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# INSTITUTIONS *and* IDEOLOGIES

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A SOAS SOUTH ASIA READER

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*edited by*

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DAVID ARNOLD

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PETER ROBB

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Taylor & Francis Group

COLLECTED PAPERS ON SOUTH ASIA NO. 10

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A SOAS South Asia Reader

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**RoutledgeCurzon**  
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## PREFACE

This volume was prompted by a felt need for an introduction to South Asia, and also to the Centre of South Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the University of London. The Centre is a body set up to help research, publications and interdisciplinary collaboration among its members, who include academic and library staff and graduate students at SOAS, in association with colleagues elsewhere in London and around the world. The volume has been edited by David Arnold, who is Professor of South Asian History at SOAS, and Peter Robb, the current Chairman of the Centre of South Asian Studies. The editors, helped by a wider committee, made a selection from among recent published works of internal staff-members of the Centre, of whom there are currently 47, their scholarship embracing languages and literatures, history, law and the social sciences. Further volumes of the same kind may follow.

The aims of this book are modest. We recognise that there is and can be no fully satisfactory introductory text on South Asia. Why should there be? We do not expect a single introduction to be able to encompass the richness and diversity of history and culture in the whole of Europe; and the Indian subcontinent is certainly not less complex than the European. This book therefore adopts an approach which will enable the newcomer to approach South Asia, as it were, little by little. It assumes that one has to give up any idea of 'understanding' it all, and think instead of building up and joining together small islands of information, isolated pieces of insight. That is why this volume presents a series of different and partial views on to South Asia, rather than a survey of it. This is one way, the collection suggests, in which the new student of South Asia can make a beginning, or in which old hands can refurbish their ideas. Here we focus on some institutions and ideologies—the state, an army, a political party, and religion, law, medicine, language, literature and political thought. Much is neglected here (in terms of what is studied at SOAS, let alone what can be found in South Asia), and not all that is included is 'representative' either; but then we are rather arguing against the notion of a single South Asia whose essence we could somehow capture.

Camera-ready copy has been prepared in SOAS. The editors are indebted, as ever, to Janet Marks, executive officer of the Centre, and to all colleagues who have helped in the work. Conventions of spelling and citation are not wholly standardised but reflect practice in different disciplines. We also gratefully acknowledge permissions granted by the first publishers of these papers, of whom details are given in notes to the individual chapters.

Peter Robb

## INTRODUCTION

### Institutions and Ideologies in South Asia

David Arnold

This reader has two main purposes. The first is to serve as a general introduction to the history, culture and politics of South Asia.<sup>1</sup> It reproduces a number of articles which have appeared in print separately elsewhere. Taken together, they give an overview of the region as well as providing a series of more detailed case studies, which serve as multiple points of entry into a vast and undeniably complex subject.

The reader's second aim is to illustrate the diverse ways in which the study of the region is currently being pursued by scholars of South Asia—through its religion and art, language and literature, legal institutions, history and politics. In part this represents the development of new disciplinary approaches to the region, such as women's studies, but it also reflects the critical reworking of some long-established subjects, such as law, medicine, art and literature, in the light of recent concerns and controversies. This multi-disciplinary and often cross-disciplinary perspective is a vital part of the current scholarship on South Asia. It recognises both the strengths and the frailties of individual disciplines when faced with particular problems of understanding and analysis, and the value of a combined or comparative approach to a region of this scale and diversity.

Although originally written for separate publication, the essays in this volume are linked by a common concern with institutions and ideologies. The essays can be read as individual pieces, each addressing its own specific issues, but they can also be seen as part of a common enterprise of scholarly exploration. It hardly needs to be said that many of the issues and conflicts that make the headlines in South Asia today—state violence, religious unrest, ethnic and communal clashes, rural insurrection, poverty, war and famine, to name but a few—are common to many other regions of the contemporary world, particularly eastern Europe, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. As such they

<sup>1</sup> The term 'South Asia' has come to be widely used since the 1950s to describe the region covered by the present-day states of Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Afghanistan, Tibet and Burma, though they have important geographical, historical and cultural affinities with the region are now generally regarded as lying outside it. For two useful descriptive and illustrative accounts of the region, see especially Francis Robinson (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka* (Cambridge, 1989); Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed.), *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (2nd impression, New York, 1992).

invite wider comparative study. But they also assume a distinctive character derived from the peculiar geographical, historical, cultural and political circumstances of South Asia.

It has often been suggested that one critical aspect of this distinctive regional identity is the tension, indeed the paradox, between unity and diversity in South Asia.<sup>2</sup> At least to the eyes of the outside observer, there seems to be much that unites the region and distinguishes it from its neighbours. This, by convention, is 'the subcontinent', a term that has, remarkably, been reserved almost exclusively for South Asia. If, on the one hand, it is suggestive of the almost continental scale and complexity of the region, it is also indicative on the other of the way in which it is seemingly walled off by the Himalayan mountains from the rest of the Asian land-mass and divided by sea from its nearest maritime neighbours. Historically, the region has known a succession of empires, which, while never quite holding the entire region in their sway, have exercised significant and often enduring influence over large parts of it. A home to Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Zoroastrians, South Asia has often been identified as having been deeply influenced by culturally distinctive social practices and religious beliefs. And the common experience of colonialism (almost entirely under a single power, the British, by contrast to the colonially-partitioned worlds of Africa and South-East Asia), has arguably left a common legacy of ideas and institutions, and even a lasting attachment to the English language.

But to what extent are these supposedly unifying factors merely superficial, more evident to the outsider than to those within South Asia who would define themselves by a host of other, even antagonistic, identities? One of the underlying issues of this volume is how far the kinds of institutions and ideologies discussed here serve to reinforce the idea of South Asia as a collectivity, how far they promote or express aspects of cultural, social and political unity, or, by contrast, how far they subvert such claims and suggest instead a deep-rooted plurality of perception and identity. For every aspect of South Asia's unity that scholars might adduce, it is possible to counter with at least as many expressions of division or diversity. There is the remarkable variety of climate and terrain, of agriculture and land-use; there is the rich profusion of languages and dialects, of sects and creeds. There is, no less strikingly in the present age, the great variety of political forms and institutions, even between the three original successors to British rule—India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—to say nothing of the idiosyncrasies of Nepal, Bhutan or Bangladesh.

One of the difficulties which South Asia constantly poses is that of

<sup>2</sup> For some earlier examinations of this theme, see Philip Mason (ed.), *India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity. A Symposium* (London, 1967).

locating the appropriate form or level for analysis, and this is no less the case with a discussion of institutions and ideologies than it is for many other fields of enquiry. South Asia is far from being a homogeneous region: its people are, and long have been, subject to a complex scale of social hierarchies and overlapping identities. The region is heir to an immensely powerful and authoritative tradition—of formal religious precept and practice, of institutions of law and government, of education, arts and sciences. Some aspects of this 'classical' tradition are discussed and documented here. But the volume also acknowledges the importance of another tradition—that of peasant society. At times the two seem to stand in stark contrast; at others they seem happily to merge and mingle. Indeed, a great deal of the scholarship on South Asia—among historians, anthropologists, linguists and political scientists alike—has been devoted precisely to how these two broad traditions intersect or diverge, or need to be supplemented and refined by reference to other social and cultural categories. This problem—of relating form and practice, the orthodox and the eclectic, the classical and the vernacular—is far from being an exclusively South Asian phenomenon, but it is one which contributes to the difficulties and complexities of scholarly analysis of the region. The articles in this volume instructively present some alternative perspectives on this issue, even if they cannot presume to have finally resolved it.

No less at issue here, and more acutely represented in recent scholarship than in the work of earlier generations of South Asia scholars, is the question of how identities are formed, imposed and interpreted. Problems of agency, representation and intentionality are among the most perplexing of those currently under investigation. In some instances it would appear that the kinds of institutions and identities discussed here emerged through an almost effortless and barely conscious process of evolution. In other instances, most evidently during the period of colonial rule, identities seem often to have been imposed or constructed, whether wilfully in a deliberate attempt to categorise or to change certain aspects of South Asian society, or from want of adequate understanding. Again, there are situations in which identities and institutions were consciously changed or created for ideological reasons—through the reform of language, for instance, or through the introduction of new legal and political institutions—though not always with the effect intended. Likewise, it is easy enough to assume that certain groups almost automatically enjoy the perquisites of power—by virtue of their social status, their wealth, their bureaucratic position and so forth—and that other groups, by contrast, are by the same terms virtually powerless, mere 'victims' of others' whims or aggression. But such presumptions of domination and subordination, of authority and agency, need constantly to be re-examined, and not just

from one side of the power equation alone. Often, as some of these essays suggest, the situation was far from clear-cut or monolithic. Ideologies and institutions could subvert as well as support systems of cultural hegemony and political authority, or throw up major contradictions within the exercise of state and social power.

One further concern informs a number of these essays. This is the relationship between South Asia and the West, especially as this was reflected in the nature of the British rule and its legacies for the post-colonial age. Here again is an essential but in many ways intractable theme. On the one hand it is possible to take a long-term view of South Asia which traces a basic continuity between the present and the more distant past and sees colonialism as a relatively shortlived and superficial event. Such a view would emphasise the durability and adaptability of pre-colonial political and legal institutions, the 'great continuities' in philosophy, art and social practice, and would indeed see these traditions as working to minimise or undermine the impact of colonial rule. It might finally see these traditions re-emergent and resurgent in contemporary South Asia. Certainly much of contemporary politics and polemic would seem to support this version, but so too would much serious and seemingly non-partisan scholarship. Those of this view might argue that to give much prominence to the West is to deny South Asians their own agency and to flatter the West with excessive notions of its own impact and capacity to transform a society so different from its own. But other writers would find this view too 'essentialist' or perhaps too 'Orientalist', giving insufficient attention to the vast scale of change in South Asia over recent centuries and recent decades, ignoring the profound impact colonialism and the West have had on many aspects of South Asian life and thought. To put it crudely, was it the Hindu tradition or was it colonialism which made India what it is today? Did the peculiar cultural and political circumstances of Islam in South Asia forge the identity of Pakistan and Bangladesh, or were British policies and practices of greater moment? Was colonialism a turning-point or just a hiatus?

The essays in this volume necessarily vary considerably in their emphases and conclusions, but they effectively suggest some of the ways in which the colonial experience and South Asia's on-going encounter with the West has been ignored, resisted or absorbed—or, indeed, has remained a constant dialogue or an unresolvable dilemma—across a broad swathe of human experience, reflected not just in the more obvious realms of history, politics and economics, but also in the arts, in language, and still more elusively, but perhaps most momentously, in understandings of the self.

## Part I: Ideologies

The divide between institutions and ideologies is an artificial one, and it is offered here mainly as a convenient way of grouping papers which overlap conceptually and in subject-matter. Nonetheless, something of a collective view and some connected themes can be gleaned from the summaries which are given in a descriptive paragraph at the start of each paper. Some further suggestions will be made in this and one other introduction to the two main sections into which the book is divided.

First, there is a clear view that there are *distinctive* South Asian characteristics and conditions—from the classical traditions explained by Gelblum to the particular response to political ideology discussed by Byres. Secondly, it is clear that this ‘South Asia’ is thought of as plural and not uniform: we are shown different *kinds* and different *levels* of South Asian society (Anderson on Islamic law, Leslie on women, Stein on peasants, and so on). Thirdly, it is clear that this ‘South Asia’ is never unchanging (though distance of time or space may have made it seem so to some observers). It is a South Asia in constant dialogue with itself, and with external influences. Finally, though the West has provided the most powerful of recent influences, yet these are never seen as all-powerful. The most convincing pictures of South Asia show—as here by Tillotson, Radice, Snell, Shackle, Taylor and others—that it has created its own evolving forms out of a range of ingredients, equally with regard to language or culture, and to politics or government.

With all this in mind we should come to the first paper, by Chapman, with a keen appreciation of the difficulties which he faced in providing a broad overview. He traces the current political divisions of the subcontinent back over the millenia, arguing that the divisions are ancient and deep, but that they occur within a geographical unity. This is a valuable point at which to start, because it invites us to think about what we tend to take for granted: the ‘nationhood’ of the present nations, and the ‘regionality’ of the whole region. It also shows how difficult it is to tell large and general stories about South Asia. Of course, on South Asia, there will always be room for a range of different views; and some recent scholarship tends, in particular, to suggest that Indian culture was much less rigid, and that trade was much more advanced earlier on, than used to be thought.<sup>1</sup> Thus too, after

<sup>1</sup> Some of the complexity of culture can be pursued in such works as A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (third ed., London, 1967), Wendy O’Flaherty [Doniger], *Hindu Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1975), Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972)—all written by one-time members of SOAS—and J.L. Brockington, *Righteous Rama* (Delhi, 1985); while an alternative and more detailed view of the economic past could start with the essays, especially by Irfan Habib and Burton Stein, in Tapan

Mughal decline in the eighteenth century, British rule, according to recent accounts, was not so much drawn into a vacuum as added gradually to a range of vigorous and competing local powers and interest groups, which the British co-opted, subverted or overwhelmed.<sup>2</sup> There are differences of view, finally, on whether or not Hindus and Muslims in South Asia did (or do) always inhabit such different worlds as the orthodox versions of the religions imply. The historian, Gyanendra Pandey, has written: 'Communalism in India'—that is, perceived and antagonistic socio-religious identity—'is another characteristic and paradoxical product of the age of Reason (and of Capital)': though religions and identities existed, religious groupings, he suggests, were not 'ready-made', and nor was religious identity necessarily 'primitive', or 'pathological', or merely 'nationalism gone awry'.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, to encounter India in any age, one must, of course, attend to religion. However recent their present forms and political implications, elements of religious difference are exceptionally old and exceptionally persistent—though never unchanging, they are possibly older and more continuous in South Asia than in any other civilisation. In this volume, the essays by Gelblum and Leslie take up the Hindu tradition, the first more briefly by explaining some of the ways in which its philosophical thought can be characterised and distinguished, and the second by examining a custom—*sati*, or suttee—something of which will be known to all, if only in terms of more or less colourful and fanciful descriptions such as in Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which is based in turn on early European accounts (such as by Bernier).<sup>4</sup>

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Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 1 (1982): 'the economy of the Delhi Sultanate', claims Habib, 'seems to be marked by a considerable expansion of the money economy...' (p.82), resulting in a 'large inland commerce' (p.85). Then—that is, from the twelfth century A.D. if not before—the real costs of transportation, in time and risk, were not so great as to preclude specialisation and exchange, though not of course at levels achieved in more recent centuries.

<sup>2</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars* (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990), pp.5, 10, 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Bernier, who travelled in India in the late seventeenth century, contributed to a number of stereotypes later picked up by others, such as James Mill; though Bernier commented on Hindu tolerance (no doubt a fault to one who believed in a 'true' religion), he stressed caste, the lack of 'public spirit', the oppression of the poor and the lowly, and (apart from Brahman learning) the 'universal ignorance'; F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire* (Oxford, 1914). See also James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1 (5th ed., with notes by H.H. Wilson, London, 1858), especially pp.288-90, but also Wilson's attack on Mill's account as 'valueless' and 'unjust' (pp.368-76). On *sati* see Abbé Dubois, *Description of the Character*,

Gelblum begins from the assumption, which all would accept in one sense or another, that there are pan-Hindu sources; and he explains ways in which they differ from the texts of received religions such as Christianity and Islam, even though they have aspects of 'revelation' and of commentary or explanation which are analogous to the Bible, the Qur'an, the Talmud and the *shari'a*. One of the great differences between Hindu and much other religious thought lies in the value placed in the latter upon rule or authority, and hence upon singular, incontrovertible truth. The tradition described by Gelblum is difficult and complex (even once one has mastered the terms) because it is, by contrast, so multifarious, nuanced and ambiguous. Yet its great literature remains at the core of what it means to be Hindu.

Leslie, in writing of the sacrifice of Hindu widows on their husband's funeral pyres, reminds us of at least two great general principles. First, one needs always to try to approach other cultures (or other periods, or indeed other people) on their own terms, if one seeks to understand them. Second, one should be receptive to the likelihood that these different perspectives will have something of general importance to offer. In this case, Leslie is attempting to rescue the ideas of the *sati* herself, as part of what she calls a 'soteriological path' (a way to salvation, of giving life meaning). In doing so she contributes also to current efforts to see women as actors, even deciders, and not victims. South Asia in particular needs this kind of attention, and can offer such lessons.

Shackle and Snell provide consideration of the importance of language as a repository of ideas and an emblem of identity. Though South Asia contains many languages, their number and boundaries are ever a matter of debate. Yet, neither language nor identity remain constant over time, and in the Indian subcontinent there have been remarkable changes in recent centuries. In South Asia as elsewhere, political and other institutions, printing, and other 'modern' developments have encouraged orthography and standardisation of grammar and vocabulary, so as to define general languages out of less articulated dialects, both regional and specialised. Once a supposedly single language serves all purposes—conversation, formal and technical communication and record, and literature—so language can develop as an ideology: it can reflect or help create social and political identity. Shackle's essay plays upon the ambivalence, the paradoxes, the acts of will and the intrinsic preferences and tendencies which have formed choices about language. The discussion illustrates too the variety of approaches needed to examine such developments, the cross-fertilisation demanded between disci-

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*Manners, and Customs...of Hindus* (Oxford, 1897), and, for a summary of such descriptions, V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, *Indian Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 295-300.

plines, the challenges offered to the usual Western expectations. Snell offers a discussion—illustrated by linguistic examples but accessible to all—of the ways in which one language (English) can influence another (Hindi). Obviously this is important for literary analysis as well as for spoken Hindi; but it also has wider implications for our understanding of language as an expression of identity. Plainly in this case the borrowings from English are often unconscious, and should be contrasted with more contrived and politically-motivated sectarian preferences in language development, such as those of script and vocabulary which separated out a North Indian *lingua franca*, Hindustani, into various forms of Persian-influenced Urdu and Sanskrit-based Hindi.

Hutt broadens this discussion to consider not only the values attributed to particular kinds of language, but the reflection in literature of more general attitudes to identity. At one level the discussion concerns the meanings to be attributed to a single word, if such it be, 'Gurkha' or 'Gorkha'. Here literature as well as language is harnessed to the building of the 'nation', which has been the great enterprise of recent centuries in South Asia as elsewhere: in this case the issue is the attitude to be taken to the *lāhure*, the soldier who had served abroad.

Questions of mix and influence can be asked of literature (Radice) and architecture (Tillotson): now we may consider ideologies of art. Radice examines the influence of Milton on the Bengali poet Madhusudan Datta: the broader question is one of judging importance and quality, whether there are distinctive aesthetics and values whereby Bengali writing should be considered, or universal criteria which can readily be applied. A great deal of easy opinionating has surrounded this kind of question; South Asia demonstrates how difficult it really is, not just in terms of art but in terms of ethnic, social and political systems. Tillotson similarly makes explicit what must always be at issue in a volume of this kind—the character and validity of the point-of-view. He argues that European perceptions of Indian architecture reflected current ideas about architecture rather than distorted views of India: that is, that they were informed by particular systems of understanding and taste rather than by a general and political prejudice. This is *not* an argument that there are no distortions—all representations are affected by point-of-view. It is an argument against general or essentialist categorisations of art according to extraneous criteria (ethnicity, religion) or determinist assumptions about motivation. A current question in South Asian studies is whether there are particular South Asian modes of explanation which have been obscured by the intellectual paraphernalia of Western science and knowledge.

(PR)

RELIGIOUS VS. REGIONAL DETERMINISM:  
INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH  
AS INHERITORS OF EMPIRE<sup>1</sup>

Graham Chapman

*For much of its history, South Asia has been divided into many different kingdoms and realms. At some periods it has been unified under a central imperial power—but whether or not politically unified it has a unity of geography and of culture, and to some degree of language, which marks it out as a well-defined subcontinental areas. To understand contemporary South Asia it is necessary to understand why, after the most recent period of imperial unity under the British, the subcontinent is again divided into different polities, and the role that religion has played in this fragmentation. Moreover it is necessary to understand that in many ways the current division is unusual, based on borders which have not occurred before when independent states have gone their own way. Despite the current fragmentation, there are forces which are compelling the countries to seek again some form of accommodation. These forces are not only those of trade complementarities, but of shares use of major resources such as the rivers of the Indus Basin and the Ganges and Brahmaputra. But improving relations between Pakistan and India can always be poisoned by one seemingly insoluble dispute, over the future of Kashmir.*

*Introduction*

In the last 40 years, the two largest nations of South Asia, India and Pakistan, have been at war with each other three times. They are currently engaged in a covert nuclear arms race. For much of the 40 years, trade and other contacts between them have been almost completely severed. The region has been dogged by other conflicts, such as tribal problems on the Bangladesh-Indian border, and the communal dispute in Sri Lanka. Yet in 1985 the states of South Asia, that is to say Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, founded the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). It is significant that these countries have found it in their interests to promote a new forum for the exchange of ideas and the development of new economic and cultural links, because the last decades have shown the extent to which opportunity costs have been

<sup>1</sup> First published in Michael Chisholm and David M. Smith (eds.), *Shared Space: Divided Space—essays on conflict and territorial organisation* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1990).

incurred by confrontation rather than co-operation. The theme of this essay is the extent to which communal divisions have been countered by regional forces of integration. It considers in particular the nature of the space shared by the big three—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—and makes only passing reference to the mountain kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan, and the island states of Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

The space that the big three occupy as separate and independent sovereign states has quite often in history been divided in different ways. There is little that is inherently 'natural' about the current arrangement: indeed, there are many questions which are raised by the current political map which command immediate attention. Why is it that the Punjab is divided between the Indian and the Pakistani Punjab—though both sides use the same language? Why is it that Bengal, throughout which there is a continuity of Bengali language and culture, is similarly divided? Why, if India can include Assam and Kerala within a federation, is Bangladesh a sovereign state and not part of the federation?

There are other questions which the map does not pose directly, but which seem curious given the proximities of the countries. Why do India and Pakistan trade so little with each other? Why do India's neighbours seem to fear that she meddles in their affairs, when India protests that she never does unless invited in or unless trouble spills over her borders? Why has India, such a large polyglot federation, survived as a democracy, when Pakistan and Bangladesh have not?

Behind all of these questions is the assumption that South Asia is in some sense a well-defined geographical region of the world, and that there are few obvious natural subdivisions within it. This is the starting point.

### *I. South Asia as a geopolitical region*

Cohen (1963) divides the world deductively into, first, geostrategic regions, and then geopolitical regions. His geostrategic regions are multi-featured in cultural and economic terms, but are single-featured in trade orientation and are also distinct arenas within which power can be projected. His division of the world broadly follows Mackinder's views: there is the Maritime Dependent Trading world and the Eurasian Continental power. Between these two are the 'shatterbelts' of Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The geopolitical region is defined as a subdivision of the geostrategic:

It expresses the unity of geographic features. Because it is derived directly from geographic regions, this unit can provide a framework for common political and economic actions. Contiguity of location and complementarity of resources are particularly distinguishing marks of the geopolitical region (Cohen, 1963, p.62).

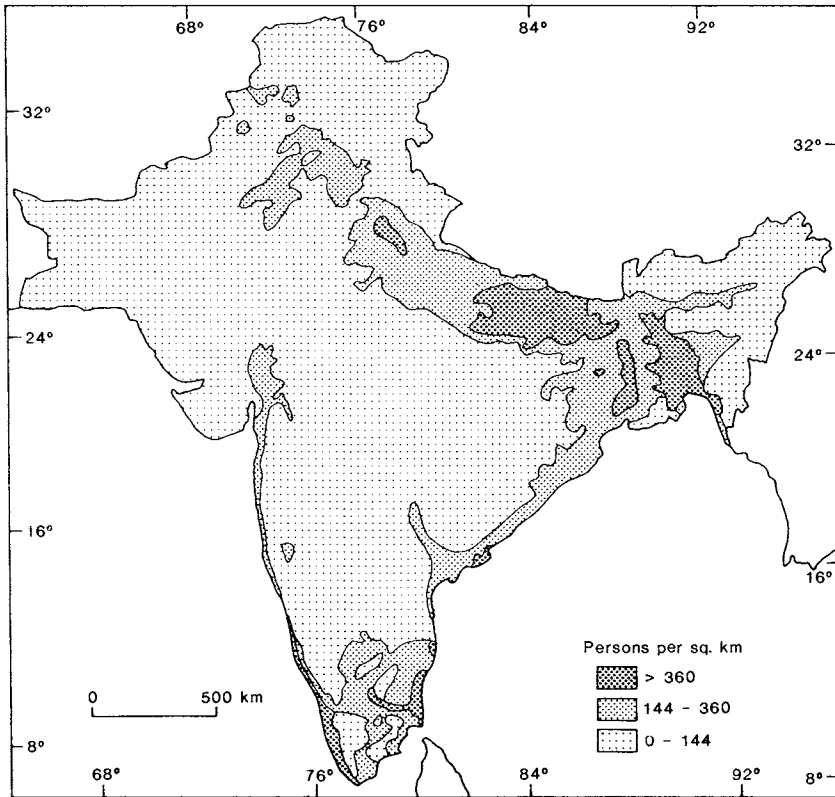


Figure 1. *Rural population density in South Asia*

Source: Spate and Learmouth, 1967, p.121.

So the Maritime Dependent Trading world is divided into Europe and the Mahgreb; Africa minus Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia (part of the Middle East shatterbelt); North America; South America; and Australia with New Zealand and Oceania. The Eurasian Continental region is divided into the USSR and China. South Asia is distinctive: Cohen classifies it as an independent geopolitical region, not within a geo-strategic region. It is big enough to be a subcontinent in its own right, it has been and is guarded from the Eurasian power(s) by the massive wall of the Himalayas, from the Middle East by the Hindu Kush and other mountains of the Northwest frontier, and from Burma and Indo-China by lower but heavily-forested jagged mountain ranges.

Like Gaul, this subcontinent can be divided into three parts: the high montane regions of the north, the depositional lowlands of the Indus and the Ganges, and the ancient Deccan block of peninsular India.

These three regions are of course subdivided: principally by moisture availability, either directly from rainfall or from littoral extraction from rivers. In the Ganges river, it is the lower or eastern parts which are wetter: the western parts and the Indus valley are much drier. In the Deccan, the extreme southwest coast (Kerala) is wet, and so are some of the coastal regions on the eastern side. But much of the interior is substantially drier, although not as dry as the Thar desert.

The map of the distribution of rural population (Figure 1, using 1961 data) shows little more differentiation from region to region than it would have shown centuries if not millennia ago. Perhaps the greatest change would be the higher relative densities now in the Punjab (between latitudes 26 and 30, and longitudes 71 and 76 on the map). It is a map which displays the agricultural potential of South Asia, defined principally by a combination of fertile riverine plains and higher and more reliable rainfall. There is one other factor. Movement in the plains has historically been much easier, whether using ox carts, or deploying armies, or using the river system. In the Deccan, navigation is more restricted seasonally, with shorter and smaller navigable reaches in the rivers; between the river basins where settlement may be possible are barren marchlands, or jagged ghat ranges, and forest areas.

Figure 2 shows the frequency with which boundaries between states have occurred in South Asia, and the fact that the northwestern, northern, and eastern mountains are the subcontinental frontier. (The northeastern frontier is historically more complicated—Assam has historically not often been incorporated by the powers of the Gangetic plains.) It also portrays quite clearly the threefold division of mountains, plains and Deccan.

The major variables to be considered in understanding the way in which this vast region has been divided and integrated over the centuries are linguistic, religious, cultural and economic. The arenas within which these variables have expressed differing kinds of forces and within which they have been manipulated are obviously political and military.

### *Language*

As a result of its settlement history, South Asian linguistic geography is extremely complex. There are two major language groups: the Indo-Aryan group (derived from Sanskrit) of the North dominates the Indus and Ganges valleys, and includes Hindi (and the vernacular Hindustani), Punjabi, Sindhi, Bihari, and Bengali. This group also permeates the Thar desert and the northern parts of the Deccan—Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya. All of these languages are within the Indo-European group, of which French and English are also a part. The northern languages are indeed closer to European languages than they

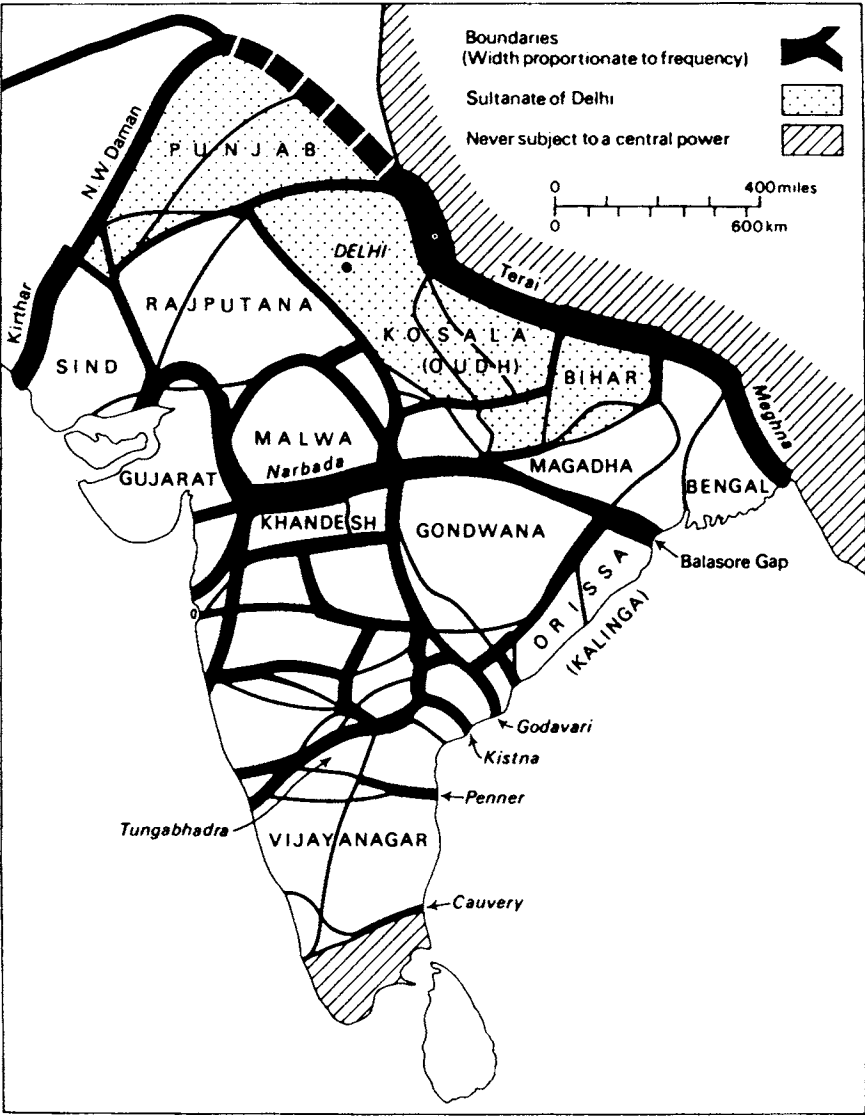


Figure 2. *Relative frequency of boundaries in South Asia from c.300 BC to c.AD 1750*

The map is suggestive: no absolute value is given to line widths.  
*Source:* Spate and Learmouth, 1967, p.176.

are to the southern Dravidian group, comprising Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. In addition to these languages there are others, many associated with small tribal groups. There are also many scripts. In the contemporary Republic of India there are 14 recognised languages for constitutional purposes (plus Sanskrit, which is not in common use), and nearly as many scripts, and in addition, depending on the distinction between dialect and language, somewhere between 400 and 1000 others (*A Social and Economic Atlas of India*, 1987). In Pakistan there are four major languages, and a fifth of some significance. Even in uniform Bangladesh there are distinct tribal languages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### *Religion*

South Asia is pre-eminently the land of the Hindus—a word derived originally from the Indus. The country is often known as Hindustan. But South Asia is also home to 250 million Muslims—a number which dwarfs the numbers associated with the Muslim heartlands of the Middle East. The history of the relations of these two religious groups has had a significant impact on the varying patterns of state formation in South Asia. There are also many other major religions in South Asia: Jainism and Buddhism both have adherents (both are reformist offshoots from precursors of Hinduism); Sikhism commands the loyalty of a people small in number but significant in many fields and locally important in the Punjab. Zoroastrians, Christians and animists are also found. Table 1 shows the distribution of some of the communities in 1941.

To understand the relations between the two major religions, Hinduism and Islam, we need to understand the origins and theology of each. We can then see how they could relate at the popular everyday cultural level, and the grander political level.

*Hinduism.* Around the second millennium BC there started a series of periodic invasions by a pastoral and nomadic people from Central Asia, the Aryans, who were light-skinned, fair-haired, blue-eyed. They also penetrated northern Europe, and are presumed to be the ancestors of the Nordic people. They are in one sense the founders of Hinduism, though such a phrase will be heavily qualified below. They are the 'master race' that Hitler tried to refound, and from Hinduism Hitler took the everyday symbol of the swastika, a symbol of the sun and good fortune. Their language, in its most refined form, is known as Sanskrit, and when first encountered by European scholars was thought to be the original stem of all Indo-European languages, though now it is known that it is an offshoot of the lost stem as they are.

There clearly was considerable mixing between the various invading groups in India, and today there is some kind of colour gradient from the lighter and sometimes blue-eyed peoples of the Northwest, to the

Table 1. *Percentage distribution of communities in the Indian Empire 1941*

	Caste Hindu	Untouchable	Muslim	Sikh	Other
<i>British provinces</i>					
Madras	70.4	16.4	7.9	0.0	5.3
Bombay	70.5	8.9	9.2	0.0	11.4
Bengal	29.3	12.2	54.7	0.0	3.8
United Provinces	62.0	21.3	15.3	0.4	1.0
Punjab	22.2	4.4	57.1	13.2	3.1
Bihar	61.0	11.9	13.0	0.0	14.1
Central Provinces	58.8	18.1	4.7	0.1	18.3
Assam	34.7	6.6	33.7	0.0	25.0
NW Frontier Province	5.9	0.0	91.8	1.9	0.4
Orissa	64.1	14.2	1.7	0.0	20.0
Sind	22.9	4.2	70.7	0.7	1.5
<i>Princely states</i>					
Hyderabad	63.5	17.9	12.8	0.0	5.8
Mysore	72.1	10.2	6.6	0.0	2.1
Travancore	51.8	6.5	7.1	0.0	34.6
Kashmir	17.3	2.8	76.4	1.6	1.9
Gwalior	86.4	0.0	6.0	0.0	7.6
Baroda	68.8	8.1	7.8	0.0	15.3
Total of these and other states	59.3	9.5	13.6	1.6	16.0
Total	53.0	12.5	23.7	1.5	9.3

Source: Coupland, 1943, pt.2, p.339.

darker skinned and always dark-eyed peoples of the South. But there was also a limit to the mixing in an important sense. Imagine that in Britain there had been an apartheid that prevented the Roman-British from marrying the Celts (and language barriers and social stigma would certainly have made such a barrier for quite some time), that the Saxons never married the Celts, that in their turn the Danes and the Normans stayed aloof from the society which they had conquered (and to a large extent they did). Imagine society as frozen layers of serfs, and serfs of serfs. In Britain some would say we still have such a society, hidebound by class distinctions. But we have had since Roman times a dogmatic and egalitarian religious philosophy, which does not limit permissible marriages. The important qualification about India is this: the Aryans

evolved their own religious philosophy before much homogenisation had taken place, and this philosophy in practice embraced a doctrine of the inequality of man, of the ritual hierarchy of caste. There is no space here to go into any detail about the immensely complex subject of Hinduism and caste (Cohn, 1971; Bougle, 1971; Dumont, 1970), so the following resumé is only a guide. Doctrinally, there are four grades of caste, the Brahmins (priests and pundits—guardians of knowledge), the Kshatriyas, or warriors, the Vaisyas, or merchants, the Sudras, or menials. Below them come groups of untouchables (now known as Harijans), and tribals, not normally embraced by Hinduism. The major groups are divided into 3000 sub-castes, and then into 90,000 endogamous marriage groups. Such groups have traditionally each had their own occupations, a ritual notion of which persists when caste-members have other jobs, and which in any one area are supposedly complementary. The untouchables carry out the most polluting jobs, such as cesspit cleaning, and labourers have always been Sudras of some type or other low-caste groups. The Brahmins traditionally eschew any manual work, but are the keepers of the *Vedas*, the sacred hymns of the Aryans, often recited by the Brahmins in their role as priests at important life ceremonies. Though such texts exist, Hinduism is not dogmatic. It does not claim a revealed truth, and does not prescribe one God. There is only one force in the universe, and it is in everything, but it has many faces and hence there are many gods. Different groups worship different deities, many will worship different deities for different purposes. One of the few common threads is that all groups traditionally believe in reincarnation, and that one's obligation in this life is to carry out one's duty according to one's rank at birth. Reward comes in the next incarnation. Other common features of Hinduism are a preference for vegetarianism, though lower classes may eat chicken or goat, and the untouchables frequently keep and eat pigs. The cow, the central pivot of agricultural life, is sacred to all, and in theory always allowed to die a natural death.

This complex society evolved with distinctive regional variations, and has bequeathed contemporary South Asia with the regional languages noted above. Hinduism, however, crossed the north/south linguistic divide, and Brahmanism is in many ways stronger in the South today than in the North. But within this umbrella of life philosophies, there are always, by caste and by region, a myriad of societies. Economically and culturally, until the advent of cities with populations of a million-plus, India can best be described as divided into numerous *pays*, as defined by Vidal de la Blache.

But there was a major difference. The *pays* of de la Blache existed within a well-defined and centrist state, whose laws were made centrally and recognised universally. In India there was no such centrist

tradition—partly for reasons of scale. Given the early technologies, there was plenty of cost but little economic advantage in the integration of large areas of India. More significantly, it was because such functions as maintaining the social order were organised within castes, each having a tribunal (*panchayat*) for its own members. Inter-caste matters would be settled by the dominant caste of any one area, but by involving the *panchayat* of lesser castes to take action against its members where necessary. In such a society the concept of king or monarch had a very different connotation. The Raja, usually a Kshatriya and ritually inferior to the Brahmans, might be rich, but his wealth had, beside his own gratification, two major functions (Bayly 1983). One was for pomp and ceremony which were for public consumption; the other was that of a general, or minister of defence. In other words, the interpretation of customary law was the preserve of the Brahmans; the Raja's was the defence of the principality.

*Islam.* The establishment of Islam as a major political and military force occurred remarkably quickly after its foundation by the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an, or Koran, which he wrote is, according to Muslims, not his words but the direct dictation to Muhammad by God. This therefore is a revealed religion, with a dogmatic source, much as fundamentalist Christians believe the Bible to be The Word. But, unlike Christianity, Islam does not recognise the distinction of the secular and the religious in human affairs: it prescribes rules for nearly all contingencies in life, and sets the aim of introducing the comprehensive Islamic state on earth.

Muslim influences reached India through Arab traders in Sind and in Bengal, and through the teachings of wandering Muslim saints or mystics, known as Sufis, not unlike the wandering Christian monks who took Christianity to Ireland and Scotland. But when Islam came in force, literally, when the first of the successful Muslim invasions burst into India through the northwest in the twelfth century, it brought something radically different from anything India had encountered before. The Ghurids established in North India an empire (or more correctly a confederacy) acknowledged by the Khalif of Baghdad as the Sultanate of Delhi, and very rapidly after its establishment in India Islam was known to be precisely that—Islam in India, and not simply an extension of Islam in general. This was the beginning of 600 years of Muslim domination.

At times this Islam was iconoclastic, and brought destruction to many Hindu temples, and the forcible conversion of some subjects. Other subjects voluntarily chose the new religion, and this was particularly true of the untouchables and low-caste people, perhaps attracted by the doctrine of the equality of man. But one of the central tenets of Hinduism is that one cannot renounce one's birth; hence many,

especially the higher castes, resisted conversion. Mass conversion of lower castes seems to have been greatest in East Bengal, for reasons which are not clear but may have been connected with Arab seafarers. Muslims were concentrated in the Indus valley, contiguous with the Middle East, and in East Bengal. These are roughly the areas of contemporary Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition there were important Muslim populations in the imperial urban centres of the Ganges plain and in many imperial cities in the central Deccan.

### *Culture*

Religion and culture may overlap, but cannot be seen as the same thing. In India, we have already noted the complexity of social groups that Hinduism spawned. When some of these groups were converted to Islam, they did not abandon their origins overnight, no more than someone today could expect to change his job tomorrow by proclaiming himself a Christian. Islam may prescribe the equality of man, but it does not command that people marry at random. Within Islam-in-India, therefore, caste persists in significant ways defined not so much by pollution rules as family marriage rules. It even persists to the extent that persons who were once distillers, who by being Muslim are not allowed to drink, nevertheless continue to make and market alcohol. In Pakistan, the network of families, each known as a *biradri*, is fundamental to all social and political life. Further, the acceptance of Islam and the recitation of the Qur'an in Arabic does not deprive a man of his native tongue—so that a Bengali Muslim is first and foremost a Bengali, yet also a Muslim.

In other words, within Islam as within Hinduism local regional cultures persisted. Usually the same regional culture pervaded both religions in one place. The major religious difference was that for Muslims the common and exact reference point of a revealed and egalitarian religion *could* be established with Muslims from different areas, whereas for Hindus such common references were much harder to establish and were always confounded by caste.

### *Economy*

Economic variables enter into the question of integration from two viewpoints. One concerns the benefits that accrue from complementarities exploited, and the other the costs of integration.

The benefits argument is simply that of comparative advantage, that two regions linked together can each specialise to the ultimate advantage and increase in welfare of both. For this to happen, though, there have to be complementarities and there has to be a transport system whose operating costs are below the increased gains that trade engenders. Economic advantage must also obviously not be nullified by one-sided political power. In the case of South Asia, before the railways

there were few complementarities that could be exploited. Those regions which could be connected by transport, primarily the northern plains, were fairly homogeneous. Indeed, if any complementarities could be established, they would be with regions outside India, not within—hence the interest of European traders once ocean transport became sufficiently advanced. The exploitation of internal complementarity, particularly linking regions in or across the Deccan, could only occur after the coming of the railways, and even then could only occur fully with a change in the political regime.

## *II. Integration and empire*

We need to think of three forces of integration, and to consider their interplay at two social levels. The forces are identitive, utilitarian, and coercive. The two levels are those of the elites and the masses.

The bonds of identity are those mutually recognised by a people as the symbols of their community, and are usually associated with language and religion, but they may also be associated with territory. Where these are strong, utilitarian integration can also follow if the technology permits. Utilitarian bonds are those of economic self-interest. The British now know that they are bound economically to Europe and that to break away would be injurious, no matter if they do not 'feel' European. The only comment one needs to make about coercion is that it is expensive, and fundamentally its premise is the threat of destruction. So after the costs of an invasion, which may instantaneously be met by plunder, a period of accommodation and reconstruction has to occur.

The elite-mass distinction is useful in elaborating all three of these forces. An elite may have identitive bonds in common, although the subject peoples do not. These bonds can then form the cement of integration, and while the masses are divided they will not combine to eject the elite. In the case of utilitarian bonds, these may be perceived more easily by the elite than by the masses. In the case of the use of coercive force to achieve integration, this almost by definition has to be controlled by an elite. The use of force by the masses against other masses is more likely to lead (as we shall see) to anarchy, genocide and disintegration.

There were four major imperial periods in South Asia before the advent of the British (see Figure 3). They all had the following features in common. They were based on the agricultural and population heartland of the Gangetic plains, they projected power from this northern resource base into the Deccan, but none ever included the whole of peninsular India, and each decayed internally as much as collapsed because of external pressure. A major distinction between them was that the first two were Buddhist-Hindu or Hindu, whereas the third and fourth were formed by Muslim aristocracies which ruled over Hindu

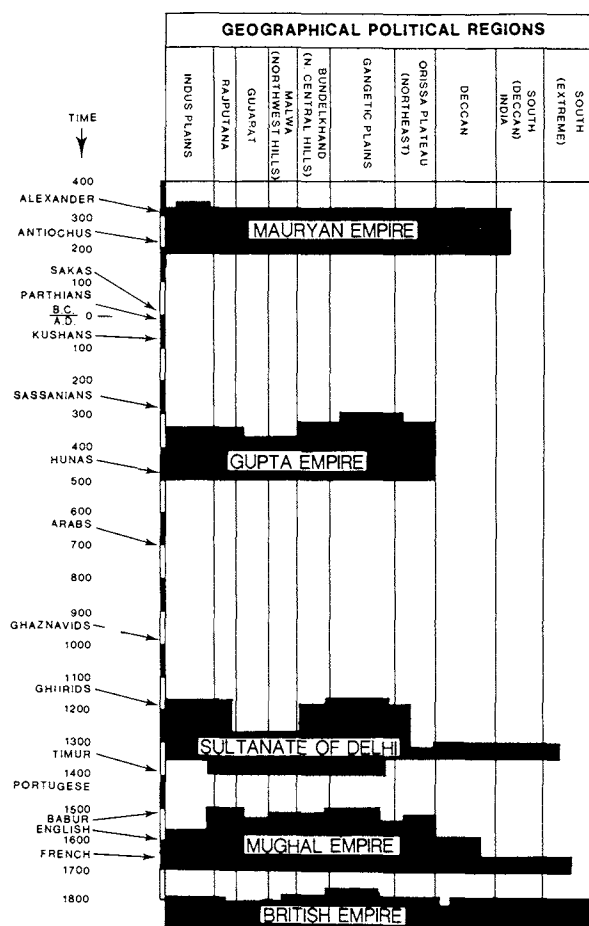


Figure 3. *The empires of South Asia in time and space*  
 (From a paper by S.C. Malik, to UNESCO/IGNA workshop, New Delhi, 1989)

India. The exact heartland of these empires did vary a little: the first two, the Mauryan and Gupta empires, were centred on East Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (modern names), whereas the Muslim empires of the sultanate and the Mughuls were based on Western Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab.

#### *The Mauryan and Gupta empires*

The Mauryan empire (Thapar, 1966) at its zenith was synonymous with one man—Asoka, who died about 232 BC. At the time that he forged

the empire, by force, there were many differentiated local communities—the *pays* referred to above. There was therefore no mass identitive integration, and the empire relied on integration through fealty by subsidiary chiefs to the emperor. There was no, or very little, utilitarian integration—the transport technology did not allow it. Although it was a well-ordered empire, and order and stability were no doubt constructive, it was expensive to maintain. It went into decline after Asoka's death, many of its troubles blamed on inflation. Asoka in his lifetime tried to promulgate his own version of Buddhism as a state religion. Clearly, he perceived the need for a common identitive bond—but it did not take root. The next empire, that of the Guptas, in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, echoed in many ways the emergence and decline of the Mauryan. It, too, never penetrated far into the Deccan. It was, however, remarkable for its development of applied science, mathematics and astronomy, and much that Europe was thought to have learnt from the Arab world was in fact knowledge that had diffused to it from this Indian empire.

There is, however, a problem here in that it seems easy to put a line round an area on a map and say of an historical past 'here was an empire'. What does this mean? The exact tributary status of many of the component parts is often unknown to us: and the tributary status may be near to fiction, paid more in protocol than hard cash or armed levies. It may also involve more of a treaty alliance than acknowledgement of overlordship. Where documentary evidence is weak, we are left to surmise.

There is also a possibility that we may have introduced a North Indian bias. There were great empires in the South, which have left temples and ruins for us to marvel at. But there is one significant difference between them and the northern empires: their resource bases were neither as great nor as dense spatially as those of the North, and no southern empire ever threatened to take over the North. (This is true even of the Marathas, who could only have dominated the North by becoming an imperial power in, and the new aristocracy of, the North.)

#### *The Sultanate and the Mughal empire*

The Sultanate from the twelfth century and the Mughal empire between the sixteenth and the eighteenth, were different from the earlier empires, particularly, among many other reasons, because they were led and dominated by Muslims. The added complication of Hindu-Muslim relations could be used to work both for and against empire. These relations posed questions hitherto unknown in the Indian context. India is renowned for its syncretic civilisation, capable of absorbing and moulding a great many imported and invading cultures. Even the Huns were absorbed within Hinduism as the Rajputs of Rajasthan. But, despite having profound effects on the nature of Indian Islam, India and

Hinduism failed to absorb or dominate it. We may think of the relations between the two religions at theological, daily, and political levels.

Islam is the antithesis of Hinduism in nearly all ways. It is dogmatic, evangelical, egalitarian. The latter is inegalitarian, but tolerant of divergent views and practices, and is by definition not evangelical: you have to be born into a caste to be a Hindu. Where Hindus believe in reincarnation, Muslims believe in one life and heaven or hell afterwards. Where the Hindus believe all life is unitary, the Muslims, like the Christians, have their version of the Garden of Eden, in which Adam was placed last so that mankind could use the garden (the environment) as his birthright.

There are clear differences observable in daily life. Where Hindus worship idols, Islam prohibits all graven images—all ornamentation in a mosque is abstract. Muslim males go publicly to prayer as a congregation on a fixed day. Hindus usually go individually to a temple when they feel the need, and Hindu women, though not overtly the equal of men, are not debarred. They appear bare-faced in public where Muslim women appear veiled, if at all. Hindus are largely vegetarian, Muslims eat mutton and beef. No Muslim would eat pork, deeming it, as the Jews deem it, to be unclean. There are no pigs in Pakistan: there are many troughing in the rubbish dumps of India. Muslims bury their dead, the Hindus cremate theirs. Where differences are as great as these, though communities living alongside each other may normally be tolerant, small accidents or even contrived events can set off a riot, that may degenerate into long-lasting communal strife. In this there is the further problem that Indian culture stresses the family and the community more, and the individual less than in the West. The result is that a slight against one member of a community is more likely to be felt equally by his brethren. Thus riots may start when music is heard near a mosque at prayer time, when a cow is killed by a Muslim, when a pig is let loose in a mosque, when a roadside idol is vandalised.

At the grand political level Muslims could secure the political support of their Hindu subjects by minimising the discrimination against Hindus in public service, by reducing or eliminating the taxes levied on non-believers, by marrying into Hindu dynasties. But they could also close ranks by stressing their Muslim identity and persecuting Hindu idolaters.

The problem of maintaining the integration of these Muslim empires was essentially still the same as with previous ones: that though large areas could become incorporated by force, given that there were few utilitarian bonds that could develop because of inadequate transport, what was to prevent regional aristocracies breaking away, once established? So long as the empires were expanding and could therefore call on unification for the armed struggles, with the anticipation of reward

after victory, mutual support provided the integrating impetus. In the case of the Sultanate, it became clear after the failure to dominate the Deccan that there were fissiparous tendencies which were suppressed by some sultans only at great cost (Thapar 1966). An aristocracy, once seated and landed, rapidly becomes more and more rooted in its own locale, seeing less and less interest in distant centres of taxation.

The Mughal empire (Spear, 1965) faced the same problems. But the manipulation of religious factors in seeking a solution is more in evidence. Different leaders pursued different policies towards their solution. Akbar (1542-1605), the greatest of the Mughals, who delineated the state most clearly, chose not to use Islam as the identitive bond of the ruling class, to keep it integrated by virtue of its opposition to the subservient masses. He indulged in patronage of Hindu nobles, took a Rajput princess as a wife, and went so far as to found a new religious cult centred around himself, in effect becoming an apostate. He also devised a system of appointments to the vice-royalties of the empire, which gave an incumbent wealth and tenure in his lifetime, but by which the state resumed all property and wealth at his death. The positions were not hereditary, and Akbar thus avoided the development of powerful locally-rooted aristocracies, and maintained the dependency on the emperor of the aristocracy as a class.

By the time of Aurangzeb (1618-1717), the fragility of the empire had been displayed. His solution was to unite the aristocracy by reasserting Islamic purity and domination; he became a zealot in the crusade against Hinduism, and reintroduced the discriminatory *jizya* tax. Conviction, confrontation, coercion and suppression were his guidelines. At its peak, the army directly or indirectly (through dependants and camp-followers) employed a quarter of the imperial population.

From the advent of Islam in India until the present day, there was always the possibility of local spontaneous conflict between Muslims and Hindus. The extent to which rulers and politicians may have played conflict up, or down, was always bound to vary, but none of them could ever rid India of this inherent communalism.

### III. *The British raj*

The British came to India as traders, and their first territorial acquisition in Bengal in 1757 was largely an accidental result of self-defence. That Bengal was the first acquisition was, however, in a geographical sense not an accident: for here was the world's greatest delta, which ocean-going ships could penetrate far upstream, carrying with them their superior ordnance. It was here in the rivers that the problem of inland transport was solved.

The move in self-defence that caused the British to take Bengal had many indirect causes, one of which was the instability of the decaying

Mughal empire. This instability created a vacuum into which the British were drawn, as often as not in a proxy war with the French, both sides using local nobles and local feuds as surrogates in their own attempts to wrest the monopoly of trade, and as surrogates for inadequate manpower. The result of 80 years of such activity was that the 'British acquired India in a fit of absence of mind'. The lack of a clear policy and the use of a pragmatic approach are evident in the political map

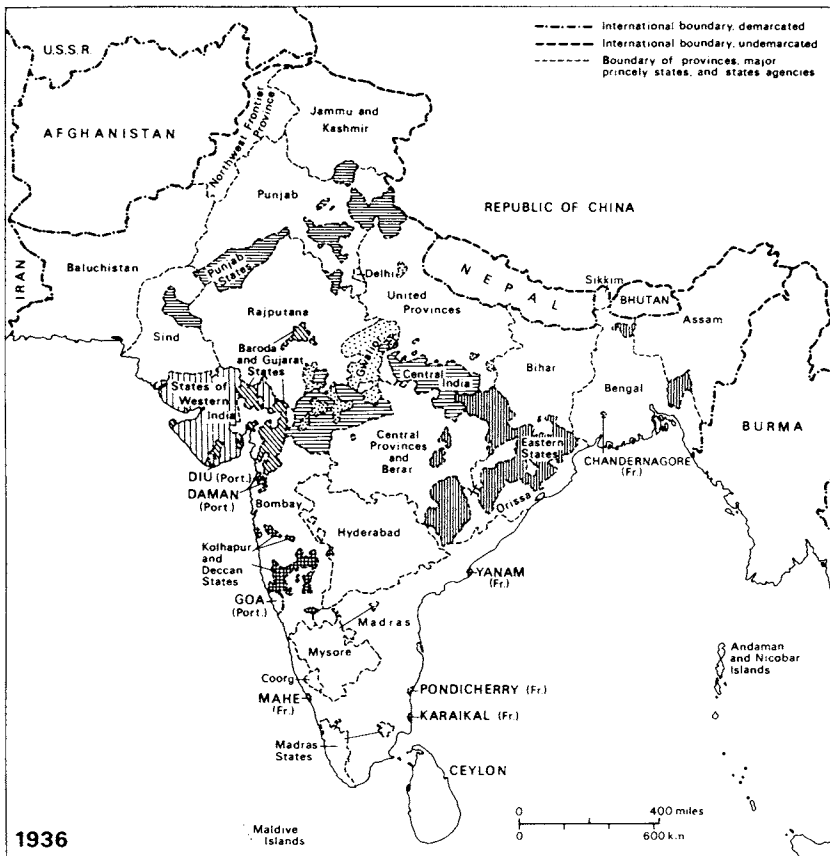


Figure 4. Political divisions in South Asia, 1936

Source: Schwartzberg, 1976, and others.

which finally emerged in India (Figure 4). The British had built themselves three major port cities—Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, around which were territories they ruled directly themselves. But 40 per cent of Indian territory and 25 per cent of its population were encompassed in princely states (Coupland, 1943), the territories of major and minor nobles which emerged at the collapse of the previous empire, who had treaty obligations with the Crown in external affairs, but who were internally autonomous autocrats. In many ways the British fragmented India politically, dividing in order to rule. But it should also be clear by now that division both territorially and communally was by no means new to India. Under the British these divisions might have been shaped in new ways: but they were always there. As one independence leader observed: 'We divide, you rule'.

British integration relied on all aspects of the integrating forces we have mentioned, but not equally at elite and mass levels. They used superior technology as the basis of coercion where necessary. They relied on the bonds of British identity to cement the rulers of empire, and they too were forbidden to become landed gentry. The civil service was Europeanised at the highest level early on, and English instituted as the language of government, supplanting Persian. But the new rulers came from a country which had a rudimentary parliamentary democracy. At some stage they would have to confront questions about the legitimacy of their rule, and the exclusive proprietorship by their group of that right. Racism was thus inevitable, not so much as an overt policy for future development, but as an explanation for what had happened. Conveniently, it also stressed and strengthened the adhesion of the rulers as a group. Although for the majority of the rural masses the British did nothing, they nevertheless fostered utilitarian integration by the development of the railways, and by the development in many areas of major irrigation schemes, incorporating millions of people within the command areas of thousands of miles of canals. They also founded new universities in which a new middle-class intelligentsia studied in English.

What they did not do was foster the identity of the Indian masses as 'Indians'. Partly it was not in their own self-interest to do so; partly they believed in their own propaganda, that India was a subcontinent of many races and tongues.

#### *IV. Independence and partition*

With the filtering of Western liberal ideas into India's small emergent middle class, demands for change were made, which were met gradually, starting with democratic elections on very small franchises to town boards. By the end of the nineteenth century, some elected representatives were allowed on provincial councils (Coupland, 1943), though outnumbered by appointees of the Governor ('official members'). But

the power of veto remained at the centre, where the Governor-General (Viceroy) was answerable to London.

The growing demands in India for more representative government led to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. This was above all a middle-class, urban, educated and English-speaking movement: the British had not only infused democratic ideas into India, they had given the slim new middle class the physical and linguistic means of communication on a pan-Indian basis. The adoption of the qualifier *Indian* was a propaganda ploy staking a claim on a perceived future (Rahmat Ali, 1942).

The realisation that there was a possibility of increasing democratisation on a Western pattern caused some alarm to farseeing members of the Muslim community. They realised that a simple first-past-the-post system of democracy, if ever entrenched in India, could lead to the interests of the minority community being permanently ignored. Representative democracy might work well in a culturally-homogeneous country such as Britain, where parties could express class interests, but it was doubtful that it could where such conditions did not exist. Because of pressure from the Muslims, the British adopted in 1909 the concept of separate electorates: one roll for the Muslims, one for the others. In legislative elections, there were to be blocks of seats allocated to these different electorates, the minority being given preferential treatment. The scheme, though well intended, wrote communalism into the constitution of India. Obviously the candidate who would appear most attractive was he who could claim to get the greatest concessions from the 'other side'. In the 1920s, Gandhi did not object to the idea of reserved seats *per se*, but he rightly pointed out that the electorate for reserved seats should be universal. In effect all electors could then vote twice, once for candidates for each of the blocks of seats. The effect would have been that though there would be a guaranteed number of Muslim or Hindus in the Councils the candidates would have to fight a campaign not on sectarian issues but on issues of wider appeal. Could such a system work in Ulster?

During and after the First World War the demands for Dominion status (independence within the Commonwealth like Australia or Canada) grew (Hodson, 1969; Philips and Wainwright, 1970; Moon, 1961). Gandhi and his philosophy were a key in the pattern assumed. He wanted a non-violent protest, which often involved non-co-operation. To do this he had to have the support of the masses, and in that lay his genius. Though not an official of the party, he transformed Congress from a small, middle-class clique to a much wider movement. Steadily the British conceded more—though always struggling with the contradictions inherent between ultimate responsibility held in London, and new representative institutions growing in India. The experience of

these new institutions convinced more Muslims that their anxieties for the future were well-founded. Congress had always sought to be secular and multi-communal, but its behaviour locally was often more partisan. To understand this we need to refer back again to the idea of local community, so strong in India. The new leaders might well have been nationalistic: but the masses were sunk still in local perceptions. When they had to be enlisted in the struggle for power, they were told it was for self-determination. But who or what was 'self'? To a Tamil it is Tamils, or perhaps Tamil Brahmins or Tamil non-Brahmins. In Bengal, self meant one's own community, here very clearly either Hindu or Muslim. The Bengali part went unspoken—taken for granted as the starting point. With classic myopia, local differences seemed large, distant ones less important. Thus, later Jinnah could and did appeal to Muslim Bengalis to join his movement as Muslims.

In the 1930s, the Muslim League under Jinnah's leadership campaigned hard for more devolution of power from the centre to the provinces, with the aim of attaining more power locally for the Muslims of the Punjab and Bengal, two mixed provinces in which Muslims were in a majority (approximately 55 to 60 per cent in both: see Table 1). In 1935 the Government of India Act actually foresaw a federal future in which the princely states would be involved too. However, the Second World War intervened, and events ran rapidly beyond the ability of either the British or the Indian leaders to control them. Realising that Independence would follow soon after the war, the Muslims had in 1940 proclaimed their goal to be the creation of a separate state, to be known as Pakistan, to be founded in the Indus valley, and to embrace the whole of the Punjab, including eastern Hindu majority districts. The campaigners saw India in regional terms. Bengal was not part of the original Pakistan concept, but the Pakistani camp drew attention to the fact that Bengal, like Pakistan, ought to be able to claim its independence at the end of empire. The Congress leadership, seeing itself as the heir of the British raj, rejected the demands outright, and tense negotiations began in an attempt to reach a settlement. Basically, the only plans acceptable to the Muslims were based on a weak centre, and on reserving the right of secession to the provinces. But Congress wanted a strong centre, and rejected the right of secession.

Here we see the point behind the remark made above about coercion by the masses rather than the elites. Jinnah held very few cards, which was one of the reasons that he was given so little credit by Congress. The Muslim communities were the minority, and not strong in the institutions of the new society, nor strong in trade or banking, nor strong in the civil service. But the masses could be awakened, and what Jinnah could threaten was, simply, anarchy. The often fractious nature

of the two communities was openly played upon by extremists on both sides, with the result that large-scale rioting broke out, particularly in Calcutta in August 1946, but it spread to other areas too. By 1947, the internal law and order situation had disintegrated to the point where it was possible that the British would have no effective government left to transfer to anybody. It was in this atmosphere that the last Viceroy, Mountbatten, reached an agreement with the Nehru and Jinnah for the partition of India, something which was acceptable to all only in so far as all could see each other equally miserable and disappointed by the conclusion. Jinnah was miserable, because the logic of partition had been applied within the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal—so he only got the Muslim parts—and hence East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was formed from just the rural hinterland of Calcutta, but lost the city itself. Nehru was miserable, because he and Gandhi felt that India should never have been partitioned, and that the Muslim League's rejection of Congress's secularism was false. And the British were miserable because they saw the best defence arrangements for South Asia to be within a single state, itself defensible behind the boundaries of British India. They were right—after partition hostility between India and Pakistan has led to each turning to the outside for help—the USA supporting Pakistan and the USSR supporting India.

The real tragedy, however, was twofold. First, the partition of the Punjab and Bengal provoked some of the largest mass migrations ever known. At least 12 million people moved: some put the figure as high as 16 million. In the first few months the caravans and trains of refugees moved through a land where government, the armed forces, the police, the railway personnel, were being divided, and security was non-existent. In this atmosphere, extremists on both sides perpetrated the most ghastly atrocities (Collins and LaPierre, 1975). Whole trains arrived at their destinations with every passenger stabbed or hacked to death. The final death toll is not known, but was perhaps more than a million.

The second tragedy was due to a combination of decades of British procrastination and princely personality. The British had never unified South Asia. The existence of the myriad princely states was but one proof of that. In 1947, the paramount power was to be withdrawn, and from then on in theory the princes could proclaim their independence (which would have led to a Balkanisation of India like that at the collapse of the Mughal empire). In practice, they were persuaded that their communications and economies were bound up with the states of India and Pakistan, and that their only real option was to be absorbed into those states. All but three duly aligned themselves on the basis of majority community and contiguity. The most significant of the dissenting three was the state of Kashmir, where a Hindu raja ruled a