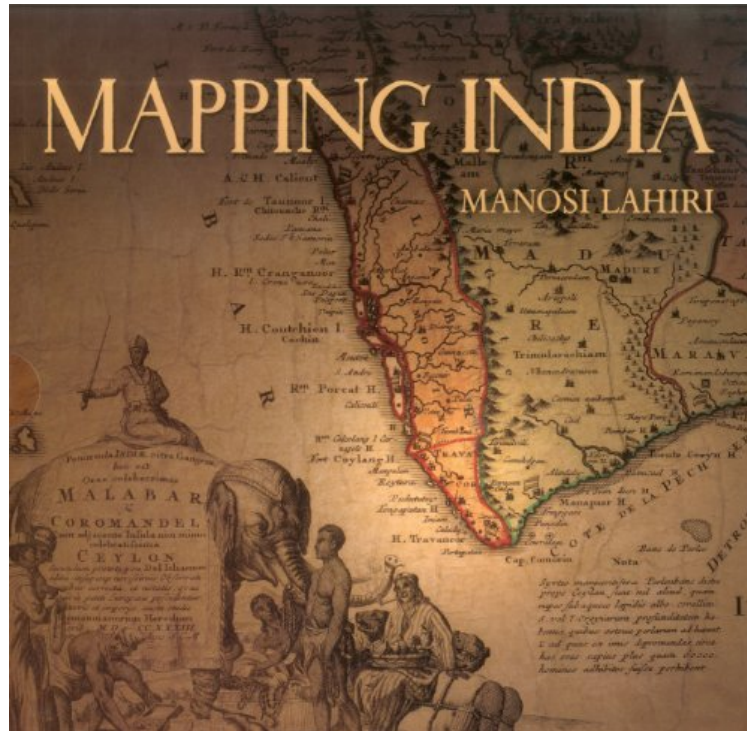


Mapping India

Manosi Lahiri

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Manosi Lahiri : Mapping India before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mapping India:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Definitive Work on the History of Cartography of IndiaBy Stephen R. Fox(A version of this review, by this poster, appeared in The Portolan, the journal of the Washington Map Society.)The distinguished Indian geographer Manosi Lahiri poses a number of intriguing questions in this sumptuous book: Why did an indigenous tradition of cartography never develop in the subcontinent? Even accounting for centuries of European involvement, why is there in general such spotty coverage of the subcontinent, in comparison with other major historical population centers? How do we account for Indias uncomfortable relationship with its own 19th century cartographers, and its official policy different than that of any other democracy that cartographic information is strategically sensitive to be controlled, rather than a resource to be shared as widely as possible?This is a volume that could only have been written by an Indian, as it rests on a deeply personal knowledge of the many historic cultures and states, layered with successive waves of European colonial exploitation, that comprise India. In spite of the rich historical intellectual traditions in the closely related fields of astronomy and mathematics that Indian states developed, Lahiri shows that there is virtually no record of rulers, traders, or theologians recording their fortifications and military victories, their cities, their sea routes, or even their perception of the heavens in the form of maps for a number of complex reasons before the 17th century. Unlike the unified China, Lahiri argues that historically, Indian rulers never developed the power, the need, or the means to create maps of their realms. India before the British colonial consolidation comprised a large number of small polities divided by religion, politics, and

language. Even today, each Indian banknote has its denomination written in 15 languages of the nation each spoken by more than five million people plus classical Sanskrit and English. Warfare tended to be local. Most Indian states were landlocked and never developed the trade routes that spurred European (and to a certain extent, Chinese) mapmaking. Indian religions did not demand an extensive cosmography. And linguistic differences and incompatible local systems of measurement across the subcontinent made even the most rudimentary sharing of information difficult. Lahiri notes some exceptions to these theses, but argues that for the most part, the history of cartography in India is the history of outsiders mapping of the subcontinent. Implicit, Lahiri argues, is that outsiders principally Europeans created only those maps they needed, both as to location and theme. Hence the paucity of cultural maps and of transport networks away from the European presence. Mapping India begins with an introductory essay reviewing cartography of India before the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. Prominent among the plates in this essay are one from Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* and works by medieval Arab cartographers. Lahiri also presents a fanciful, undated Gujarati-language cosmograph showing the subcontinent as two and a half continental islands, surrounded by two oceans (p. 6). She argues, though, that such cosmographs tended to be artistic representations showing man's place on earth as described in ancient tales . . . and that Indians had a more realistic intellectual concept of the nature of their subcontinent, such as that reflected in the *Four Abodes of God* by an eighth-century sage, showing relationships and routes among holy sites (pp. 3-4). But an early cartographic record of this ancient center of civilization is remarkably lacking. Subsequent chapters are organized thematically. Chapter 1 presents the initial mapping of coastal India with the arrival of the Europeans in the 1500s, with a focus on Dutch, French and English cartography. Chapter 2 focuses on the Mughal empire (1526-1828), noting that the first map of the empire was derived from observations of the first ambassador of the East India Company to the shah's court in Agra from 1615-18. A Frenchman, Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil, who lived in Awadh (the British Oudh) for 25 years in the mid-18th century, produced the most complete atlas of India to that date, richly illustrated with scenes from the *Ramayana*. Published in France in 1785, it did not become available in India until published as *Maps of Mughal India* in 1988. Even this most powerful of historic Indian polities is represented cartographically only by the efforts of outsiders. Chapters 3-6 (early plans and sketches; old cities and forts; 18th and 19th British surveys and maps; and 18th and 19th century British military maps) are a series of short essays on individual locations, each represented by one or a few maps. While it is not clear in some cases the extent to which these are sole examples or representatives of larger numbers of maps of each of the locations, they provide a richer, graphic dimension to the history of competition among European powers and later of the British consolidation over India. Of particular interest to both the history of India and of cartography is Lahiri's discussion of the 70-year Great Trigonometrical Survey (pp. 169-88), which had the monumental twin goals of creating a network of surveyed triangles over the landscape of India and of measuring a meridian passing through India, as part of a larger effort to measure the size and shape of the earth. While focusing on the many local maps related to the GTS principally revenue maps designed to facilitate the work of the East India Company Lahiri alludes to the controversial role played by Indian surveyors working with the British. Without them, this great contribution to cartography would not have been possible, but their cooperation with the colonial administration strengthened the subjugation of India. As Tibet was off limits to Westerners, the British trained Indian pundits (sometimes masquerading as pilgrims) to do the legwork. Frequently at great personal risk, these men provided the data that created the first accurate maps of the region, yet when the maps appeared, their British supervisors took the credit. Only one, Nain Singh, received early recognition from the Royal Geographic Society (p. 234) and the Indian government did not celebrate their contributions until it issued a set of commemorative stamps in 2004 (p. 241). Chapter 8 ventures into maps of three unfortunate 19th-century milestones of the East India Company: the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, opium, and the periodic famines that British agricultural policy exacerbated. A major military campaign in the crown jewel of the Empire was an event destined to generate large numbers of maps both for the British military and for public understanding at home; Lahiri provides enlightening examples of both types, but again, the lack of even sketch maps by the mutineers speaks loudly to the cultural and political differences between the Indians and the British. British opium policy cause of two wars with China and immense suffering in both India and China appears not to have produced any maps. The only ones Lahiri includes are some woodblocks by Xu Yiju, a senior Chinese bureaucrat charged with opening ports to the British following the second Opium War of 1856-60. Xu sought to promote a greater understanding of the West by the Chinese government so it could withstand further erosion of its sovereignty (p. 273). Agricultural policy produced periodic famines, the result of forcing farmers to shift from subsistence to cash crops. When drought hit an area, the localized lack of food intensified the effects. Lahiri provides two from a set of six maps of the effects of the drought in the northwest provinces and Punjab in 1861, demonstrating the administrative support the British to mitigate the ensuing famine. Unfortunately, these maps are of inferior quality and have many errors, Lahiri notes, but their utility in early mitigation of the crisis can easily be appreciated. The response of the government to the famine was slow, but that of the people in Britain was generous, with *The Times* reporting a donation of 20,000 on April 3, 1861 to the Governor of Bombay, the result of donations on Good Friday and Easter the previous weekend. (p. 266) Chapter 9's review of general maps and atlases of the 19th and 20th centuries carries the reader through a variety of historically significant developments, from the first maps of India in local languages through the demarcation of the India-Pakistan

boundaries in 1947. Lahiri elaborates on the vagueness of the charge given the two boundary commissions, both under the chairmanship of British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe: to demarcate boundaries on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims, but also to take into account other factors. (p. 288) The lack of clarity in the Commissions charge and the inevitable need to sever rail, communication, irrigation, and other infrastructure guaranteed the conflict which persists to this day. Lahiri is quite critical of the complex exercise of drawing two long international boundaries in a matter of weeks (p. 295), an exercise whose methodology has never been documented. Reviewing the maps available to the Commissions and the results of their work, she provides useful but admittedly speculative conclusions about the Commissions process that help explain the complexities of the borders. Since independence, India and Pakistan have fought three major wars (in 1947, 1965, and 1971) and one minor one (in 1999). The importance of cartographic information, Lahiri argues, has made it a natural step for the Government of India to adopt colonial British practices of restricting access to maps. In 1956, the Survey of India restricted public access to topographical maps along India's international land and coastal boundaries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this one act was responsible for excluding maps from the imagination of most Indians (pp. 12-13). Not until 2005 years after the easy availability of satellite images on the Internet did India change this policy, and in 2006 introduced the first Open Series maps to the public. Lahiri's bibliography suggests that the library of books on the cartographic history of India would fill only a short shelf, mostly monographs about specific incidents and limited time spans. In *Mapping India*, she has provided both the general reader and the cartographic specialist a general survey work of great erudition and visual appeal. 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. outstanding illustrated art book on the history of Indian maps By Henry Berry Nearly all the maps are done by European mapmakers and publishers. Many of these are British, reflecting that India was of interest to the British government, businesses, and public because it was an important British colony and virtually a lucrative commercial property with British government cooperation of the East India Company. The front cover is a part of a map of the area of Ceylon on the Indian Peninsula. This map has an elaborate cartouche picturing an elephant and a crudely-drawn tiger surrounding by different types of Indian figures (as cartouches in antiquarian maps of America often have pictures of Native American crops or vegetation and figures in native dress). The full-page map illustration facing the Content page is the Nepal part of a 1822 map of India "To The Hon[orable] Directors of the East India Company" by the noted British mapmaker Arrowsmith. The frontispiece map is part of the city of Calcutta showing roadways, the British Fort William, a Raceground (no doubt made by the British for recreation of military occupiers and businessmen), and part of the Hoogly River published in 1842 by the British Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in Britain. France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal are other European countries whose maps are shown. (European sources for the majority of the Indian maps holds as well for historical maps of China, Africa, Japan, the Americas, Australia, and the rest of the world.) Europeans and especially England were the major publishers of Indian maps for the longest time not only for mercantile reasons, but also because Europeans were in the lead in exploration and colonization from the 15th through the 19th centuries; maps were useful in the growing educational and scientific interests of a growing middle class; and the public of countries active in exploration and trade (e. g., the Dutch in the East Indies) were interested in the new lands. Maps of these centuries met practical interests of trade, administration, geography, etc., but in many cases also offered outstanding works of artistic style and publishing craftsmanship with their ostentatious cartouches, depictions or symbols of terrain, details of regions or cities, coloring, and elaborately engraved long dedications and titles. All of this is the historical backdrop in Lahiri's chronological study of Indian maps. That the majority of the maps were done by British and other European powers does nothing to diminish their geographical accuracy. Accurate maps were crucial to the British and other commercial interests and the military hold required for pursuing these. Accurate maps were crucial for coastal and river navigation, transportation, administration, military operations and defense, and to pursue larger colonial and commercial ambitions. Thus the maps mostly follow the course of British Empire and East India Company exploration, development, and exploitation of India through independence following World War II when Indian-made maps start to replace the European ones. Lahiri's text with accompanying color illustrations of maps and sections of them for close-up examination blends commentary and critique of the maps with what they represent historically and their significance in relation to historical developments. The book offers a visually pleasing and informative study of the history of India beginning with European interest up until about the 1950s after India gained its independence. Lahiri's knowledgeable engaging text draws on her long and varied academic background and extensive travels in the region. This book stands out among the many oversize art books on maps for being a first on the historical maps of India.

Mapping India presents an overview of important maps that eloquently reflect the changing social and political fortunes of India. These maps speak of the commercial interests and wars that led to the colonization of India, and show territories the size of countries that were conquered, ceded or controlled through treaties. They also record changed courses of rivers, routes taken by armies, people living in communities in new cities, places where famines occurred, how the highest peak was discovered and named, when native royalty gathered to pay respect to the British Emperor, and the destination to which Mahatma Gandhi marched with his supporters for the salt satyagraha. From the

earliest chronicles of India to its post-Independence strides, Mapping India is the story of India recounted through its maps.

Mapping India contains a wealth of illustrations, from a 15th-century map based on Ptolemy's "Cosmographia" to the red dividing lines drawn by Cyril Radcliffe in 1947. The maps from the intervening centuries serve as a fascinating visual history of the creation of the modern Indian state. (The Economist, March 24, 2012)The maps that Lahiri presents in her widely researched book are alluring and piquant, taking the reader back almost to the mythical imagining of a land with four dhams or pilgrimage centers at its four corners. (Bhaswati Charkavorty Telegraph, March 30, 2012)The distinguished Indian geographer Manosi Lahiri poses a number of intriguing questions in this sumptuous book. (Stephen R. Fox The Portolan, Spring 2014)This magnificent publication will fill many gaps in our knowledge of the mapping of India. Dr Lahiri is a well-respected geographer, who has studied in Calcutta, SOAS London and Delhi, and her deep knowledge of both the geography of India as well as its history shows throughout. (Susan Gole IMCOS International Map Collectors' Society, Summer 2012)Lahiri has brought her training as a geographer to bear upon an art that charts the shifting political and cultural fortunes of the country with great clarity....Lahiri has done a great service to map lovers everywhere with this book. (Bibek Bhattacharya Outlook Traveller, February 2012)Through this book, Lahiri has brought to light the delightful art of map-making. Mapping India can be best described as a labour of love. With over 160 coloured maps and photographs, it is a visual treat. (Ektaa Malik Pioneer, January 21, 2012)Manosi Lahiri's Mapping India will engage, inspire and enthrall an untapped reader base of wannabe cartographers and history buffs to the rare treasures that size up the contours and corners of subcontinental India. (Fiona Fernandez Mid-Day, January 25, 2012)About the AuthorManosi Lahiri is a professional geographer. She completed her PhD in Geography at University of Delhi. Manosi was a lecturer at Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi and undertook consulting work for several UN agencies. She founded ML Infomap, a pioneering GIS company, in 1993 to propagate GIS technology. She received the Lifetime Achievement Award from GIS Development at MapIndia in 2010.