

A New History of
INDIA
FIFTH EDITION



Stanley Wolpert

A New History of India

Fifth Edition

STANLEY WOLPERT

New York Oxford
Oxford University Press

1997

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York

Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Bombay
Buenos Aires Calcutta Cape Town Dar es Salaam Delhi
Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madras Madrid Melbourne
Mexico City Nairobi Paris Singapore
Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 1977, 1982, 1989, 1993, 1997
by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Wolpert, Stanley A., 1927—

A new history of India / Stanley Wolpert. — 5th ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-510030-1 (cl). — ISBN 0-19-510031-X (pa)

1. India—History. I. Title.

DS436.W66 1997
954—dc20 96-19953

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To the memory of
Professor W. Norman Brown
guru and friend
and

for my dear departed friends

Professor V. A. Narian
(1927–87)

Professor Holden Furber
(1904–94)

Madhu Mehta
(1926–95)

Raja Dinesh Singh
(1925–95)

PREFACE

A half century of freedom has tripled India's population (now some 960 million), more than quadrupled its gross domestic product, and lifted its economy in the last half decade of "globalization" into orbits of cyberspace, armed with nuclear ballistic missiles and satellite dishes. From booming Bangalore (South India's Silicon Valley) to smog-choked Delhi, from bustling Bombay (*Mumbai*) and Ahmedabad to revitalized Calcutta some 200 million urban-educated Indian business managers, skilled scientists and professionals, political leaders and government officials have in the last five years leapfrogged to affluence, enjoying all the pleasures and pains of modern Western life, thanks to the "miracle" of economic privatization.

"Make our need your opportunity!"—New Delhi's modern mantra to world capitalists has attracted more billions of private investor dollars to India since June 1991 than had been lured by its previous Soviet-inspired Five-Year Plans over the preceeding forty-five years. India's vast market—its ocean of cheap labor and fast-growing army of brilliant scientists and engineers, led by Harvard-, Oxford-, and UCLA-trained economists and freedom-thinking bureaucrats—has transformed Delhi's near bankrupt economy of 1991 into South Asia's only superpower. On the eve of the third millennium India thus seems ready, at long last, to "take off," wide awake and working harder than ever before to achieve all the proud hopes and glowing promises of its nationalist leaders' fondest futuristic dreams, or, as others might prefer to put it, to "return" to its ancient "Golden Age" of *Ram Rajya* ("Rama's Rule"). For to most Indians the past remains prologue, even as time itself is believed to be cyclical. History lives in India as in few other lands, where rebirth remains almost as universally axiomatic as death.

Yet for most Indians, even today, past poverty remains present reality. Indian male life expectancy continues to rise—five years

longer now than the average Russian or Pakistani male; but for Indian women life remains perilous, often ending in felonious flames (whether from dowry-greed ignition or murderous *sati*-pyres) or suicide. Modernity has made youthful bride suicides “easier,” tens of thousands of such tragic deaths occurring annually on India’s railway tracks. With increased road traffic 160,000 Indians currently die annually in highway accidents, the world’s highest rate of road accident fatalities. Urban crime and drug-related deaths have also recently multiplied, as has political corruption. Escalating “*hawala*” (money-laundering or “bribery”) payoffs, revealed on the eve of India’s recent national elections, have tarnished the reputations of many leaders in every major political party. So, like the electorates in the United States, Great Britain, and most other Western nations, many Indians have lost faith in all politicians and official probity. Coexistent with such modern cynicism, however, loom shadows of ancient India’s pluralistic fears and hatreds, vows of vengeance, and the bitter *karma* of countless wars and ethno-religious conflicts, which continue to ripen in Ayodhya, Mumbai, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Kashmir.

I first visited India in February 1948, at the age of twenty, a maritime engineer. My ship reached Bombay on the day when one-seventh of Mahatma Gandhi’s ashes were immersed in the waters of Back Bay. I witnessed that ceremony from Malabar Hill, watching hundreds of devout mourners swim after the beautifully painted and flagged ship that bore those ashes, hoping to touch some cinders as they blew away from the aft deck. I had never seen so many people before. I knew nothing of Gandhi’s life, except that people called him India’s “Saintly Father,” and yet he was murdered by one of his fellow Hindus. The enormity of that crime and its paradox changed the course of my life. I abandoned marine engineering for Indian History, and have been a student of that uniquely fascinating subject ever since. In 1958 I returned to India as a Ford Fellow to conduct research on my doctoral dissertation, *Tilak and Gokhale*, which was first published in California in 1962. By then I had been teaching Indian History at UCLA for almost four years, and have remained there ever since, except for brief leaves or sabbaticals abroad.

This year, thanks to my good friend, inspiring historian-educator Professor Vartan Gregorian, president of Brown University, I have had the honor of launching Brown’s Dr. E. S. P Das Chair in Modern

Indian History and Culture here in Providence. I thank Dr. Das for his generous support and flattering appreciation of my *New History*. I also must thank my brilliant students at Brown, especially Raj and Amit, Mohit and Ritesh, Shehriar, Piyush, Shoma, Sara, Sheela, Sonali, and Nimish, who have helped me “Rediscover India.”

The greatness and glory of India’s civilization, the beautifully rich wonder of its culture, the gentle wisdom and goodness of its best children, have over this past half century only increased my appreciation of Indian History, intensified my love of all that is good about India, and reaffirmed my devotion to its people. There are too many for me to thank, but I must name just a few members of my extended Indian family, whose love and generosity compel me to return Home, despite my longing at times for release: Madhukar and Tunni Shah, Bala and Bhanu Sar Desai, Feroze and Sillu Dordi, Doctorji and Mrs. Amarjit Singh, Inderji and Shiela Gujral, Khushwant Singh, Patwant Singh, Chhote Bharany, Pran and Prabha Chopra, and all their dear children.

For most kindly sharing their wisdom, and for generous support over many long years, I thank friends Vartan Gregorian, J. Kenneth Galbraith, Lloyd Cotsen, John Hawkins, Mimi Perloff, and Bob Dalk. I also thank my good editor Nancy Lane, and her fine assistant Thomas LeBien, and Oxford’s excellent trade editor Paul Schlotthauer for having done so much to help publish two of my books this year.

Finally, dear Dorothy, to you and our youngest friends, Sam and Max, this book and its old author remain dedicated, with love.

Providence
May 1996

S. W.

CONTENTS

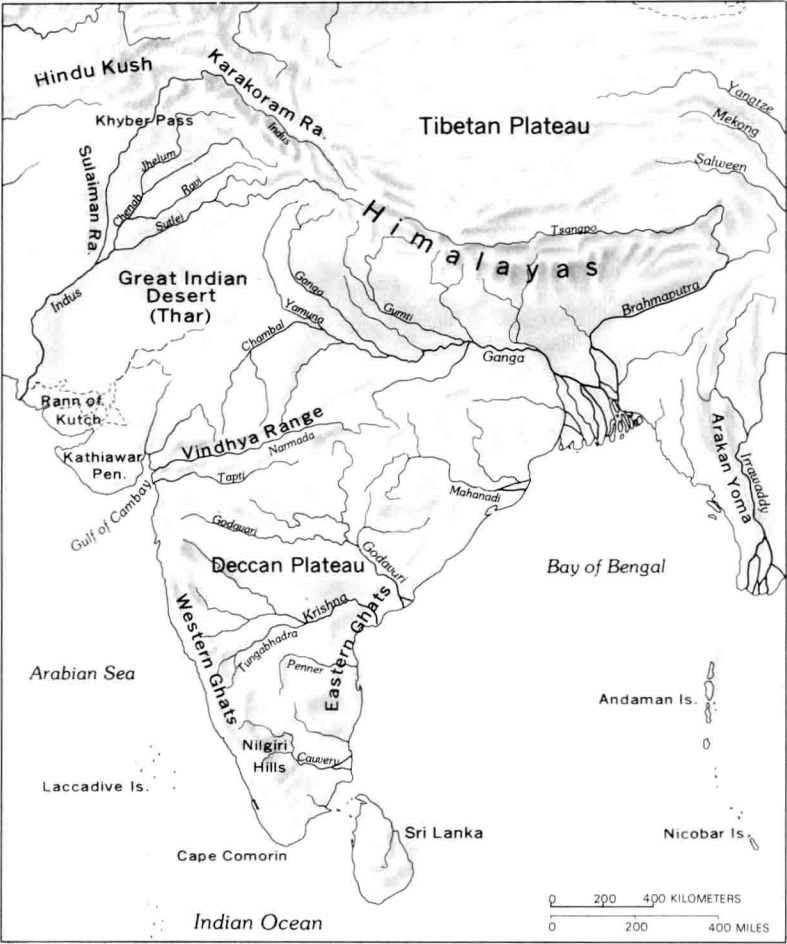
1.	The Ecological Setting	3	
2.	Indus Culture (ca. 2500–1600 B.C.)	14	
3.	The Aryan Age (ca. 1500–1000 B.C.)	24	
4.	North Indian Conquest and Unification (ca. 1000–450 B.C.)	37	
5.	India's First Imperial Unification (326–184 B.C.)		55
6.	Political Fragmentation and Economic and Cultural Enrichment (ca. 184 B.C.–A.D. 320)	70	
7.	The Classical Age (A.D. 320–ca. 700)	88	
8.	The Impact of Islam (ca. 711–1556)	104	
9.	Mughal Imperial Unification (1556–1605)	126	
10.	Western Europe's Vanguard (1498–1669)	135	
11.	Great Mughal Glory (1605–1707)	149	
12.	Twilight of the Mughal Empire (1707–64)	168	
13.	John Company Raj (1765–93)	187	
14.	The New Mughals (1793–1848)	201	
15.	Unification, Modernization, and Revolt (1848–58)		226
16.	Crown Rule—A New Order (1858–77)	239	
17.	Indian Nationalism—The First Movement (1885–1905)	250	
18.	The Machine Solidifies (1885–1905)	265	
19.	Revolt, Repression, and Reform (1905–12)	275	
20.	The Impact of World War One (1914–19)	286	
21.	Toward Independence (1920–39)	301	
22.	The Impact of World War Two (1939–46)	329	
23.	The Nehru Era (1947–64)	351	
24.	<u>From Collective Leadership to Indira Raj</u> (1964–77)	371	

25.	From Janata Raj to Rajiv's Death	407
26.	India Today	441
	Bibliography	455
	Glossary	483
	Index	489

MAPS

1.	India—Physical Features	2	
2.	A. Average Annual Precipitation	7	
	B. Population Density (1976)	7	
3.	Pre-British Indian Empires		
	A. Indus or Harappan "Empire" (ca. 2000 B.C.)		64
	B. Mauryan Empire in the Reign of Ashoka (269–232 B.C.)	64	
	C. Gupta Empire under Chandra Gupta II (A.D. 375–415)	65	
	D. Delhi Sultanate in 1236	65	
	E. Mughal Empire at the Death of Akbar (1605)		66
4.	Pre-Muslim India (ca. 1200)	102	
5.	India (ca. 1500)	123	
6.	British India (1797–1805)	202	
7.	South Asia Today	350	
8.	Pakistan	392	
9.	Bangladesh	393	
10.	India Today	442	

A NEW HISTORY OF INDIA



India—Physical Features

THE ECOLOGICAL SETTING

India is named for the Indus River, along whose fecund banks a great urban civilization flourished more than four thousand years ago. That unique civilization, evolved in South Asia and sustained unbroken throughout four millennia, ranks with Western and Sinitic civilizations as one of the world's most brilliant cultural systems. The sophistication of Indian thought, the beauty of Indian art, and the power and wealth of Indian imperial unifications endow the pageant of Indian history with singular glory. Long before the dawn of the Christian era, India fired the imaginations of distant peoples and tempted conquerors from Macedonia to Central Asia to invade its subcontinent and seek to master its population and their arts. More recently, other invasions—whether launched by the zeal of Islam or Christianity or stimulated by the prospect of commercial profits or power—have brought fresh waves of migrants to South Asia. Each invasion has added diversity to India's vast population and complexity to its rich patterns of culture; nonetheless, many of the earliest seeds of the original civilization have survived in clearly recognizable form. Like the branches of a giant banyan tree that have long since surpassed the original trunk in girth, the great traditions of Indian civilization have spread from epoch to epoch across the subcontinent of their birth, drawing sustenance from countless local traditions, often stooping to conquer, and enduring essentially through change.

The story of Indian history must begin where Indic civilization itself emerged, in the ecological setting of South Asia. The subcontinent of South Asia encompasses an area of more than one and a half million square miles, from the Hindu Kush and Baluchi Hills on the west and the Great Himalayas on the north, to the Burmese mountains on the east and the Indian Ocean on the south. Within this kite-

shaped subcontinent, whose north-south and east-west braces extend roughly 2,000 miles each, can be found virtually every sort of topography, climate, and geological formation: from sub-sea-level desert wastes to the world's highest peaks (Everest is 29,028 feet); from perennial drought to some of the earth's most heavily drenched terrain (Cherrapunji in Assam receives an average annual rainfall of 426 inches); from the ancient Precambrian granite of the peninsula (ca. 500 to 2,000 million years old) to a northern tier of relatively youthful Cenozoic mountains (ca. 60 million years old).

Geographically, the subcontinent may most simply be divided into three major horizontal zones: the northern mountain belt; its neighboring offspring of Indo-Gangetic alluvial plains; and the peninsular massif of the south, which may originally have been part of Africa. The northern mountains have served as a natural protective wall against both invading armies and Arctic winds, shielding South Asia from frost even more than from force, and providing its Indus plains above thirty degrees north latitude with January temperatures averaging fifty degrees Fahrenheit, while the rest of the subcontinent basks in mild warmth of up to eighty degrees. Though India's southernmost tip only dips to eight degrees latitude north of the equator, its climate throughout the year is subtropical, thanks to the northern shield. Heat is the most pervasive fact of India's ecological setting, and it is not surprising to find both sun and fire deified by Hinduism to this day. Though the impact of heat on Indian thought, work habits, and health cannot be measured, its significance should not be ignored. In contrasting the civilizations of China and India, and especially their modern achievements, the enervating effect of heat on Indian productivity is a factor that can hardly be underestimated.

Perhaps because of India's heat, water has always played an especially sacred role in Indian life and thought. The waters of the Indus River system, one of whose lesser tributaries is the Soan, were to become the cradle of North Indian culture; and, like the alluvial valleys of the Punjab ("Land of the Five Rivers") and Sind, whose silt was borne in their torrents, they are perennial gifts of Himalayan ice and snow.

The earliest traces of human habitation in South Asia survive as flakes of stone found scattered around the valley of the Soan River in what is now the northern part of Pakistan. These primitive tools or

weapons are the only surviving signs of Paleolithic man's presence in North India. They appear to indicate that at some time during the second interglacial age, between 200,000 and 400,000 years ago, humans migrated to South Asia over the Hindu Kush Mountains of the northwest, or possibly climbed directly over the high Himalayas ("Abodes of Snow") from their original habitations in Central or East Asia, where Paleolithic skeletal remains, as well as flake tools, have been unearthed.

Fed by the glaciers of southern Tibet, the Indus flows almost a thousand miles north and west through Kashmir before it veers sharply to the south, cutting its gorge through Nanga Parbat, down the Malakand Pass, to capture the waters of Afghanistan's Kabul River. Both rivers join in the region of Gandhara, just north of the Khyber Pass, which was to become the historic highroad into India of invading armies from the west. North India's two other great river systems, the Yamuna-Ganga and Brahmaputra, originate in the same region of Tibetan ice, so close to the source of the Indus that they may once have belonged to a single mighty lake, whose prehistoric unity and tranquility was perhaps shattered by the titanic eruptive force of the birth of the Himalayas, driving their waters off in diverse directions. This ancient natural displacement of the waters that have brought tons of sedimentary earth to South Asia's northern plains and that continue daily to fructify that soil, is politically reflected at present in the threefold division of the subcontinent into Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. These three nations depend most vitally upon the Indus, Ganga-Yamuna, and Brahmaputra rivers, respectively. Hindus have long worshipped "Mother Ganga" as a goddess. Hardwar—where the Ganga emerges with torrential force from her mountain wall to flow more placidly across the plains of Uttar Pradesh ("Northern Province")—is but the first of many sacred cities, including Allahabad and Banaras, that line the Ganga's crescent path of more than fifteen hundred miles to the Bay of Bengal in the east. At Bengal's delta, the mouth of the Ganga meets that of "Brahma's Son" (Brahmaputra), whose thousand-mile journey north of the Ladakh Range ends only after it has veered back upon itself to cut its way down between Bhutan and Burma into the "Land of Bengal" (Bangladesh).

South of the high, geologically youthful mountains of the north and their offspring alluvial plains lies the barren desert land (Rajas-

than) and the rugged Vindhya and Satpura ranges of central India's ancient mountainous bedrock. This central mountain belt below the Tropic of Cancer has always presented a formidable natural barrier to easy communication between northern and southern India, encouraging the development of virtually independent cultures as well as empires to the north and south of the Vindhya-Satpura-Chota Nagpur divide throughout most of India's history.

The Deccan Plateau rises just south of the river Tapti, below the Satpura Range, and dips like a weatherworn old table to the east, obliging all of South India's major river systems—the Mahanadi ("Great River"), Godavari, Krishna, and Cauvery—to empty into the Bay of Bengal. The western edge of the Deccan Plateau is a spinelike wall of mountains called the Western Ghats ("Steps"), which average some three thousand feet in height and catch most of the annual rain that blows from the Arabian Sea during the southwest monsoon. The Deccan Plateau is, therefore, mostly parched and barren badlands, resembling the Southwest United States. The narrow coastal littoral of western India, however, is more like a tropical rain forest, enjoying from one to two hundred inches of rainfall annually. This area, the Malabar coast, is one of the world's best environments for growing pepper, nutmeg, and other spices that proved so potent a lure to Western appetites.

Denied the north's bounty of perennially snow-fed streams, South India has always depended on rain for its water. To this day, the annual advent of the June monsoon is greeted with ritual dance and ecstatic worship by southern India's peasantry. In Bengal and along the neighboring coastline of Orissa, the monsoon often arrives with hurricane force. Spending their fury on Assam and Burma, the rains then move west and are deflected by the Himalayas to water the Gangetic plain as far north as Delhi.

The winds that annually bring revitalizing rain to the south also probably brought the first humans to peninsular India by sea from East Africa, possibly at about the time East Asian migrants first wandered into the northern Soan River valley. Again, we have no skeletal remains, only tools, to inform us of human nomads in South India during the Paleolithic age, but here the tools are core stone implements, rather than flakes. Crude hand axes have been found in western, central, and eastern sites across the Deccan, but since most of

