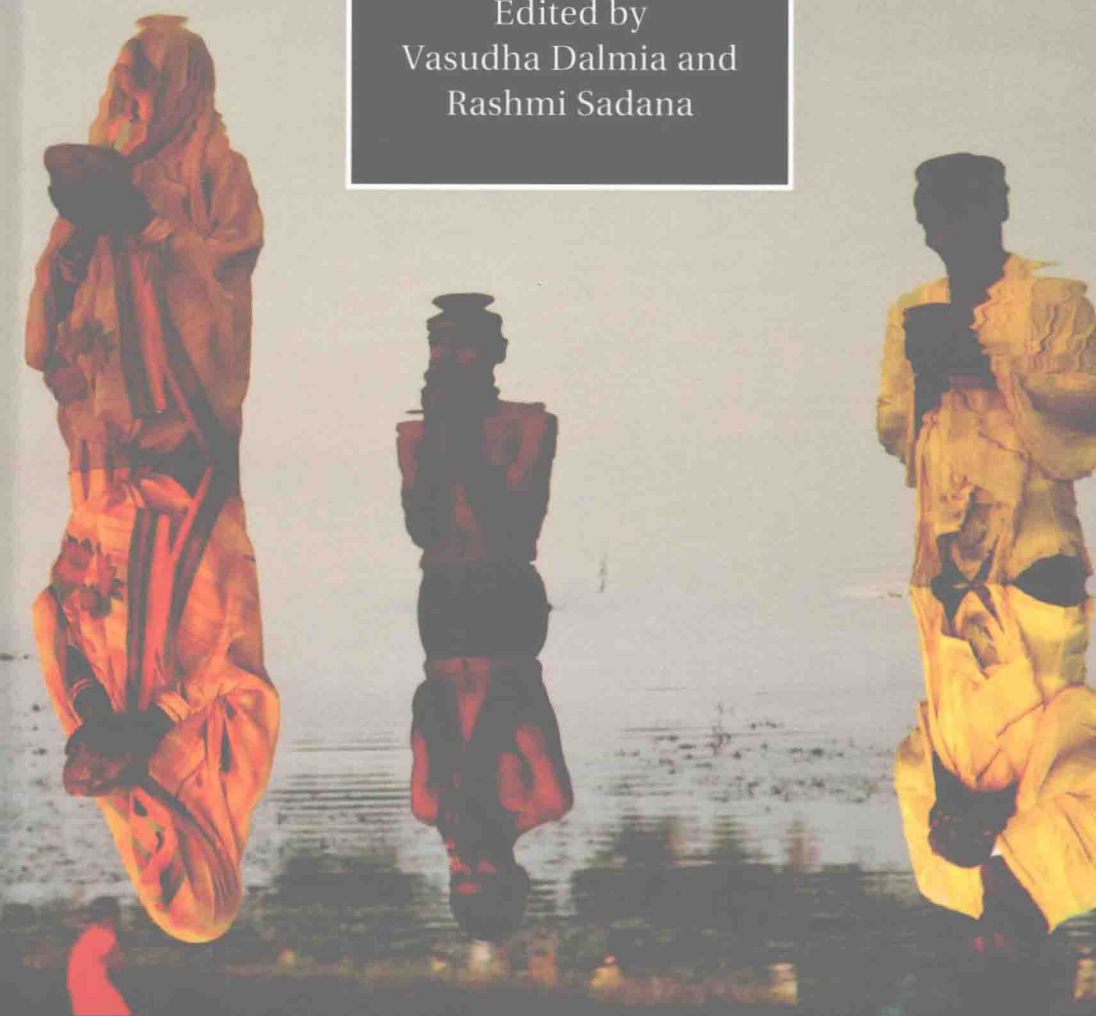


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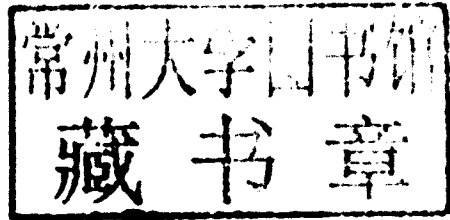
Modern Indian Culture

Edited by
Vasudha Dalmia and
Rashmi Sadana



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The Cambridge Companion to
Modern Indian Culture

India is changing at a rapid pace as it continues to move from its colonial past to its globalized future. This *Companion* offers a framework for understanding that change, and how modern cultural forms have emerged out of very different histories and traditions. The book provides accounts of literature, theatre, film, modern and popular art, music, television and food; it also explores in detail social divisions, customs, communications and daily life. In a series of engaging, erudite and occasionally moving essays, the contributors, drawn from a variety of disciplines, examine not merely what constitutes modern Indian culture, but also just how wide-ranging are the cultures that persist in the regions of India. This volume will help the reader to understand the continuities and fissures within Indian culture and some of the conflicts arising from them. Throughout, what comes to the fore is the extraordinary richness and diversity of modern Indian culture.

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Chronology

The Brahmanical tradition and the Vedic period

The Brahmanical tradition dates from the Vedic period (roughly 1500 to 600 BCE), when the sacred Hindu texts known as the *Vedas* were first composed. This period becomes a critical reference point for many Indian modernists, revivalists and nationalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who, in the face of British colonialism, hark back to ‘tradition’ in order to help define a modern India. Despite the coeval influences of Buddhism, Jainism, *bhakti* devotional traditions, and later, of Islam and Sufi traditions, Indian ‘tradition’ in the modern period is almost exclusively focused on Hindu texts and mythologies dating from the Vedic period.

3000–1500 BCE	Period when the Indus Valley civilization, one of the world’s oldest, arose and flourished.
second millennium BCE	The so-called Aryan migrations occur – that is, migrations into the Indian subcontinent of people speaking an Indo-European language.
1500–1200 BCE	The <i>Rig Veda</i> , or first book of the <i>Vedas</i> , is composed.
900–500 BCE	The later <i>Vedas</i> , the <i>Brahmanas</i> and the early <i>Upanishads</i> are composed.
500 BCE – 500 ACE	Hindu law books (e.g., <i>The Laws of Manu</i>) and epics (e.g., the <i>Ramayana</i> and the <i>Mahabharata</i> , of which the <i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> is a part) are composed, and the six orthodox systems of philosophy are developed.

- 326 BCE Alexander leads incursions across the Punjab until his army faces stiff opposition, followed by his retreat and withdrawal from India in 324 BCE.
- 268–233 BCE Height of the Maurya empire under the reign of Ashoka. A propagator of Buddhist-inspired morality, Ashoka is known for having accepted the principle of non-violence and denouncing caste.

Classical and medieval India

- 320–647 Reign of successive emperors of the Gupta dynasty. The Gupta age is known for both its religious and social tolerance and its renewal of Brahmanical orthodoxy. It is also a period of great literary, scientific and cultural production. The poet Kalidasa writes the play *Shakuntala* and poem *Meghaduta* in this period; the cave paintings of Ajanta in western India come from this period, as does the calculation of the value of 'pi' (3.141) by the mathematician and philosopher Aryabhata.
- 405–11 The Chinese scholar Fa-Hsien travels to India and writes of the Buddhist culture that he finds there.
- Sixth century Development by Shaivite (the Nayanars) and Vaishnavite (the Alvars) saints in Tamil Nadu of *bhakti* worship, which calls Brahmanism into question and celebrates the direct communion of devotee and God; rise of the Pallavas in South India.
- Sixth to Seventh centuries Rise of multiple kingdoms including Harsha of Kanauj (606–47) and Pulakeshin II of Badami (609–42).
- 711 Arabs conquer Sind.
- mid eighth century Founding of the Rashtrakuta dynasty; overthrow of Chalukyas.
- 871–907 Aditya I defeats the Pallavas, founds the Chola dynasty.

- 985–1016 Rajarajachola founds the Chola empire of South India. The Cholas further economic and cultural exchange between southern India and south-east Asia.
- 999–1026 Mahmūd of Ghazni raids palaces and temples in north-western India, in large part to finance his imperial ambitions in Central Asia.
- 1017 The Islamic scholar Alberuni is sent by the Sultan Mahmud of Persia to India to learn about ‘the Hindus’. He stays in India for thirteen years and writes *Tarikh al-Hind* (‘History of India’), which is part travelogue, part discussion of Hindu belief systems and ways of life.
- 1206–1526 The period of the Delhi Sultanate, when political power became centralized under a series of Muslim rulers, most of whom were Turkish.
- c. 1250 Sun Temple of Konorak in Orissa.
- 1293 Marco Polo in South India.
- 1346–1565 Vijayanagara, Hindu kingdom of South India.
- 1469 Birth of Guru Nānak, founder of Sikhism.
- 1498 Vasco de Gama in Calicut.
- 1510 The Portuguese conquer Goa.

The Mughal Empire and the English East India Company

Indian modernity is often correlated with the arrival of the British and the cultural and economic changes that ensued during the colonial period; however, the dates in this subsection will suggest that modernity is a process with no fixed start date. European colonization developed in fits and starts, and the decline of Mughal sovereignty was also gradual.

- 1526 The Mughal Empire is founded when Babur, a descendant of Timur (or Tamerlane), defeats Ibrahim Lodi, the last Delhi Sultan, at the battle of Panipat.
- 1600 Queen Elizabeth I grants a charter to the English East India Company for trade with the East Indies.
- 1605 Accession of Jahangir to the Mughal throne.
- 1619 The English East India Company obtains permission from Emperor Jahangir to trade in India.

- 1628 Accession of Shah Jahan to the Mughal throne. Builds the Taj Mahal in Agra and the Red Fort in Delhi during his reign.
- 1639 Madras is founded, as Fort St George, by the English East India Company.
- 1651 Foundation of the English East India Company's first factory, at Hugli in Bengal.
- 1657 Shah Jahan falls ill and a fraternal struggle for succession to the Mughal throne begins.
- 1658 Aurangzeb, third son of Shah Jahan, imprisons his father, takes the throne.
- 1668 Bombay is ceded to the English East India Company.
- 1690 Calcutta is founded by the English East India Company.
- 1707 Death of Aurangzeb, which marks the beginning of the decline of the Mughal Empire.
- eighteenth century During this period Mughal power becomes decentralized, and Hindu and Muslim revenue farmers as well as Hindu and Jain merchants and bankers gain in economic power. The Mughal emperor is still recognized as the legitimate ruler of India, and Muslim civil servants and Hindu scribes skilled in Persian are still the mainstays of administrative structures, but political power shifts from the centre towards regional rulers, small potentates and even Hindu rajas of local villages.
- 1757 The English East India Company defeats Nawab Siraj-ud-daula of Bengal at the battle of Plassey. The British take political control of Bengal.
- 1765 The right to collect revenue (*diwani*) in Bengal is ceded to the British.
- 1770 Bengal famine; one-third of the population dies.
- 1799 Final defeat and death of Tipu Sultan, who as the ruler of Mysore Kingdom fought multiple incursions by the English East India Company.
- 1793 The Permanent Settlement gives *zamindars* (landholders) private property rights and holds them responsible for collecting revenue from *raiyats* (peasant cultivators) in perpetuity and remitting those revenues to the colonial state.

Nineteenth-century social and religious reform

Major themes of this period are British colonial governance in India, the rise of English-speaking Indian intellectuals in Bengal, the influence and importance of Brahmanism, Muslim and Hindu identity formation, and the changing role and position of women.

- 1803 The British take Delhi after repelling fierce resistance from the Marathas – warriors from dominant peasant castes whose power and influence had spread since the seventeenth century over much of the Deccan region of western and central India.
The British gain political dominion over Gujarat (in western India), aided by their alliance with Hindu merchants.
- 1813 The British Parliament lifts a ban on allowing Christian missionaries into India. Entry is permitted under a new system of licensing.
- 1815–30 Rammohun Roy emerges as a key figure in social reform movements and religious controversies in Calcutta. Many will come to consider him the ‘father of modern India’.
- 1818 The British overthrow the Marathas and assert their dominance over western and central India.
- 1829 *Sati*, widow immolation on the funeral pyre of the husband, is officially abolished by the colonial government in India. Brahmo Sabha is founded by Rammohun Roy as a group devoted to theism and universality.
- 1833 Britain outlaws slavery, infanticide and human sacrifice in India. Rammohun Roy dies in Bristol, England.
- 1835 Thomas B. Macaulay presents his ‘Minute on Indian Education’ to Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India. The British colonial government subsequently introduces English education for Indians, and English replaces Persian as the language of the British colonial higher administration in India, marking the defeat of the Orientalists by the Anglicists.
- 1843 Brahmo Samaj is founded by Debendranath Tagore, who institutionalizes the ideology of Hindu reform started by

- Rammohun Roy's Brahma Sabha. Vedanta is accepted as the authentic scriptural source of Hinduism.
- 1853 The first railway and telegraph are established in India.
- 1857 On the night of 10 May, Indian soldiers of the XI Native Cavalry based in Meerut rise up after having witnessed their fellow soldiers being taken away in chains for refusing to load their rifles with cartridges rumoured to be greased with pork and beef fat. This anti-British campaign, which comes to be called the Mutiny or Rebellion of 1857, spreads across India and lasts for over a year, causing much bloodshed. The British quell the rebellion in 1858. The Emperor, Bahadur Shah II, is exiled to Burma, and his sons and grandson are killed by a British military officer, exterminating the Mughal line.
- 1858 In response to the 1857 uprising, the British Crown abolishes the English East India Company and assumes direct rule, appointing a Viceroy of India.
- 1859 Syed Ahmad Khan publishes 'Asbab-e-baghat-e-Hind' ('Causes of the Revolt'); it is translated into English in 1873. This document catapults Khan on to centre stage in public debates about religious and social reforms as he speaks for Muslims in India.
- 1868 Rassundari Debi, a Bengali woman, completes her autobiography, *Amar Jiban* ('My Life'), the first work of its kind. An expanded version is issued in 1897.
- 1875 Swami Dayananda founds the Arya Samaj, a Hindu religious reform movement calling for rejection of ritual and idolatry and a return to purity and simplicity through adherence to the *Vedas*.
- 1877 Syed Ahmad Khan founds the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, later known as the Aligarh Muslim University, to foster the education of Muslims in particular.
- 1885 Queen Victoria proclaims herself Empress of India. The Indian National Congress is founded in Bombay, with the intention of creating a dialogue with the British colonial government and gaining more rights for Indians under colonial laws.
- 1888–91 Mohandas K. Gandhi studies law in London.

- 1893 Swami Vivekananda receives great acclaim at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, at which he represents Hinduism.
- 1893–1914 Gandhi works in South Africa as a lawyer and activist for the rights of Indians there. He employs ideas of *satyagraha* (non-violent protest) for the first time.

Twentieth-century nationalist movement

Major themes of this period include the rise of competing Indian nationalisms, the anti-colonial struggle, Hindu nationalism, the Muslim Question and the call for a separate Muslim state, independence from Britain and the Partition of 1947.

- 1905 Bengal is partitioned by the British into two new presidencies, one of which has a Muslim majority. In protest, Indians begin to boycott British-made cloth and other imported goods, launching the *swadeshi* ('one's own country') movement.
- 1906 The Muslim League is founded, with the purpose of protecting the political rights of Muslims.
- 1907 The Indian National Congress is split between moderates, who believe in constitutional principles and seek reform, and extremists, who favour active opposition to British rule, including the boycott of British goods and services, and in some cases, violence.
- 1908 Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* ('Indian Home Rule') is published.
- 1909 The British institute the Morley-Minto Reforms, which increase Indian membership on advisory legislative councils and introduce a separate electorate for Muslims.
- 1911 The Bengal Partition is revoked by the British.
- 1911 Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu nationalist party critical of the secular Indian National Congress, founded.
- 1912 The capital of British colonial India is moved from Calcutta to Delhi.
- 1913 Rabindranath Tagore is awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.
- 1913 Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra*, India's first silent film, is shown commercially.

- 1919 The Rowlatt Acts (or the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act) are instituted in February by the British colonial government (based on a 1918 report by Justice S. A. T. Rowlatt). It allows for Indians suspected of sedition to be imprisoned without trial and is seen as an affront to Indian civil liberties. It fuels widespread protest.
- 1919 The Amritsar Massacre is committed on 13 April, when General Reginald Dwyer orders British and Gurkha soldiers to open fire on a mass gathering of Indians in Jallianwala Bagh, an enclosed park in Amritsar, killing 379 men, women and children, and injuring 1,200.
- The anti-British Khilafat Movement is launched by Indian Muslims in support of the Turkish Sultan and Caliph, spiritual leader of the world Muslim community, whose position is threatened by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire by Britain and its allies. In an attempt to forge unity between Hindus and Muslims in India, Gandhi strongly supports the Khilafat Movement.
- Gandhi leads an India-wide protest against the Rowlatt Acts.
- 1924 The Khilafat Movement ends as the Muslim Caliphate in Turkey is abolished.
- 1928 Hindu nationalist ideologue Vinayak Damodar Sarvarkar (1883–1966) publishes *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*.
- 1930 Muhammad Iqbal (1873–1938) gives the Presidential Address at the All-India Muslim League session in Allahabad. Working towards a federalist solution to the communal problem, he emphasizes the need for specifically Muslim interests to be part of the political sphere in order for Muslims to reap the benefits of their numerical majorities in certain Indian provinces.
- 1930 Gandhi's 'Salt March' (12 March–5 April). Along with seventy-eight followers from the Sabarmati Ashram and many more who join along the way, Gandhi marches 241 miles to Dandi, where he breaks the law by picking up a natural lump of salt at the sea shore. Gandhi gains worldwide fame after this event, with photos appearing in *Life* magazine, among other publications.
- 1931 India's first sound film, *Alam Ara*, in Hindi-Urdu is released.

- 1932 Iqbal delivers a second Presidential Address to the Muslim League.
- 1935 The Government of India Act is passed, providing for limited home rule, with continued British control over foreign policy and defence.
- 1940 The Lahore Resolution, calling for a separate Muslim state, is ratified by the Muslim League. It is inspired by the Presidential Address to the League session in Lahore delivered by M. A. Jinnah (1876–1948).
- 1942 The ‘Quit India’ Movement is launched by the Indian National Congress, advocating mass civil disobedience and an immediate end to British rule in India. Britain outlaws the Congress.
- 1943 The Bengal Famine causes the death of over 3 million people.
- 1945 Britain concedes the necessity of granting Indian independence and advocates formation of an interim government.
- 1946 General elections are held, and the Congress Party and Muslim League emerge as dominant parties. Attempts to form an interim government fail. Muslim–Hindu violence breaks out.

Partition, Independence and beyond

- 1947 In June, the Congress Party and Muslim League agree to the partition of India.
In July, the British Parliament passes the Indian Independence Act, providing for two independent dominions to be created, to be known as India and Pakistan.
Pakistan gains independence on 14 August, with M. A. Jinnah as the nation’s Governor-General.
India gains independence on 15 August, with Jawaharlal Nehru as the nation’s first Prime Minister.
On 29 August Dalit leader B. R. Ambedkar becomes chair of the newly set up Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India.
- 1948 Gandhi is assassinated by a Hindu extremist in Delhi.