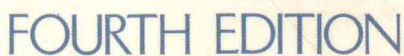


# A NEW HISTORY OF



# A New History of India

*Fourth Edition*

STANLEY WOLPERT

New York Oxford  
Oxford University Press

1993

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto  
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi  
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo  
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town  
Melbourne Auckland Madrid

and associated companies in  
Berlin Ibadan

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

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.,  
200 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. — 4th ed.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index  
ISBN 0-19-507659-1 (cloth). — ISBN 0-19-507660-5 (pbk.)  
1. India—History. I. Title.  
DS436.W66 1993  
954—dc20 92-12573

4 6 8 9 7 5

Printed in the United States of America

# A NEW HISTORY OF INDIA

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

To the memory of  
Prof. Vishnu A. Narain  
(1927-87)  
historian and friend

# PREFACE

The last four years have brought three new central governments to power in India; added more than 50 million to her vast population; momentarily focused world attention on a dismal spot near Madras where Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated; and witnessed escalating violence in Kashmir, Punjab, and Assam and accelerating urbanization as well as rural development, with their pleasures and pains, wealth and poverty, chaos and misery all flooding into the oceanic "river" called India. Indic Civilization absorbs such change as it has everything else throughout the four millennia of its unbroken history; her surface briefly ruffled by the turbulence of fresh waves, the depths of her cultural currents of continuity barely touched by contemporary traumas. India carries on; the history of her 880 million offspring for the most part reflecting ancient patterns indelibly imprinted in the fears and hopes of hundreds of millions of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Punjabis, Bengalis, Tamils, Brahmans, Marathas, Dalits, or whatever name conjures up for each the essence of cultural self-consciousness. The sum total of all those conflicting or coexisting passions, aspirations, dreams, and duties, most of which were eventually institutionalized, is our modern world's oldest, wisest, richest, and poorest continental nation—India. This book is the most recent incarnation of my life's labor of love, trying to understand and explain India's history.

Forty-four years ago I completed my first passage to India just hours before the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were immersed in the waters off Bombay. I was twenty at the time, a marine engineer who knew nothing about India except that I was strongly lured there, perhaps by my love of elephants. Whatever it was that attracted me to ship out to a land so remote from my New York home, I sensed that first day, watching tens of thousands of mourners, many so magnetized by the boat that bore one-seventh of Mahatma's ashes as to swim after it in hopes of touching a "Great Soul's" cinders, that I, too, was

magnetized by Indic Civilization. My life's course had changed. I became a student of Indian history. I have remained one ever since.

My *New History* tells the story of that one-fifth of humankind we call "Indian," residing on barely two-and-a-half percent of the earth's domain, spread among 25 states within India's Union Republic, larger than all of Western Europe. No single history could "cover" all four millennia of India's uniquely complex and crowded past. I have tried only to convey the essence of India's enduring qualities, tracing important threads of her contributions to our modern world history, uncovering the roots of tragic religious and regional conflicts and unrelenting poverty that continue to plague her children. After 34 years of teaching Indian History at UCLA, I still consider history the most comprehensive and luminous disciplinary window through which to view and to try to understand the most distant, axiomatically different civilization from our own. History cannot only teach us what "actually happened" in some remote or recent era of the past, but by allowing us to chart the course of change over time, can help us comprehend current reality better and project future paths and possible patterns of human behavior with greater empathy and accuracy. Though history never precisely repeats itself, the "*Past is Prologue*," and until we learn to understand our past errors, we may be "doomed" to blunder into similar pits of misjudgment in time of future trial.

Modern urban India, epitomized by New Delhi's international airports, a stadium, freeway flyovers, five-star hotels and Bombay's elegantly illumined Marina necklace of highrises, has joined most industrial nations in our global race toward more and greater Consumerism. Most of India's predominantly peasant population, however, remains submerged in village penury, barely surviving on the knife-edge of subsistence. Over four decades of freedom have brought many changes to India's prospering urban managers, middle-class merchants, industrialists, landlords, and bureaucrats, who now move "ahead" on India-made vehicles and "tune-in" to Indian TV. India's majority, however, remains rooted in her religious past, hard-working, patient people seeking the goal of most devout Hindus, *Moksha* ("Release"), from this world of pain and the sorrows of rebirth.

I am indebted to many friends, colleagues, and students the world over for insightful ideas and valuable criticism of my work, and I thank all who have helped me to learn something about Indian history.

There are too many to name in this brief preface, but I must say a word of heartfelt thanks to my History “guru,” Dr. Holden Furber, and to my kind friend, Dr. Kenneth Galbraith. My warm thanks to my editor, Nancy Lane, and Oxford University Press for continuing to keep me in print.

Finally, to my dear wife, Dorothy, and to our grandson, Samuel, this old author and all of his works are dedicated, with Love.

*Los Angeles*  
*January 1992*

S. W.



# CONTENTS

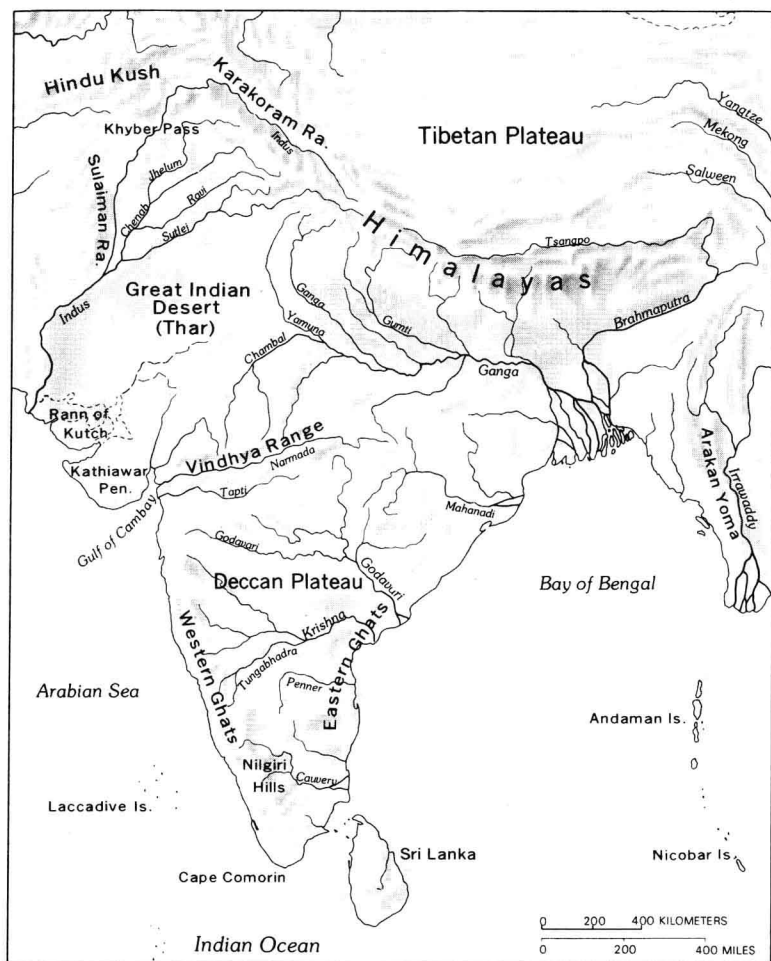
|     |   |     |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|
| 1.  | The Ecological Setting  | 3   |  |
| 2.  | Indus Culture (ca. 2500–1600 B.C.)  | 14  |  |
| 3.  | The Aryan Age (ca. 1500–1000 B.C.)  | 24  |  |
| 4.  | North Indian Conquest and Unification<br>(ca. 1000–450 B.C.)                            | 37  |  |
| 5.  | India's First Imperial Unification (326–184 B.C.)                                       | 55  |  |
| 6.  | Political Fragmentation and Economic and Cultural<br>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<br>(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. | From Collective Leadership to<br>Indira Raj (1964–77)                                   | 371 |  |

|     |                              |     |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|
| 25. | From Janata Raj to Rajiv Raj | 407 |
| 26. | India Today                  | 434 |
|     | Bibliography                 | 447 |
|     | Glossary                     | 475 |
|     | Index                        | 481 |

# MAPS

|     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 1.  | India—Physical Features                                    | 2   |
| 2.  | A. Average Annual Precipitation                            | 7   |
|     | B. <i>Population Density</i> (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<br>(269–232 B.C.) | 64  |
|     | C. Gupta Empire under Chandra Gupta II<br>(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  | 435 |

# 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