In this fascinating study, Richard Eaton recounts the history of southern India’s Deccan plateau from the early fourteenth century to the rise of European colonialism in the eighteenth. He does so, vividly, by narrating the lives of eight Indians who lived at different times during this period, and whose careers illustrate particular social processes of the region’s history. In the first chapter, for example, the author recounts the tragic life of maharaja Pratapa Rudra in order to describe the demise of regional kingdoms and the rise of interregional sultanates. In the second, the life of a Sufi shaikh is used to explore the intersection of Muslim piety, holy-man charisma, and state authority. The book’s other characters include a long-distance merchant, a general, a slave, a poet, a bandit, and a female commander-regent.

Woven together into a rich narrative tapestry, the stories of these eight figures shed light not only on important social processes of the Deccan plateau across four centuries, but also on the complex relations between peoples and states of north India and those to the south of the Narmada River. This study of one of the least understood parts of South Asia is a long-awaited and much-needed book by one of the most highly regarded scholars in the field.

Richard M. Eaton is one of the premier scholars of precolonial India. His many publications include *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (1993), *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711–1750* (2003) and *Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India* (2004).
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 over the past seventy years.

Designed to take full account of recent scholarship and changing conceptions of South Asia’s historical development, *The New Cambridge History of India* is published as a series of short, self-contained volumes, each dealing with a separate theme and written by one or two authors, and published within a four-part structure.

The four parts 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 will be found at the end of the volume.*
THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF INDIA

I · 8

A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761
Eight Indian Lives

RICHARD M. EATON

University of Arizona
For my sister and brother-in-law
BETH AND ROSCOE SWARTZ

Celebrating fifty years of marriage
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1 These include dropping my camera in the Arabian Sea at Janjira, getting suspended mid-air in Raigarh’s cable car because of a power outage, and being stranded in Bidar owing to lack of funds.