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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY  
OF INDIA

*Indian society and the making of  
the British Empire*

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## THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

*General editor* GORDON JOHNSON

President of Wolfson College, and Director, Centre of South Asian Studies,  
University of Cambridge

*Associate editors* C. A. BAYLY

Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History, University of Cambridge,  
and Fellow of St Catharine's College

*and* JOHN F. RICHARDS

Professor of History, Duke University

Although the original *Cambridge History of India*, published between 1922 and 1937, did much to formulate a chronology for Indian history and describe the administrative structures of government in India, it has inevitably been overtaken by the mass of new research published over the last fifty years.

Designed to take full account of recent scholarship and changing conceptions of South Asia's historical development, *The New Cambridge History of India* will be published as a series of short, self-contained volumes, each dealing with a separate theme and written by a single person. Within an overall four-part structure, thirty-one complementary volumes in uniform format will be published. As before, each will conclude with a substantial bibliographical essay designed to lead non-specialists further into the literature.

The four parts planned are as follows:

- I The Mughals and their contemporaries
- II Indian states and the transition to colonialism
- III The Indian Empire and the beginnings of modern society
- 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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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE



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



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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

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 A.D. 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 about eight 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 not expect the *New Cambridge History of India* to be the last word on the subject but an essential voice in the continuing discourse about it.

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The aim of this work is rather different from that of earlier Cambridge *Histories*, including the old *Cambridge History of India*, v (1929) and the more recent *Cambridge Economic History of India*, 2 vols (1982 and 1983). All these works attempted to one degree or another to be 'authoritative', 'definitive' or at the very least, to provide a good deal of basic factual material. This volume cannot hope to do that in view of its length and the complexity of the subject. Besides, the notion of a Western history seeking to be authoritative, in some sense to master India, has become a little dubious. Rather, this should be seen as an attempt to provide a single author's synthesis of some of the more important work and themes which have appeared in historical studies of India, written in the subcontinent and outside, over the last twenty years. As such the book is partial, argumentative and thematic, rather than exhaustive, balanced and chronological.

The book deliberately deals with some episodes and types of history which were the staple of the older volumes, notably the conquests in India under Lord Wellesley and the Rebellion of 1857. This is because history cannot be written without the history of events, and because however subtly refracting are the mirrors through which area specialists now see India, these events remain critical to non-specialist understanding of the subcontinent, and indeed of world history. At the same time some current specialist themes, ecological change and the nature of resistance, for instance, have received attention because they demand some treatment at an all-India level. Other subjects, the history of the poor, of changes in the micro-economy of the districts, of specific policies implemented by provincial colonial governments: these are better tackled by the regional and thematic volumes which will appear in this series.

Much of the historical writing on India since 1960 has been a persuasive attempt to argue the importance of regionalism: political, economic and cultural. This volume notes regional differences as far as possible, but attempts to draw themes together at an all-India level. This is not because the powerful case for different regional histories

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has been ignored, simply that most regional and local studies assume the existence of processes working at a broader level, and if only for heuristic reasons these should be considered in their own right.

For the same reason I have not hesitated to use terms such as 'capitalist', 'class', 'class formation', 'bureaucracy', 'aristocracy' and 'gentry' in my analysis. This is because I consider, firstly, that there were indigenous concepts and understandings of the social order which very closely approximated to these Western terms, though of course, one must always bear in mind the uniqueness of Indian cultural and social forms. There are dangers in glib comparison, but on the other side excessive Orientalist purism has done little except make India seem peculiar to the outside world. These terms are also employed because general changes in India's and the world's economy and governance during the period considered here were, in fact, bringing into being social groups and relationships which were similar to those of contemporary western Europe. These groups and relationships never lost their specifically Indian character but they are nevertheless amenable to comparison at an international level.

I have used the less 'corrupt' Anglo-Indian forms of Indian place-names and personal names used by the early twentieth-century literature. Poona is English for Pune, and Ganges for Ganga, as surely as Munich is for München and Florence for Firenze. On the other hand, I have not suppressed Indian names and terms simply to make things easy for a Western audience since audiences who read English are no longer overwhelmingly Western. In the old days the British used to like India without Indians and Indian words as they liked France without the French and French words. Those days are gone.

My colleagues will know where in this book their work has been drawn upon, even if they are not directly referred to. I hope that it has not been distorted too much in the process. But some more specific debts must be acknowledged. Among many institutions in India the staff of the Connemara Library, Madras and Professor Mehboob Pasha and the staff of the Muhammadan Public Library, Madras, provided invaluable assistance. I must also acknowledge the help of Sri V.A. Sundaram, I.A.S. Among those who have provided useful criticism are Susan Bayly, Sugata Bose, Raj Chandavarkar, Sunil Chander, Hiram Morgan, David Washbrook and above all Peter Marshall who patiently corrected far too many errors. They are warmly thanked.

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Finally, Neil McKendrick, David Fieldhouse and Graeme Rennie helped this project to completion in an indirect, but no less important manner. I am very grateful to them.

C. A. BAYLY

## Note on annotation

The policy of the series is to provide bibliographical and reference material in the essay (below, pp. 212–30). However, footnotes and references have been considered appropriate in the case of (a) direct quotations; (b) unpublished material; or (c) less well-known works.