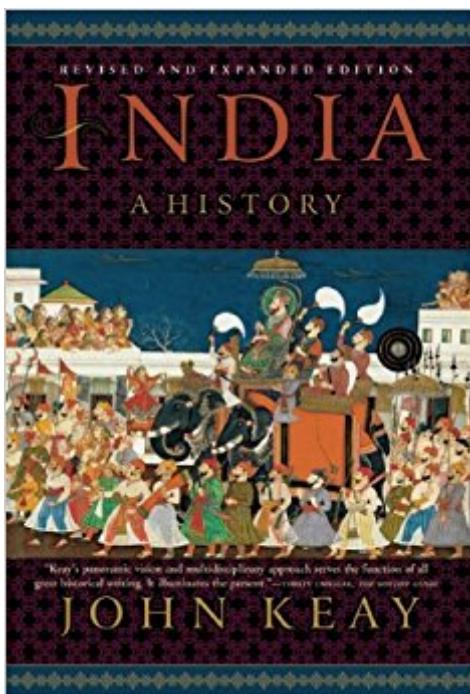


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India: A History. Revised And Updated



Synopsis

Fully revised with forty thousand new words that take the reader up to present-day India, John Keay's India: A History spans five millennia in a sweeping narrative that tells the story of the peoples of the subcontinent, from their ancient beginnings in the valley of the Indus to the events in the region today. In charting the evolution of the rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and peoples that comprise the modern nations of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, Keay weaves together insights from a variety of scholarly fields to create a rich historical narrative. Wide-ranging and authoritative, India: A History is a compelling epic portrait of one of the world's oldest and most richly diverse civilizations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The history of what is now India stretches back thousands of years, further than that of nearly any other region on earth. Yet, observes historian John Keay, most historical work on India concentrates on the period after the arrival of Europeans, with predictable biases, distortions, and misapprehensions. One, for example, is the tendency to locate the source of social conflict in India's many religions--to which Keay retorts, "Historically, it was Europe, not India, which consistently made religion grounds for war." Taking the longest possible view, Keay surveys what is both provable and invented in the historical record. His narrative begins in 3000 B.C., with the complex, and little-understood, Harappan period, a time of state formation and the development of agriculture and trade networks. This period coincides with the arrival of Indo-European invaders, the so-called Aryans, whose name, of course, has been put to bad use at many points since. Keay traces the

growth of subsequent states and kingdoms throughout antiquity and the medieval period, suggesting that the lack of unified government made the job of the European conquerors somewhat easier--but by no means inevitable. He continues to the modern day, his narrative ending with Indian-Pakistani conflicts in 1998. Fluently told and well documented, Keay's narrative history is of much value to students and general readers with an interest in India's past and present. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Sweeping from the ancient brick cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, built in the Indus Valley around 2000 B.C., to modern India's urban middle class armed with computers and cell phones, this erudite, panoramic history captures the flow of Indian civilization. No apologist for Britannia's rule, British historian Keay (*Into India*, etc.) gives the lie to comforting fantasies of the British Raj as the benevolently run "Jewel in the Crown." For most Indians, "Pax Britannica meant mainly 'Tax Britannica,'" he writes. Nor was British-ruled India peaceful, he adds, because India became a launch pad for British wars against Indonesia, Nepal and Burma, for the invasion of Afghanistan and the quashing of native revolts--often with the coerced participation of Indian troops. Finally, the Raj was "Axe Britannica," beginning the extensive deforestation of the subcontinent and the systematic suppression of its rural economy. Keay challenges much conventional scholarship in a dispassionate chronicle based largely on a fresh look at primary sources. For instance, the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, enthroned in 268 B.C., is revered because he preached tolerance and renounced armed violence, yet Keay notes that, contrary to popular opinion, Ashoka never specifically abjured warfare nor did he disband his army. Keay concludes this illustrated history by astutely surveying India's erratic progress in the half-century since independence, marked by communal violence, resurgence of regional interests and the rise of Hindu nationalism. This careful study serves up a banquet for connoisseurs and serious students of India. (Mar.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Comprehensive history of India over 5,000 years to present. Excellent, but could use illustrations of the many shrines and temples mentioned. Author frequently switches back and forth between time periods without out clear delineation. Many of the places and leaders mentioned have multiple names, and the author confusingly switches among them while describing the period A directory would be helpful, likewise a dictionary giving the translation of the many Indian terms used would be helpful for reference when the words are repeatedly used. Maps presented are helpful given the many changes in boundaries of the territories, states and countries over time, but more detail on the

maps would be helpful.

I have never read a history of India that is better written or substantiated. From 5000 BC onwards, the reader is taken through a treasure trove of facts and observations, often reading like a fiction novel. I have learned a lot and plan to reread the beginning to better understand the Genesis of this nation and its identity.

It must be a daunting project for a historian to attempt to write a history of India on one volume. The grand sweep of India's history, stretching back five thousand years with a bewildering diversity of cultures, languages, religions, and ethnic groups provide so much material that it must be very difficult to decide what to write about and what to exclude. This diversity must also make finding a common theme throughout the history of the subject difficult. If a historian wishes to write a history of France, he has only one nationality to examine. Most French speak the same language, follow the same religion and culture, and have a shared identity. China is somewhat more diverse, but a historian still has the cycle of dynasties to use as a framework. India is more difficult. The subcontinent has only been completely unified as one state under the British and as soon as the British left, the former colony was split between India and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. Making matters more difficult the indigenous Indians, the Hindus were less interested in dating and precise dating than some other civilizations, such as the Chinese, and more inclined to mythologize their history. Thus, instead of annals of history with more or less precise dating, we have the great Sanskrit epics, which quite possibly contain much true historical information. Many of the persons and events in the epics may be historical, but historians face considerable difficulty in determining just when these events occurred and how they are related chronologically, without the help of archeology. It was only when the Muslims invaded India that we begin to get reasonably precise dating. Despite these difficulties, John Keay does an admirable job of telling the epic story of India in one volume. As someone who did not know very much about this fascinating, and increasingly important country, I was glad to read a history book that lays out the whole story, from its beginnings to the present day, in a way that holds my interest. The maps and charts are adequate, though my Kindle Paperwhite still does not handle graphics very well. I did get somewhat lost in all the exotic and unfamiliar names of princes and dynasties, and occasionally the history of a certain region of India at a particular time, or some of the less prominent kings of a dynasty was somewhat rushed through, but I think that India, A History is an excellent resource for the casual reader to learn about the history of India. Those who wish to study the subject further can use the bibliography John Keay

provides. Either way, I think they will find this book useful and interesting.

John Keay does tremendous justice to about 5000 years of history of the Indian subcontinent in a matter of 640 pages, starting from the Harappan civilization to the final decade of the 20th century, covering political history for the most part but pausing thoughtfully on issues of culture, myth, language & values every now & then. I think that Keay's style is definitely engaging & non-partisan. Unlike some of the other reviews, I did not think that this book is entirely dry & mirthless. I think that there are many instances of having a little fun at the expense of a king here & there, a shahenshah later on & then men from his own country. I think what this book really does for me is separating the element of myth from what is history. For example, both Ashok & Akbar have legendary statuses associated with them - though as Keay reveals, some of such popular imagination is indeed deep rooted in facts, but certain extrapolations of such persona are just stuff of popular imagination. I thought that the challenges in this book are actually challenges of Indian history/geography itself. Barring certain periods, it is very fragmented. It is also debatable exactly what constituted "India" in different periods of history & which dynasties, kingdoms & men played a greater role in defining what we mean by it today. I would recommend this book very highly to anyone who wants summary content on Indian history. [@souvikstweets](https://twitter.com/souvikstweets)

The book has about the right amount of depth for anyone moderately interested in the history of the Indian Subcontinent. Keay's ability to string narratives quite seamlessly is his strong point backed by his research. This is a difficult undertaking for many reasons, chiefly among them are poor historical records in the pre-muslim period and the many parallel storylines in different regions. Through all this, Keay does a commendable job akin to painting and putting together a jigsaw puzzle with blank pieces. Beware the language can feel quite contrived at times and the writing tends to meander in places. Details can also be overwhelming at times. Sometimes its not clear why some historians are treated more creditably than others. Such minor quibbles notwithstanding, this book has been a great guide to understanding India and Indian society.

Very well written and thorough given its expansive topic and single volume length. With the kindle version it can be difficult to understand the geography as you have to keep switching back to the maps. The names of places in India have changed a number of times throughout the centuries and it takes some effort to follow at times, for someone who has never been to India and had minimal understanding of its history before reading the book. I do feel like I understand the history, culture

and current state of affairs much better.

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