India before Europe

Second Edition

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 c. 1200 to 1750, before European intervention. In this thoughtfully revised and updated second edition, readers are taken on a richly illustrated journey across the political, economic, religious, and cultural landscapes of India – from the Ghurid conquest and the Delhi Sultanate, through the rise and fall of the southern kingdom of Vijayanagara and their successors, to the peripheries of empire, and the great court of the Mughals. This was a time of conquest and consolidation, when Muslims and Hindus came together to create a literary, material, and visual culture which was uniquely their own and which still resonates today.

Catherine B. Asher is an art historian, focusing on the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. She has served as President of the Historians of Islamic Art, Vice President of the College Art Association and Chair of the CAA International Committee as well as Chair of the CAA Publications Committee. She has been Treasurer of the American Council for Southern Asian Art and Chair of the American Institute of Indian Studies Center for Art and Archaeology. Her publications include Delhi's Qutb Complex: The Minar, Mosque and Mehrauli (Marg Foundation), The Architecture of Mughal India (Cambridge University Press), and Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past (American Institute of Indian Studies).

Cynthia Talbot is a social and cultural historian whose research has focused on both south and north India. After studying temples and brahmmins for years, in recent decades her interests have shifted to heroic histories and warrior culture. Her publications include Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra (Oxford University Press), Knowing India: Colonial and Modern Constructions of the Past (Yoda Press), and The Last Hindu Emperor: Prithviraj Chauhan and the Indian Past, 1200–2000 (Cambridge University Press), which received the Association for Asian Studies A. K. Coomaraswamy Book Award in 2018.
India before Europe

Second Edition

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Preface to First Edition

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 500 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.
Preface to First Edition

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 Joffee, 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
Preface to First Edition

institutions. Virginia Larson and Rebecca Moss spent hours scanning the illustrations. Julianna Budding deserves our deep appreciation for 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.
Preface to Second Edition

Over fifteen years have passed since the first edition of *India before Europe* was published and, in that time span, the world has become even more interconnected. The rapid acceleration of globalization has led to increased migration from South Asia to other regions, as well as easier access to South Asia for people from abroad. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down the movement of people from one place to another, the trend is inexorable for the foreseeable future as families, friends, businesses, institutions, and other socio-economic networks continue to spread out over larger expanses of space. Just as striking as the increase in the migration and mobility of people in recent years is the speed with which electronic technology and social media has hastened the transmission of ideas and information around the globe, making it possible for almost instantaneous conversation on a mass scale. This trend too is likely to grow in the coming years, despite efforts by many states to control the content of discourse for both negative and positive reasons. While we had not imagined, when we wrote the first edition of this book, that the physical and intellectual distances between places would shrink so swiftly, we are heartened by these developments in the recent past and gratified, in retrospect, that the issue of cultural exchange was so central to our book about the more distant past. We continue with that emphasis in the second edition.

We are also pleased that scholarship on the period from 1200 to 1750 has burgeoned since *India before Europe* first appeared. Much new work has been done on topics covered in that edition as well as on other aspects of premodern India. Current work on the Mughals especially has been both exciting and inspirational as we prepared this second edition. Among these riches are new interpretations of the Mughal state policy of sulh-i kull, thoughtful reevaluations of the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, probing studies of nobles and their administrators, and stimulating reassessments of the imperial princes. Insightful work on Aurangzeb and the later Mughals has offered fresh approaches. Impressive new scholarship on the Deccani sultanates and south Indian polities has also...
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guided us in formulating this second edition. Studies on Mughal, Deccani, and southern Indian art, architecture, and material remains have made us think more carefully about the role visual culture played in state formation and consolidation as well as providing personal pleasure. Thanks to this latest scholarship we were inspired to enhance this second edition with more on topics such as merchants, Indian Ocean trade, elite women, food and plant history, textiles, painting from Rajput, Mughal, Deccani and south Indian courts, patronage of Indic languages in Persianate courts, poetry in regional languages and more.

The growing interest in the era from 1200 to 1750 is reflected not only in the increase in specialized research but also the composition of surveys of the period. In addition to *India before Europe*, works such as Richard Eaton’s *India in the Persianate Age* (2019) and André Wink’s *The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* (2020) provide nuanced understandings of historical developments, especially in regards to the interactions of the subcontinent’s multiple communities and India’s place within world history. Our text considers these topics as well but one notable distinction, in comparison to other surveys, is its substantial, detailed focus on cultural developments, both Indic and Islamicate. This includes visual and material culture and the many literatures produced in South Asia during this period.

Readers of the first edition have asked how to find color illustrations of the material included. Most monuments covered are relatively well known and web searches will usually yield images suitable for presentations. For objects and paintings again general web searches are useful, but we suggest consulting the List of Figures at the front of this book in order to identify the museum or library that holds the particular object or painting. Many of these institutions have excellent websites with accessible high-quality images along with detailed information. To further assist the reader we have provided a list of Further Reading at the end of each chapter. There is also a lengthy Additional Bibliography at the back of the book.

Since the authors were geographically distant, almost all of the second edition of *India before Europe* was written in cyberspace due to the difficulties of travel during the pandemic that commenced in 2019. Thanks to the internet and email we were able to again gain the assistance of many of those we acknowledged in the first edition. For this edition we would like to thank others for their invaluable expertise and suggestions for improvement including Molly Aitken, Eric Beverley, Crispen Branfoot, Allison Busch, John Cort, Debra Diamond, Daniel Ehnbom, Mary Beth Heston, Dipti Khera, Karen Leonard, Leslie Orr, Vijay Pinch, Sheldon Pollock, Yael Rice, Nicholas Roth, Katherine Schofield, Anna
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Seastrand, Tony Stewart, and the anonymous reviewers of both the prospectus and final draft. Eric Schenk is to be thanked for his patience while revisions to the text were slowly completed in a world ravaged by the pandemic. Most of all, however, we would like to honor the memory of Rick Asher, who sadly died before this book went to press. Even while suffering from a terminal illness, Rick took on the responsibility of obtaining permissions to publish all the images used here, a difficult and time-consuming task for which we are extremely grateful. We cannot list all the innumerable ways in which he helped us move this project forward, not to mention his constant support and good cheer which buoyed our spirits – we dedicate this book to him.
Glossary

*Adi Granth* the most sacred scripture in the Sikh religion

*amir* a noble in a Muslim court

*Aavadhi* 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

*Baniya* refers to various Hindu and Jain merchant-banker communities of northern and western India

*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

*Brajbhasha* a north Indian vernacular language that was a precursor of Hindi. Early compositions in Brajbhasa consisted mainly of religious poems with heavy bhakti overtones but over time it became a literary language of north Indian elite courts.

*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

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Glossary

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 Westerners

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 Ashm 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

Habshi Abyssinians brought from Africa to the Deccan as military slaves and converted to Sunni Islam. They served in the regular army, as the sultan's bodyguards, and some rose to high positions as ministers and generals.

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”
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**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

**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

**Jat** a martial peasant community predominantly found in western north India

**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 Islamic 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

**khanjar** a curved sword often with a handle made of expensive materials such as jade; it was usually worn in a noble’s waistband

**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 worshipers

**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

pan a digestive consisting of areca nut among other ingredients wrapped in a betel leaf; offering pan was a perquisite of hospitality

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 title of the 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

purdah seclusion of women

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

qazi a judge in the classical Islamic tradition; in Mughal India and the various sultanates they settled disputes, issued legal deeds, judged people charged with crime, officiated at marriages and dealt with other civil matters
**Glossary**

*qibla* direction of Mecca toward which all Muslims pray

*Ragamala* literally, a garland of musical modes; it often refers to a set of paintings loosely based on these modes

*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 *dargahs*, 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

*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* a superstructure, often of considerable height, on Hindu and Jain temples, erected over the central sanctuary

*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 kull_ 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

_Summi_ 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

_ummah_ the community of people espousing Islam

_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
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Yogini female ascetics devoted to the Hindu god Shiva

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
Place Names: Alternative Spellings

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