

# HISTORY OF INDIA



SINHA & BANERJEE

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BY

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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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This book is written for the special benefit of students reading for the Bachelor's degree of Indian Universities. But we hope it will be useful to all persons who want more knowledge of Indian history than a school text-book provides. It is difficult to meet the requirements of the student as also the general reader. But that has been our aim.

Many learned monographs are published every year, which light up obscure corners of Indian history, give us new interpretations of old facts or bring new facts to our knowledge. In view of this almost incessant research work of our generation, standard histories of the last generation have to be completely revised and re-written, or set aside as obsolete. This book is, we hope, a fairly connected and up-to-date review, which also gives an appreciation of personalities and presents before the reader the complexity and variety of the strands that have been woven together into the history of India. In so complicated a story much must remain untold. There is little space in our book for controversy.

It is not the work of a single mind, nor is it a composite history written by specialists. There may be some lack of literary unity ; we did not, however, carefully allot space to each other, demanding a severe effort at compression, but left each of us to deal as best as he could in that portion of Indian history in which he is interested. No doubt we compared notes in the end. We hope our readers will not find here the usual defects of a composite history. If it is not erudite, we hope it is not also dull.

College students should read more history than less, and we have given at the end of each chapter a list of monographic literature over which they should learn to browse freely.

April 20, 1944

N. K. SINHA  
A. C. BANERJEE

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

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In this edition the book has been thoroughly revised and brought up-to-date, two new Chapters and several Genealogical Tables have been added, and an attempt has been made to make the narrative more simple and interesting.

August 15, 1947

N. K. SINHA  
A. C. BANERJEE

## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

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We have once more revised the text and added new matter here and there. The last chapter has been rewritten and brought up-to-date.

March 24, 1950

N. K. SINHA  
A. C. BANERJEE

## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

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The text has been revised and new matter has been added in some chapters.

July 7, 1955

N. K. SINHA  
A. C. BANERJEE

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

### SECTION I

#### **GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS IN INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE**

“Geography and chronology”, it has been said, “are the sun and the moon, the right eye and the left eye of all history”. The evolution of Indian history and culture cannot be rightly understood without a proper appreciation of the geographical factors involved.

#### **BOUNDARIES, GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL**

Geographically, India is bounded on the north, north-west, and north-east by mountain ranges, and elsewhere by the sea. Neither Burma nor Ceylon is geographically a part of India, although the latter is ‘geologically a fragment detached from the peninsula in relatively recent times’.

The historical boundaries of the country have not, however, always coincided with the geographical boundaries. Afghanistan and Baluchistan, which are, geographically, portions of the great Iranian plateau, have for many centuries been closely associated with India from the historical and political points of view. The Maurya Emperors ruled over some portions of these two countries. The Bactrian Greeks, the Parthians, the Sakas and the Kushans united some portions of north-western India with large areas in Afghanistan. Under Sultan Mahmud, Muhammad Ghuri and the Mughals, India again came into close political relations with Afghanistan. Under the Mughals Afghanistan was a part of the Indian Empire. Under Ahmad Shah Abdali and his successors the Punjab, Sind and Kashmir became political dependencies of Afghanistan. Even now certain portions of Baluchistan which lie beyond the proper geographical limits of India and form an integral part of the Iranian plateau are within the political boundary of Pakistan.

Turning to the north-east, we find almost inaccessible ranges of hills separating Burma from Assam and Bengal. Burma, indebted in many ways to Indian culture, remained outside the political jurisdiction of Indian Powers till the termination of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1826), when the Burmese territories annexed by the East India Company came under the control of the Government of Bengal. Burma remained an Indian province till 1937. This long political association makes it necessary for the historian of modern India to include the story of Burma in his narrative.

The islands in the neighbouring seas—the Andaman and Nicobar islands, Ceylon, the Laccadives and the Maldives—have on different occasions come within the administrative control of different Indian Powers. The Chola Kings of South India established their authority in some of these islands. Ceylon was ruled by an adventurous Indian coloniser named Vijay Singh, whom one tradition represents as a native of Bengal. The British Government established its control over Ceylon and the Andaman and Nicobar islands after the foundation of the British Empire in India. The Andaman and Nicobar islands still form a part of India, but Ceylon never had any administrative connection with British India.

#### NAVAL TRADITIONS

India has a very long coast-line, extending over more than 3,000 miles ; yet the number of natural harbours on the Indian coast is small, for the coast-line is comparatively straight and, consequently, unfavourable to the growth of convenient harbours. The Indian people never earned the reputation of being a maritime nation ; it is, on the whole, true to say that their attention was always attracted towards the north-west and the north-east—to Western Asia, Persia, Central Asia, China and Tibet—rather than to the lands beyond the seas. But it would be a mistake to think that the mystery of the sea never allured the Indian mind. The Dravidians of the prehistoric times navigated the seas in pursuit of trade and commerce. The evidence about the maritime activities of the Aryans is not quite clear, but the well-known work entitled *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* gives a detailed account of the maritime trade of India in the first century A.D. and refers to numerous Indian

ports. Commercial enterprise and the spirit of adventure led thousands of Indians across the eastern seas to Burma, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and the neighbouring islands. Tamralipti (modern Tamluk, Midnapore district in West Bengal) was a flourishing port, where the famous Chinese traveller Fa-hien embarked on his return journey to China. The Cholas extended their authority to many 'ancient islands in the sea'. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Marathas built up a respectable naval power. But the Muslim rulers of India, some of whom were very powerful on land, never cared for the sea. Vincent Smith observes that the neglect of the sea power was one of the causes responsible for the downfall of the Mughal Empire.

Towards the beginning of the sixteenth century the Portuguese established their supremacy in the Indian Ocean. Albuquerque consolidated this supremacy by establishing fortresses and bases at strategic points and also by concluding alliances with rulers of strategically important coastal areas. Although unable to challenge the Portuguese naval power, the Dutch occupied Java, Malacca, Colombo and Cochin in the seventeenth century. They were followed by the English and the French, whose rivalry in the eighteenth century was finally decided in favour of the former by their naval superiority. After Suffren's failure to establish French supremacy in the Indian Ocean (1782-84) British authority in the Indian seas was never again questioned till the fall of Singapore during the Second World War. For more than a century and a half the Indian Ocean remained a British lake.

The area described as South-East Asia has been for long known as Further India. The name reflects the idea that India and South-East Asia have reacted on each other. From the first century A.D. to the middle of the fifteenth century this area was politically and culturally within the Indian sphere. Sea power based on India established a link between the mainland and the islands. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese established a political system in South-East Asia which was essentially based on India. Though the Dutch who followed them established their headquarters in South-East Asia in Batavia, it was Ceylon which controlled their strategy of naval power. The Dutch later held the Indies under the protection

of the British navy. History thus indicates that the naval defence of South-East Asia has always been related to India.

#### CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

When we speak of the natural boundaries of India—the mountains and the seas separating her from the rest of the world—we are tempted to exaggerate her isolation. But Indian civilisation cannot be regarded as a plant growing in the shade, far away from the tempests of the outside world. Although ‘the protective wall of the Himalayas’ may be said to have ‘given to India the continuity of its civilisation and social structure from the earliest times to our own times’, yet the imposing mountain ranges on the north, north-west and north-east could never keep India immune from the political and cultural influence of other countries. In the north-west there are well-known passes (Khaibar, Gomal and Bolan) which, in spite of many natural obstacles, provided passage to the successive invaders of India, from the Aryans to Ahmad Shah Abdali. In the north there are roads from Tibet to Nepal that have carried for ages not merely peaceful missionaries of culture and religion, but soldiers as well. In the north-east there are considerable gaps in the chain of mountains separating Assam from Burma, through which the Tibeto-Burmans, the Ahoms and the Burmese entered into Assam. “The natural frontiers of India thus gave security, but not immunity, from invasion, and while they ensured definite individuality to her people by separating them from the rest of Asia by well-marked boundary lines, they never isolated them from the rest of the world”.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS WITHIN INDIA

India is divided into three so-called ‘territorial compartments’: (1) the Indo-Gangetic plain; (2) the Deccan plateau, lying to the south of the Vindhya, and to the north of the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers; and (3) the Far South. The Indo-Gangetic plain is, historically, the most important part of India, for it has always been ‘the seat of the principal empires and the scene of the events most interesting to the outer world’. This feature of Indian history can be easily explained with

reference to clearly noticeable geographical factors. The vast plain of Northern India is divided into two unequal portions by the desert of Rajputana and the Aravalli mountains. The plain on the west of the desert is watered by the Indus, and that on the east by the Ganges and its tributaries. These rivers fertilised the soil and provided easy means of communication. Naturally the Indo-Gangetic plain became the seat of a flourishing, and ever-growing, population. Secondly, except in the case of the British, Indian history has always been dominated by invaders who came from the north-west. These invaders naturally followed the Ganges, and extended their power to the whole of Northern India, before they crossed the Vindhya and appeared in the Deccan plateau. The history of the Aryan and the Muslim invasions illustrates this point. Delhi stands at the mouth of the Gangetic plain, and all invaders from the north-west had to pass through Delhi or its neighbourhood in order to gain entrance into the heart of Northern India. That is why five decisive battles of Indian history—two battles of Tarain and three battles of Panipat—took place in the neighbourhood of Delhi.

The two 'territorial compartments' lying to the south of the Vindhyas are somewhat isolated due to their geographical position. The Vindhyas cut them off from Northern India, but many centuries ago the Aryan immigrants into India proved that this high and extensive range of hills was no insurmountable barrier. The political and cultural contact begun by them became more and more intimate with the progress of time, and for historical purposes *Dakshināpatha* is as much an integral part of India as *Aryāvarta*. But for certain obvious reasons the story of the Deccan plateau and the Far South occupies a subordinate place in the history of India. In the first place, the early history of trans-Vindhyan India is primarily the history of the Dravidians, but unfortunately we are not yet in possession of adequate materials to do full justice to this subject. Secondly, as Smith points out, "No southern power ever could attempt to master the north, but the more ambitious rulers of Aryāvarta or Hindostan often have extended their sway far beyond the dividing line of the Narbada". The historian of India must concentrate his attention upon large States and Empires, seeking to give some sort of unity to the complicated story of the vast

country he has to deal with ; naturally he is able to give only a secondary place to kingdoms which never attained more than regional importance.

The Deccan plateau is sub-divided into three distinct regions by the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats. The Coromandel coast stands between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal ; the Konkan and Malabar lie between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. Between the two mountain ranges, on the east and the west, lies the main plateau of the Deccan. Historically, however, these three well-marked geographical divisions are not of much importance, for the mountains never stood in the way of political unity or cultural contact. The Marathas live on both sides of the Western Ghats, but they speak the same language and observe the same social customs. The Konkan often came under the political control of the Power which ruled Maharashtra proper.

The Godavari and the Krishna have cut the South into three natural divisions and the political history of the South centres round the struggles between the States which rose to prominence in these three areas. The Krishna-Tungabhadra Doab was the chief bone of contention between the powers dominant in the Deccan and in the Far South.

The Far South, or the territory lying beyond the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers, is not cut off from the Deccan plateau by any prominent natural boundaries, but it had a historical individuality which was affected only on rare occasions by the political fortunes of the trans-Krishna region. It was in the Far South that the cultural accomplishments and political genius of the Dravidians found a true home, where they could develop naturally, without being hampered by the aggressive and triumphant North. No Hindu or Muslim Empire-builder of the North ever succeeded in bringing the whole of the Far South under his control.

Malabar was very difficult to reach from Mysore or Coimbatore. From Mysore it could be approached only *via* Coorg or Malabar Wynod by some very difficult passes. Only the Palghat gap led from Coimbatore to Malabar. All these difficulties of communication prevented armies from the land side marching into Malabar.

## HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF RIVERS

The rivers of Northern India played an important part in the evolution of Indian history. It was in the valley of the Indus that the earliest civilisation known to Indian history—the civilisation of Mahenjodaro and Harappa—flourished. The rivers of the Punjab as well as the Ganges determined the nature and course of Aryan colonisation in India. Smith says, "The success of the English (against the French in building up an Empire in India) was dependent on their acquisition of rich Bengal and their command of the Gangetic waterway. In a later stage of the British advance the conquest of the Punjab was conditioned by the control of the Indus navigation, previously secured by the rather unscrupulous proceedings of Lords Auckland and Ellenborough". The peculiar geographical features of the South Indian rivers do not offer similar facilities for penetration into the interior. Historically those rivers served merely as convenient political boundaries.

In connection with the Indian rivers and their historical influence, it is necessary to remember that many of them changed their courses in the past, and some are changing their courses even at present. When they are in full flood, they easily cut and carve the soft alluvial plains. Smith says, "Old beds of the Sutlej can be traced across a space eighty-five mile wide. . . . Who can tell where the Indus flowed in the days of Alexander the Great? . . . The rivers of the (Vedic) Rishis were not the rivers of to-day. . . . Ever since the early Muhamadan invasions the changes in the rivers have been enormous, and the contemporary histories of the foreign conquerors cannot be understood unless the reality and extent of those changes can be borne constantly in mind". Naturally, the changes in the courses of the rivers affected the position of the cities built on their banks. Pataliputra originally stood at the confluence of the Ganges and the Son, but at present its site is about 12 miles below the confluence. Had Pataliputra remained in existence to this day, it would have lost its strategic importance due simply to a change in the course of the Son. A city built on the bank of a river may be altogether ruined by a change in its course. Speaking of the Hakra, which once flowed through the Punjab towards Rajputana, Smith observes,



“Scores of mounds, silent witnesses to the existence of numberless forgotten and often nameless towns, bear testimony to the desolation wrought when the waters of life desert their channels”.

Similar results may be brought about by changes in the coast-line and the level of the land. The ancient port of Tamluk is now far away from the sea. The famous commercial city of Kayal on the Tinnevely coast is now miles from the sea and buried under sand dunes. In some cases the sea, instead of receding, has advanced. “The careful investigator of ancient history needs to be continually on his guard against the insidious deceptions of the modern map.”

## SECTION II

### FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF INDIA

#### A LAND OF VARIETIES

From the geographical point of view India is pre-eminently a land of varieties ; she has been aptly described as “the epitome of the world”. From the physical point of view, varieties of temperature and climate, of moisture and rainfall, of flora and fauna naturally attract our attention. The temperature varies from the dry and bracing cold of the Himalayas to the humid, tropical heat of the Konkan and Coromandel coasts. India offers all the three types of climate—the Arctic or Polar, the Temperate, and the Tropical. As regards rainfall, she offers an equally wide range, from the world’s highest record of 480 inches at Cherapunji (in Assam) to less than 3 inches per annum in parts of Sind and Rajputana. Of flora and fauna India contains most of the types known to natural science.

#### MINGLING OF RACES

Scarcely less interesting than this physical variety is the human variety which India presents through her teeming millions. Smith rightly calls India “an ethnological museum”. From time immemorial India has been receiving colonisers belonging to different races. Nothing definite can be said about