

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-17967-6 - An Agrarian History of South Asia
David Ludden
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An Agrarian History of South Asia

David Ludden's book offers a comprehensive historical framework for understanding the regional diversity of agrarian South Asia. Adopting a long-term view of history, it treats South Asia not as a single civilisation territory, but rather as a patchwork of agrarian regions, each with its own social, cultural, and political histories. The discussion begins during the first millennium, when institutions of ritual, conquest, and patriarchy formed an archipelago of farming regimes that steadily displaced and assimilated pastoral and tribal communities. It goes on to consider how, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the concept of modern territoriality evolved as farmers pushed agriculture to its physical limits and states created permanent rights to all the land. Subsequent chapters focus on the development of agrarian capitalism in village societies, which emerged under the British and which formed the bedrock of the modern political economy. In contemporary South Asia, the book argues, economic development and social movements continue to reflect the influence of agrarian localism and the shifting fortunes of agrarian regions with histories which can be traced back to medieval times.

As a comparative synthesis of the literature on agrarian regimes in South Asia, the book promises to be a valuable resource for students of agrarian and regional history, as well as of comparative world history.

DAVID LUDDEN teaches South Asian and world history at the University of Pennsylvania. His publications include *Making India Hindu: Community, Conflict, and the Politics of Democracy* (1996) and *Peasant History in South India* (1985).

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- I The Mughals and Their Contemporaries
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- IV The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia

A list of individual titles in preparation will
be found at the end of the volume.

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FOR ROCHONA

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Cambridge History of India covers the period from the beginning of the sixteenth century. In some respects it marks a radical change in the style of Cambridge Histories, but in others the editors feel that they are working firmly within an established academic tradition.

During the summer of 1896, F. W. Maitland and Lord Acton between them evolved the idea for a comprehensive modern history. By the end of the year the Syndics of the University Press had committed themselves to the *Cambridge Modern History*, and Lord Acton had been put in charge of it. It was hoped that publication would begin in 1899 and be completed by 1904, but the first volume in fact came out in 1902 and the last in 1910, with additional volumes of tables and maps in 1911 and 1912.

The *History* was a great success, and it was followed by a whole series of distinctive Cambridge Histories covering English Literature, the Ancient World, India, British Foreign Policy, Economic History, Medieval History, the British Empire, Africa, China and Latin America; and even now other new series are being prepared. Indeed, the various Histories have given the Press notable strength in the publication of general reference books in the arts and social sciences.

What has made the Cambridge Histories so distinctive is that they have never been simply dictionaries or encyclopaedias. The Histories have, in H. A. L. Fisher's words, always been 'written by an army of specialists concentrating the latest results of special study'. Yet as Acton agreed with the Syndics in 1896, they have not been mere compilations of existing material but original works. Undoubtedly many of the Histories are uneven in quality, some have become out of date very rapidly, but their virtue has been that they have consistently done more than simply record an existing state of knowledge: they have tended to focus interest on research and they have provided a massive stimulus to further work. This has made their publication doubly worthwhile and has distinguished them intellectually from

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

other sorts of reference book. The editors of *The New Cambridge History of India* have acknowledged this in their work.

The original *Cambridge History of India* was published between 1922 and 1937. It was planned in six volumes, but of these, volume 2 dealing with the period between the first century AD and the Muslim invasion of India never appeared. Some of the material is still of value, but in many respects it is now out of date. The last fifty years have seen a great deal of new research on India, and a striking feature of recent work has been to cast doubt on the validity of the quite arbitrary chronological and categorical way in which Indian history has been conventionally divided.

The editors decided that it would not be academically desirable to prepare a new *History of India* using the traditional format. The selective nature of research on Indian history over the past half-century would doom such a project from the start and the whole of Indian history could not be covered in an even or comprehensive manner. They concluded that the best scheme would be to have a *History* divided into four overlapping chronological volumes, each containing short books on individual themes or subjects. Although in extent the work will therefore be equivalent to a dozen massive tomes of the traditional sort, in form *The New Cambridge History of India* will appear as a shelf full of separate but complementary parts. Accordingly, the main divisions are between i. *The Mughals and their Contemporaries*, ii. *Indian States and the Transition to Colonialism*, iii. *The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society*, and iv. *The Evolution of Contemporary South Asia*.

Just as the books within these volumes are complementary so too do they intersect with each other, both thematically and chronologically. As the books appear they are intended to give a view of the subject as it now stands and to act as a stimulus to further research. We do expect the *New Cambridge History of India* to be not the last word on the subject but an essential voice in the continuing discussion about it.

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