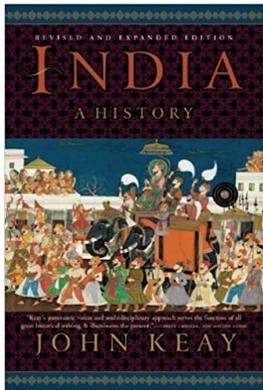




India: A History

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Despite all the controversies and mysteries surrounding Indian history, its chronology begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization and the coming of the Aryans. These two phases are usually described as the pre-Vedic and Vedic ages. Hinduism arose in the Vedic period. The

earliest literary source that sheds light on India's past is the Rig Veda. It is difficult to date this work with any accuracy on the basis of tradition and ambiguous astronomical information contained in the hymns. Indus valley civilization, which flourished between 2800 BC and 1800 BC, had an advanced and flourishing economic system. The Indus valley people practiced agriculture, domesticated animals, made tools and weapons from copper, bronze, and tin and even traded with some Middle East countries. What happened before that is anyone's guess and a topic full of myths.

The dates of Indus Valley Civilization, the advent of the Aryans and their entity and the Vedic period are based on estimates and conjectures derived from the excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (now in Pakistan) in the 1920s. The recorded history of India started around 320 B.C with Alexander's conquest of Punjab. Around the same time the Mauryan Empire (322 BCE - 185 BC) assumed power in eastern and northern India. At its height, the empire stretched over parts of modern Iran and almost the entire Indian subcontinent, except the southern tip. Kautilya, also known as Chanakya aka

Machiavelli of India and the author of "Arthshastra" helped Chandragupta to form the Mauryan Empire. Pataliputra (now called Patna in Bihar), the capital of the Magadh Empire became the largest city in the world at that time. Ashoka the Great, grandson of Chandragupta expanded the Maurya Empire even further capturing Kalinga. The death of 100,000 people in the war changed Ashoka's heart who accepted the teaching of Buddha and spread his message to China and the Far East. The successors of Ashoka were not strong enough to hold the empire together. It started disintegrating in 185 BC, almost 150 years after Chandragupta had overthrown the Nanda dynasty.

The next significant kingdom was the Guptas (4-6 AD), also referred to as the Golden Age of Indian history. Chandragupta I received Pataliputra in dowry when he married the daughter of the chief of the 'Licchavis'. His empire extended from the river Ganges or the Ganga to the city of Allahabad. His son, Samudra Gupta and his grandson, Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya) were equally skilled and powerful. They extended the empire in the south up to Narmada River.

The last of the ancient kingdoms in India was ruled by King Harshavardhana, who ascended the throne at Thanneshwar and Kannauj after his brother died. He eventually got defeated by the Chalukya Kingdom of Deccan India.

Harshavardhana was well-known for establishing relations with the Chinese, and also for having high religious tolerance and strong administrative capabilities.

While the historians have concentrated their attention mainly to Northern India, the Southern India saw the rise of multiple imperial powers from the middle of the fifth century, most

notably the Chalukya, Chola, Pallava, Chera, Pandyan, and Western Chalukya Empires. The Chola dynasty conquered southern India. They also invaded parts of Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bengal.

Another aspect of Indian history that is not well covered by historians is the foreign invasions prior to the advent of Islam. Kalidas and Patanjali (two of the greatest scholars) have made mention of the Yavanas (185 BC) who came from the West (Greece) and established their kingdom along with Sindhu, Madra, Kekeya, Gandhara and Kamboja as per the descriptions in the epic Mahabharata. This brings up another question, did Mahabharata take place after 185 BC?

The Parthians from Iran known as the Pallavas ruled from A.D. 19 to AD 45. They were followed by the Kushanas (also from Iran) for a short period. Following that the Sakas from Central Asia entered India and ruled sporadically around 4th century AD. Then came the Kushanas from South of China. Their most famous king, Kanishka ruled the present day Afghanistan, Punjab, Kashmir and Ganga-Jamuna Doab (two rivers) from 78- 101 AD.

The Muslims started invading and plundering India around 11th century. Northern India at that time was ruled by the Rajputs. Their kingdoms were fragmented and they lacked unity. Mahmud Ghazni, the Muslim plunderer invaded India seventeen times around 1001 AD. He looted all the gold from temples, massacred people mercilessly and took tens of thousands of Indians with him as slaves.

In the 14th century, the Khalji dynasty, under Alauddin Khalji, extended Muslim rule to Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Deccan, while the Tughlaq dynasty temporarily expanded its territorial reach till Tamil Nadu.

In 1398, Timur invaded northern India, attacking the Delhi Sultanate ruled by Sultan Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud Shah Tughluq of the Tughlaq dynasty. After crossing the Indus River in 1398, he sacked Tulamba and massacred its inhabitants. Then he advanced and captured Multan. His invasion was unopposed as most of the Indian nobility surrendered without a fight.

The Moghuls finally consolidated their rule to entire India starting with Babar in 1526 and ending with Aurangzeb in 1720. The kings after Aurangzeb were too weak to mention. The Moghuls were not plunderers as they considered themselves as Indians. Akbar the Great was the

most famous Moghul who tried to integrate both Hindus and Muslims in his administration. The Moghuls constructed hundreds of famous architectural marvels. The Taj Mahal constructed by Shahjahan is the most famous of them all. The Moghul rule ended in India with the British rule between 1858 to 1957. The British plundered and enslaved India, the crown jewel of the British Empire. The British were ruthless. They disrespected Indians and killed hundreds of thousands of them. The most infamous of those killings was at the Jalianawala Bag. At Jallianawala Bagh, General Dyer fired 1,650 rounds on innocent men, women and children killing 670 people and injuring another 1,200. India finally became independent in 1947 at the cost of losing two major Muslim majority areas, Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) where the Muslims established their own nations. Finally, India became a sovereign democratic republic (officially known as Bharat) in 1950. In short, India: A History is a very informative book that reveals many key facts about India. I chose this book after months of research and I recommend this to anyone interested in Indian history.

-Reviewed by Anil Shrivastava

Agent Running in the Field

Author: John Le Carre (2019)



"A splendid read! For me, it was classic Le Carre. Superb dry British wit, outstanding plot, smart description of all characters, soundly expressed political opinions - even Trump and his America found their place here, portrayed so accurately (this is the first time, I see Trump mentioned in a fiction book,

as opposed to numerous non-fiction books about him), not to mention Brexit, Europe, and all that goes with it in a "spy" world. The ending is a bit ambiguous, but all in all - loved it! Couldn't put it down."

-Reviewed by Clara