

[Mammoth Atlas Maps India's Manifold History](#)

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Republished Tome Took 20 Years, \$1.4 Million

India's tangled and protracted history is virtually impossible to grasp. The best scholars are daunted by its complexities, geographical, ethnic, linguistic, religious, social, political and more. But in March, when Oxford University Press sent HINDUISM TODAY a new edition of a Historical Atlas of South Asia, the impossible was right there in our hands, a 10-pound, 12" X 16", 376-page summary of 5,000 years of the world's oldest living civilization was revealed in what is surely one of the significant scholastic achievements of the twentieth century. Like a video through time, HASA's maps plot holy places, tribes, regions, dynasties, religions, modern census data and events of the Indian subcontinent from the Stone Age through the Indus Valley civilization, Vedic era, to the Moghul, British and finally the post Indian Independence periods. HASA's drama takes place on a "physical stage" comprising present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Tibet, Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka.

Several pages of remarkable maps plotted by Shiva P. Bajpai, atlas historian for the period from the Vedic era through the 16th century, show India as described in the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharatha and other early Sanskrit works. HASA's richly detailed 19th and 20th-century coverage draws on vast data from the British era, the Indian censuses of 1931 and 1961 and modern reporting. Raj B. Mathur has meticulously mapped castes, tribes, ethnic groups: languages, regions, populations: literacy and education: election results from India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Nepal and Bangladesh, Related text sections are rivetting authentic historical dramas. If one ever wondered about communal disturbances, India's ever-fluid northern borderlines from Pakistan to Assam are shown in maps for "Territorial Changes 1947 to 1971." If anyone ever asked, "Where was Rama's Koshala and Krishna's Kurukshetra relative to Delhi and Rishikesh?" "When did Hinduism go to Indonesia?" "Will our children ever know?" It's there in HASA, among its hundreds of maps.

Professor Bajpai, a former teacher of Indian history at Benares Hindu University, told HINDUISM TODAY, "The atlas is important because in order to understand political, economic and cultural dynamics you have to know how all these played out on the real territory and towns. And no other book on India shows this. Unless you see human interaction in the spatial dimensions and see the sites where great men lived or died or fought or built temples, it always remains academic and oral. If we don't have the map, we have no idea what it is at all."

Regarding the significance of studying Indian history, Bajpai says, "I always tell students that Indian history is unique in its conceptual, ideological, spiritual-I use the word metabiological-assumptions and the view of the unity of God, nature and man. No other culture's history deals with these questions in such depth. Others just have glimpses of what Indians had complete intellectual concepts of. We have whole philosophies. If you want to find anything different, particularly in the last 2,000 years, there is no other place except India. If there is a deeper level in the histories of other world cultures, no one is talking about it and in India we always have. Of course, India is also changing, but I mean traditional India. In other parts of the world you find more similarities. In India you will find more opposites, more things that are different from what you are, and they will challenge you, and they will reach you and touch you at a very deep level. Unfortunately, Indian history as written and presented in the West so far doesn't communicate those things, because we try to forge or discover similarities. We try to find common grounds for talking. We try to say, 'Well, we are quite common.' But the strength and uniqueness in Indian culture lies in its difference, not in its commonality with the rest of world history."

As to difficulties in accurate portrayal of India's history he commented, "I knew in Benares that ancient Indian history was greatly influenced by foreigners. I wanted to project the viewpoint of the Indians at that time, rather than color it by extraneous perspectives and ideologies. One reason that I stayed with the atlas project for 13 often difficult years was because of that inner commitment."

"Undoubtedly the current global interest is in India's spiritual heritage. For this the atlas is only a foundation. The reason for the dearth in religious history is that Indian history has been written under the influence of Western historical scholarship. We have employed either the British, French or colonial perspective. And since the 60s, the majority of Indian historians have either been Marxists or sympathize with that kind of historical approach. They concentrated on the social and economic conditions of the people in order to show how, in time, the bulk of the people were economically exploited so that contemporary projects and

government programs appear as a great advance and improvement on the entire history of India. It is a justification for contemporary political, economic, social and intellectual movements.

"It would be alright if we were just trying to project the social and economic side of life. But if in the process we begin to interpret the religious and cultural material from economic perspectives, we destroy the very spirit and soul of that culture. It remains the task of future historians to fully reveal India's spiritual past." But Professor Bajpai says he is not hopeful that the necessary shift in historical approach will come soon, from the economic and political to an objective focus fully and sympathetically appropriating India's deep spiritual dimension. Still, HASA, contains a wealth of information on India's religious traditions. Hindu fact-seekers, writers and researchers will find 150 pages of maps, 131 pages of text, a bibliography, multilevel index and numerous illustrations of artifacts and monuments, from Indus Valley home sites to great medieval Hindu temples. Exquisitely organized, HASA delivers clarity and easy access to data. Follow the index trail under entry "Sind" for a story of this now politically effaced sacred land.

Joseph E. Schwartzberg, Professor of Geography, is the man most responsible for the atlas and tells its creation story in the preface. The seeds were planted in 1908 when Charles Lesley Ames started his South Asia library. He collected many books from India. When he transferred his library to the University of Minnesota in 1961, it contained 80,000 items including 700 maps. This stimulated the atlas project. Work began in 1964 and Joseph Schwartzberg was appointed the editor. A strong organizer with contacts in India, he acted as the self-sacrificing polestar for a complex research, cartographic and fundraising process that stretched over a 13-year period. In 1967 two key collaborators from India joined the team: Raj. B. Mathur, a skilled cartographer and Bajpai, who was then working on his Ph.D. in London. London scholars told Bajpai, "Americans can't do serious work in Indian studies."

Schwartzberg proved otherwise. Years rolled by. Great sacrifices were required and made. His wife, Monique, worked without pay. When funds ran low, Bajpai and Mathur moved to California universities but flew back, unpaid, to Minnesota on winter breaks for six years. With the help of the "incredibly painstaking and talented staff of the cartographic department of the American Geographical Society, New York," the project finished in 1978, at an estimated cost of \$1.4 million, donated by the United States Office of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities. The University of Minnesota and others. Thus each of the 3,500 first edition copies was in 1993, worth \$3,000. The present edition sells for \$250.

Bajpai says: "Of course it is an expensive item. But most Indian families can afford it. It is a question of whether they really want to know who they are or not."

Prof. Schwartzberg, says in the acknowledgements: "If it helps earn for South Asia the admiration its contributions to world civilization so clearly merit: and if Americans are able to reach a more informed and sympathetic comprehension of South Asia, we shall feel that we have served the people well."

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