

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE EUROPEAN UNDERSTANDING OF INDIA

General Editors of the Series

K. A. BALLHATCHET

P. J. MARSHALL

D. F. POCKOCK

European attempts to understand India have been pursued in a variety of fields. Many of the books and articles that resulted are still of great historical importance. Not only do they provide valuable information about the India of the time; they are also of significance in the intellectual history of Europe. Each volume in the present series has been edited by a scholar who is concerned to elucidate both its Indian and its European relevance.

The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by

P. J. MARSHALL

Lecturer in History, King's College, London



CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1970

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521077378

Selection and editorial material © Cambridge University Press 1970

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1970

This digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 73-111132

ISBN 978-0-521-07737-8 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-09296-8 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>		1
1 John Zephaniah Holwell, Chapters on 'The Religious Tenets of the Gentoos'		45
2 Alexander Dow, 'A Dissertation concerning the Hindoos'		107
3 Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, 'The Translator's Preface' to <i>A Code of Gentoow Laws</i>		140
4 Warren Hastings, 'Letter to Nathaniel Smith', from <i>The Bhāgvat-Gēētā</i>		184
5 Charles Wilkins, 'The Translator's Preface', from <i>The Bhāgvat-Gēētā</i>		192
6 William Jones, 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India'		196
7 William Jones, 'On the Hindus'		246
8 William Jones, 'On the Chronology of the Hindus'		262
<i>Glossary</i>		291
<i>Index</i>		302

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Plate

Holwell's Hindu deities

page 102

Reproduced by permission of the British Museum.

Text illustrations

Ganesha

page 201

Varuna

222

Ganga

228

Surya

233

These illustrations are a selection from those included by Jones in his 'Essay on the Gods of Greece, Italy and India' and are reproduced by courtesy of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Since the sixteenth century large parts of the world have been subjected not only to the political, military or economic power of Europe, but to the power of European ideas as well. But if the Europeans have exported more than they imported, the intellectual exchange has not been all one way; the conquerors have not been entirely uninfluenced by the conquered. This book will attempt to show how increasing knowledge of one alien civilisation forced Europeans to reconsider and even to modify certain widely accepted ideas.

In the second half of the eighteenth century the triumph of British arms in India gave Europeans new opportunities for studying Indian civilisation. It is hardly surprising that many of those who took advantage of these new opportunities should have been British or that Indian religion should have been the main object of their inquiries. Religion was still the major preoccupation of the intellectual life of eighteenth-century Europe, even for those who rejected its formal claims, and religion seemed to be the key for understanding all things Indian. Nearly all investigators were drawn to Hinduism, rather than to Islam, with which they believed themselves to be already familiar, or to Buddhism, which most Europeans could not identify with certainty. A selection from what seem to be the most significant accounts of Hinduism written in English in the second half of the eighteenth century are here reproduced.

It must be stressed that this book is intended to be a study of Europeans and their beliefs, not of Hinduism. The accounts in it seem to me to be interesting not for the information which they give or fail to give about Hinduism, but for what they reveal of the authors and their contemporaries. The purpose of the Introduction and the notes is therefore to try to show something of the assumptions with which Europeans approached Hinduism, of the sources available to them, of the interpretations they put on what they had learnt, and of how their discoveries were received by a

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

wider public. The notes do not attempt to correct misapprehensions, inaccuracies or distortions.

My deficiencies, which include a total ignorance of Indian languages and a knowledge of Hinduism which is limited and superficial, have made me heavily dependent on the expertise of others, and I have received unfailing generosity from all those to whom I have turned for help. I would like particularly to thank Professor K. A. Ballhatchet, the General Editor of this series, for much helpful advice. Mr J. B. Harrison and Dr Geoffrey Parrinder read drafts of the Introduction and suggested valuable amendments to it. Mr Edward Courtney resolved many of the problems raised by Sir William Jones's classical allusions. Dr Wendy O'Flaherty and Mrs Marta Guha devoted a great deal of time and effort to the Glossary and I am deeply in their debt. They are in no way responsible for any inaccuracies and inconsistencies that may remain in it. Many of the identifications in the Glossary are due to the resourcefulness of Professor Ashin Das Gupta, Dr Uma Das Gupta and Mr Ranajit Guha. Mr Simon Digby also gave me much help with the Glossary.

I have omitted the majority of illustrations which accompanied the texts and have in some instances deleted sentences which directed the reader's attention to illustrations not reproduced. Phonetic renderings of long passages of Sanskrit in Halhed's Preface have also been omitted. The original spelling has been preserved throughout, but capitalisation has been modernised and italics have been more sparingly used. The only accents and diacritical marks used in transcriptions of words from Asian languages are those of the original authors.

Sir William Jones's transcriptions present few problems for modern readers, since his principles of transcription are not very different from those generally in use at the present time. But it is often extremely difficult to identify the original behind attempts made by Holwell, Dow or Halhed to reproduce phonetically the sounds made to them by their *pandits*. Modern transcriptions (often very tentative ones) are provided either in the notes or in a Glossary at the end of the book.

As this book is about the British discovery of Hinduism, it

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

seemed appropriate to refer in the notes and the Introduction to contemporary English translations of books originally written in other European languages, where these are available.

The place of publication for all books cited is London, unless otherwise indicated.

P. J. M

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09296-8 - The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century

Edited by P. J. Marshall

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Textual Note

The sources for the texts are as follows:

- 1 *Interesting Historical Events relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan*, vol. ii, 1767
- 2 *The History of Hindostan*, vol. i, 1768
- 3 *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or Ordinations of the Pundits*, 1776
- 4 and 5 *The Bhāgvāt-Gēētā, or Dialogues of Krēshnā and Ārjōn*, 1785
- 6 *Asiatick Researches*, vol. i, chapter ix, 1789 (First written in 1784, revised for publication)
- 7 *Asiatick Researches*, vol. i, chapter xxv, 1789 (The third anniversary discourse, delivered 2 February 1786)
- 8 *Asiatick Researches*, vol. ii, chapter vii, 1790 (Written in January 1788)

Note on Footnotes

The original footnotes of the authors are indicated by numerals; additional footnotes inserted by the editor are indicated by letters. Where both types of note occur on the same page, the author's note is invariably given first.