourishing of arts under Mughals
- **1683** Economic boom for Cochin Jews begins, maximum population 2,500



timeline

INDIA THROUGH THE AGES / 3

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- **1707** Mughal Empire rapidly weakens
Its power dispersed among various Hindu kingdoms
European colonists, especially British and French, also seek influence
- **1768** Bene Israel visited by Cochin Jews & adopt more traditional Jewish customs & laws
- **J E W S A N D T H E R A J : L I F E U N D E R B R I T A I N**
- **1800** Britain, through the East Indies Company and its army, effectively controls India
City of Bombay (Mumbai) grows rapidly and key British center
Most Bene Israel leave villages and move to nearby Bombay
Bene Israel population 6,000. Build first synagogues
Cochin, 900 miles south of Bombay, becomes economic backwater
Its Jews decline in influence and number. Many leave for Bombay
New Jews in India: "Baghdadi" community from the Middle East is formed
Most also settle in Bombay
- **1847** British imperialism, education, technology, and English language gain influence
Christian missionaries expose Bene Israel to education and Jewish texts
Passover Haggadah translated into Marathi
- **1857** Indian Rebellion against British rule defeated after considerable violence
Many Bene Israel serve in British army
- **1860** "Baghdadi" Jews, especially David Sassoon, prominent in Bombay business & trade
"Baghdadi" Jews maintain Arabic language and clothing, Sephardi religious customs
They are distant from Indian society but have close ties with British authorities
Tensions between Baghdadis and Bene Israel in Bombay
- **1878** Great Famine, worst of series of famines under British, kills 5.5 million
- **1885** Birth of modern Indian nationalism: Indian National Congress formed
- **1913** Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore wins Nobel Prize for Literature



timeline

INDIA THROUGH THE AGES / 4

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- **1914** Over a million Indian volunteers serve in WWI with British
Mahatma Gandhi and Congress lead mass demand for national independence
- **1925** Liberal Jewish community established in Bombay among Bene Israel
- **1945** Britain, under Labour Government, accepts idea of Indian independence
Mohammad Jinnah and Muslim League demand separate Islamic state
- PARTITION, INDEPENDENCE**
- **1947** Increasing Hindu-Muslim violence as independence draws near
Britain hastily quits India
They create predominantly Hindu (India) and Muslim (Pakistan) states
Massive population exchanges and violence, over 500,000 killed
Nehru Prime Minister. India aligned neither to US nor Soviets
- **1948** Mahatma Gandhi's calls for Hindu-Muslim unity leads to his assassination
India does not recognize new state of Israel
20-30,000 Indian Jews, Bene Israel in Bombay is the largest community
- **1950** Constitution defines India as sovereign, democratic republic
- **1951** Population 361 million, 16.6% literacy rate, widespread poverty
Gradual migration by most of India's Jews begins
Bene Israel and remaining Cochin Jews move mainly to Israel
Most of the Baghdadi community migrate to Britain
- **1962** War against China followed by wars with Pakistan (1965, 1971)
- **1964** Nehru dies. His daughter Indira Gandhi becomes prime minister in 1966
Israeli Chief Rabbinate rules Bene Israel are completely Jewish
- **1967** Migration of Jews peak
- **1968** 400th anniversary of Paradesi synagogue in Cochin. Indira Gandhi attends
- **1971** Constitution amended to define India as socialist, secular, democratic republic
- **1974** India conducts first nuclear tests, on way to becoming a nuclear power
- **1975** State of Emergency: Indira Gandhi assumes authoritarian powers



timeline

INDIA THROUGH THE AGES / 5

■ General timeline ■ Jewish timeline

- **1977** Indira Gandhi's rule by decree rejected. Congress loses election for first time
- **1979** Mother Teresa wins Nobel Peace prize for her work among poor
- **1980** Indira Gandhi and Congress return to power
 - Christian group in north east claims they were originally Jews from lost tribes
 - Become known as Bnei Menashe and start practising Judaism
 - Over time, about 2,000 move to Israel where their status as Jews is debated

- **1981** 60% of India's population live under World Bank poverty line
- **1984** Unrest with Sikhs leads to assassination of Indira Gandhi

ETERNAL AND MODERN

- **1991** Free market reforms begin, leading to growth in middle classes
 - Cities grow rapidly but still today most Indians live in village & rural areas
 - A small community known as Bnei Ephraim / the Telagu Jews emerges
 - They claim Jewish descent, begin studying and practising Judaism
- **1992** India establishes relations with Israel. Military & trade ties grow rapidly
- **1998** Amartya Sen's work on poverty and development wins Nobel Prize for economics
- **2008** Mumbai (Bombay) terror attacks
 - Six people in Chabad House among the dead
- **2011** 21% live under World Bank poverty line. 74% of population are literate
 - 415 living languages, 29 languages (led by Hindi) with over a million speakers
 - 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim (world's third largest Muslim population), 2% Christian
- **2014** Narendra Modi, leader of Hindu Nationalist party BJP, becomes prime minister
- **2016** GDP per capita 129th in world out of 190
 - 60,000 Bene Israel live in Israel, including children of Bene Israel parents

India's Population Today: 1.339 billion

Jewish Population Today: 4,500-6,000