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India Before Europe

India is a land of enormous diversity. Cross-cultural influences are everywhere in evidence, in the food people eat, the clothes they wear, and in the places they worship. This was ever the case, and at no time more so than in the India that existed from 1200 to 1750, before the European intervention. In this absorbing and richly illustrated book, the authors take the reader on a journey across the political, economic, religious, and cultural landscapes of medieval India from the Ghurid conquests and the Delhi Sultanate, through the rise and fall of the southern kingdom of Vijayanagara, to the peripheries of empire and, finally, to the great court of the Mughals. This was a time of conquest and consolidation, when Muslims and Hindus came together to create a culture, an architecture, and a tradition which was uniquely their own and which still resonates in today's India. As the first survey of its kind in over a decade, the book is a *tour de force*. It is fluently composed, with a cast of characters which will educate and entertain students and general readers alike.

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India Before Europe

Catherine B. Asher

University of Minnesota

and

Cynthia Talbot

University of Texas at Austin



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Preface

India Before Europe is the product of collaboration between two scholars from different disciplines, who have joined together to write a volume on Indian history and culture from 1200 to 1750. Catherine Asher is an art historian who has worked on north India's Indic, Islamic, and Islamicate cultural traditions. Cynthia Talbot is a historian who has worked largely on the social history of pre-Mughal south India and also is aware of larger trends in world history. When first approached by Marigold Acland of Cambridge University Press to write a history of the five hundred plus years immediately prior to the rise of British colonial power in India, neither of us felt competent to tackle this challenging task alone. Only by pooling our quite distinct spheres of training and knowledge, we thought, could we possibly do justice to the complexity and richness of this very important era. Little did we realize then how much more we had to learn, not only from each other but also from a wide range of individuals upon whose scholarship we relied. The end result is one that neither of us could have achieved on our own.

The book was written jointly in Austin and Minneapolis when the two authors could meet, but more often it evolved in cyberspace, where attachments were constantly zinging across the country or, at times, even across countries, for the other person's perusal. Although first drafts of specific sections or chapters were composed individually, in the end every word was evaluated and edited by both of us. We hope the outcome is a text that reads as if it were authored by a single writer, not two.

An important motivation for both of us was the desire to provide a text that would be useful to specialists and non-specialists alike, something that would bridge the vast gap in the secondary literature between the introductory work on South Asia, on the one hand, and the many scholarly monographs and articles, on the other. The need for an up-to-date survey is particularly acute for the period with which we are concerned here, the years from 1200 to 1750, since the roots of many controversial issues that divide the peoples of South Asia along national, regional, religious, and ethnic lines today are thought to lie in that era.

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xiv Preface

We have attempted to offer a balanced, interdisciplinary perspective, one that encompasses artistic culture as well as political achievement, and also recognizes the role played by different communities from a variety of regions. By this means, we hope to express our appreciation of the diverse cultures and societies of South Asia that we have had the privilege to study for many years.

A small note on the text is in order. We have italicized foreign words and terms only the first time they are introduced. If a word is used more than once with a gloss, then it is included in the glossary. There is an appendix with short biographies of the most important personalities discussed in the work. We have used many of the older terms for Indian cities, since these are often closer to the names that were used during the period under consideration than are today's more modern ones. While we have made an attempt to use a consistent transliteration system, in a number of cases we have used commonly accepted spellings, especially for temple names.

Since we are not able to mention, in the body of the text, all the scholars whose works we consulted in the writing of this book, we present an extensive bibliography instead. The help and cooperation of many other individuals and institutions were needed to complete this project, however. To provide a complete list would not be possible, but some indeed must be acknowledged. Three institutions should be thanked for their generous financial assistance: the American Institute of Indian Studies, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Texas at Austin.

Others we must thank include current and former students whose work has benefited ours in so many ways, especially Deborah Hutton, Jennifer Joffe, and Riyaz Latif, upon whose expertise we frequently relied. Colleagues at institutions here and abroad to whom we are indebted include Steven Cohen, Rosemary Crill, Carl Ernst, John Fritz, Henry Ginsberg, Pika Ghosh, Catherine Glynn, Donald Clay Johnson, Janice Leoshko, Stephen Markel, George Michell, Carla Petievich, Dede Ruggles and Susan Stronge. We are grateful to Susan Deans-Smith, Julie Hardwick, and Martha Newman for their thoughtful comments on the introductory chapter, and also to Phillip Wagoner for carefully reading the entire text during a very busy time and providing useful suggestions. Barbara Metcalf, Thomas Metcalf, Sandria Frietag, and David Gilmartin have provided much-needed support throughout the project. In India, Dr. Pradeep Mehendiratta and Purnima Mehta have opened doors when we thought nothing could be done. M. A. Dhaky, U. S. Moorti, and Jagdish Yadav have also provided tremendous assistance over the years. Alisa Eimen worked tirelessly on procuring plates from museums and institutions. Virginia Larson and Rebecca Moss spent hours scanning the illustrations. Julianna Budding deserves our deep appreciation for

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the speed with which she produced the elegant maps included here, with the exception of Map 1.2 which Maria Lane provided. We thank our families – Eric Schenk, Rick Asher, Alice Asher, Tom Asher, and Dana Bilsky – for the help and support they have given throughout this project. We are especially grateful to Eric Schenk for his meticulous reading of our final draft. To all of you, including those who helped but go unmentioned, many thanks.

Glossary

Adi Granth the most sacred scripture in the Sikh religion

Afaqi foreign-born nobility in the Deccan Sultanates, most of whom came from Iran and Central Asia

amir a noble in a Muslim court

Avadhi an important literary language of early modern north India; a vernacular form of Hindi from the Lucknow region

bangla a roof with a curved cornice

baraka a Sufi saint's spiritual power, thought to emanate from the tomb even after death

Bengali a regional language of eastern India, spoken today in India's West Bengal state and in Bangladesh

bhakti a type of Hindu religious worship characterized by an intense personal devotion to a deity often expressed in poem-songs

Brahmi a writing system dating back to at least the third century BCE, from which all subsequent Indian scripts were derived except the few based on Perso-Arabic

Brahmin the highest category in the Hindu *varna* or class system whose traditional occupation was that of priest or religious teacher, but who often served as poets, ministers, or accountants to kings and lords because of their literacy and education

char bagh a four part garden generally believed to have been introduced into India by the Mughals; the Mughal version has its origins in the traditions of the Timurids

chintz a printed and/or hand painted cotton fabric

Chishti the most popular Sufi order in India; the major Chishti saints included here are Muin al-Din Chishti, Nizam al-Din Auliya, and

Shaikh Salim Chishti; the Mughals were especially devoted to the Chishti order

Dakani a form of Hindavi developed in the Deccan between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries as a literary language; also referred to as Old Urdu

dargah the tomb of a Sufi saint that becomes a shrine

darshan(a) seeing or beholding a Hindu or Jain deity or a king

Deccani local nobility in the Deccan Sultanates as opposed to the foreign-born Afaqi

deshmukh headman of 20–100 villages in the Maratha country; a type of rural gentry

dharma broadly connotes righteousness, religious truth, or moral duty in Indic thought, but also often refers to one's social obligations to family or community

dhoti an unsewn garment for a male that is wrapped around the waist

Din-i Ilahi a discipleship relation between Akbar and his closest nobles

Diwan-i Amm Public Audience Hall in the Mughal and related courts

Diwan-i Khass Private Audience Hall in the Mughal and related courts

doab literally, two rivers; the alluvial land lying between two rivers that eventually merge into each other

gopura a gateway into the compound of a south Indian temple; tall, elaborate *gopuras* are common from the fourteenth century onward

haram literally, forbidden; the female quarters of a household or court; the female members of the court

Hindavi an Indo-Islamic term for the indigenous languages of India that were the predecessors of modern Hindi and Urdu, sometimes referred to simply as "Hindi"

hookah a water pipe used for smoking tobacco

iqta in Muslim states of the pre-Mughal era, a territory assigned to a political subordinate who had administrative authority over it and used some its revenue to maintain troops

jagir lands whose revenues were assigned to a Mughal *mansabdar* in lieu of salary

xviii Glossary

jagirdar the holder of a *jagir*

Jain a follower of the enlightened beings known as Jinas and the religion today called Jainism; Jains strive to lead an ascetic lifestyle and are often bankers and merchants

jharoka the term for a throne used by the Mughal rulers

jharoka-i darshan the Mughal emperor's public viewing window where he appeared each morning so the public could behold his image

jizya a tax on non-Muslims that in turn gave them protection under Muslim law

Kannada a regional language of southern India, spoken today in Karnataka state

khanazad literally, son; a noble who served the Mughal emperor loyally as if he was a family member

khanqah residential compound of a Sufi teacher

Krishna an incarnation of the god Vishnu whose exploits as a child and a young man are particularly popular among worshippers

kshatriya the second highest category in the Hindu *varna* or class system whose traditional occupation was that of king or warrior

madrasa school for Islamic religious instruction

Mahabharata one of India's two great epics transmitted both in Sanskrit and in regional languages, focusing on a struggle for succession between cousins and featuring the god Krishna

mandapa a porch or porches that are before the inner sanctum of a Hindu or Jain temple

mansabdar a noble who held a mansab rank in the Mughal administrative system, which entitled him to either a salary or lands (*jagir*) whose yields would equal a salary, in return for supplying a specified number of troops and horses

Marathi a regional language of the Deccan, spoken today in Maharashtra state

mihrab niche in the *qibla* wall of a mosque

Natha a Hindu ascetic order that sought immortality through the practice of yoga

naubat official orchestra that would play when the emperor was in court; sometimes called a *naqqar*

nayaka a warrior lord of south India; later the name of several dynasties who succeeded the Vijayanagara state

nayamkara a territory assigned to a political subordinate of the Vijayanagara empire who used some of its revenue to maintain troops

patola a luxury fabric where the threads of both the warp and woof are tie-dyed prior to weaving, creating a reversible design

Persian the court language of Muslims in Iran, Central Asia, and India, especially under the Mughals

peshwa Brahmin prime minister of the Maratha court who became the *de facto* ruler

prasad(a) food offered to Hindu deities and thus sanctified; often distributed or sold later to devotees for their consumption

pardah seclusion of women

qawwali ecstatic songs in honor of Sufis by *qawwal* singer-musicians

qibla direction of Mecca toward which all Muslims pray

raja a non-Muslim king or lord; the Sisodiyas of Mewar used the title *rana* instead

Ram(a) an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu who was an exemplary king

Ramayana one of India's two great epics transmitted both in Sanskrit and in regional languages, focusing on the life of the god-king Rama

rasa a term used in Indian aesthetics to denote specific moods or emotions; also connoisseurship, flavor

rupee the monetary unit used in north India since the sixteenth century; a silver coin

sama listening to music, often with an ecstatic character, at Chishti *dar-gahs*, with the goal of finding union with god

Sanskrit classical language of India that continued to be used for literary production at many non-Muslim courts and religious centers

xx Glossary

Sant a saint-poet of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century north India who sought direct experience of god; often they were of low caste and envisioned god or the divine as lacking form and attributes

serai an inn for a traveler

sharia laws concerning all aspects of a Muslim's life

Shia the smaller of the two main groups of Muslims, who reject the authority of the caliphs, and instead believe that members of the Prophet Muhammad's family were his rightful successors

shikhara the spired superstructure of a Hindu or Jain temple

Shiva a major Hindu god, celebrated for his ascetic ways and his dance of destruction that brings about the end of time; he is the husband of Parvati and father of Ganesha and Skanda

shudra the lowest category in the Hindu *varna* or class system whose traditional occupation was service, but who engaged in many activities including agriculture

Sikh member of a religious faith first established by Guru Nanak c. 1500 that developed largely in the Punjab

Sufi Muslim mystics, often organized in various orders, whose spiritual leaders guide novices through meditation, prayer, and at times specific practices, in order to find oneness with god

sulh-i kul peace to all; universal toleration promoted by the Mughal state under Akbar and Abu al-Fazl

sultan title initially used by Muslim rulers of Turkic extraction to indicate their possession of political power, but later employed by many Muslim kings; a state ruled by a sultan is known as a sultanate

Sunni the majority of Muslims who accept the historical development of Islam after the Prophet Muhammad's death

Tamil a regional language of southern India with a long literary history, spoken today in Tamil Nadu state

Telugu a regional language of southern India, spoken today in Andhra Pradesh state

ulama Muslim scholars versed in religious and legal texts

Urdu identified with north Indian Muslim culture since the eighteenth century, this language blends vernacular Hindi grammar with Perso-Arabic vocabulary

urs literally, marriage; the date a Muslim saint or a member of royalty died; anniversary commemoration at the tomb of a deceased saint, ruler, or member of a royal family

Vaishnava individuals or groups devoted to the worship of Vishnu in his various forms; their beliefs and practices are collectively designated as Vaishnavism in English

varna one of the four classes in the classical Indian conception of society; sometimes used in reference to the entire system of four classes

Vishnu a major Hindu god whose ten incarnations include Rama and Krishna; he is the husband of Lakshmi and often regarded as the preserver of the universe

watan jagir ancestral lands of Mughal nobles who were princes in their own right

zamindar a person who had the hereditary right to collect revenues from a village or group of villages, often designated as a tax-collector by the Mughal state

zikr recollection of god's ninety-nine names, in Islam

zimmi a Muslim term for people of the Book, Jews and Christians, whose histories are included in the Quran as having a shared religious tradition with Islam

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Place names: alternative spellings

Older spellings

Benares
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Dacca
Madras

Contemporary spellings

Varanasi
Mumbai
Kolkata
Dhaka
Chennai