

**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE INDIAN
PEOPLES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649034314

A Brief History of the Indian Peoples by William Wilson Hunter

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HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK
TORONTO AND MELBOURNE

*A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
INDIAN PEOPLES*

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TWENTY-FOURTH EDITION. NINETY-SECOND THOUSAND



OXFORD: AT THE CLARENDON PRESS: 1907

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1907

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PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
BY HORACE HART, M.A.
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY



PREFACE



IN this book I try to exhibit the growth of the Indian peoples, to show what part they have played in the world's progress, and what sufferings they have endured from other nations. Short Indian histories, as written by Englishmen, usually dismiss the first two thousand years of their narrative in a few pages, and start by disclosing India as a conquered country. This plan is not good, either for Europeans in India or for the Indians themselves; nor does it accord with the facts. As long as Indian history is presented to the Indian youth as nothing but a dreary record of disunion and subjection, our Anglo-Indian Schools can scarcely become the nurseries of a self-respecting nation. I have therefore tried to put together, from original sources, a brief narrative of what I believe to be the true history of the peoples of India. These sources have been carefully examined in my larger works. This little book merely states, without discussing, the results arrived at by the labour of thirty years.

I have tried to show how an early gifted race, ethnically akin to our own, welded the primitive forest tribes into settled communities. How the nobler stock, set free from the severer struggle for life by the bounty of the Indian soil, created a language, a literature and a religion, of rare stateliness and beauty. How the very absence of that strenuous striving with nature, which is so necessary a discipline for nations, unfitted them for the great conflicts which await all races. How,

among the most intellectual class, the spiritual and contemplative aspects of life overpowered the practical and the political. How Hinduism, while sufficing to organize the Indian communities into social and religious confederacies, failed to knit them together into a coherent nation.

India was destined, by her position, to receive the human overflow from the ancient breeding-grounds of Central Asia. Waves of conquest from the north were as inevitable in early times as are the tidal waves from the ocean at the present day. But such conquests, although rapid, were seldom enduring; and although widespread, were never complete. The religious and social organization of Hinduism never succumbed. The greatest of India's conquerors, the Mughals, were being hemmed in by Hindu confederacies before their supremacy had lasted $1\frac{1}{2}$ centuries. So far as can now be estimated, the advance of the British alone saved the Delhi Empire from dismemberment by three Hindu military powers, the Maráthás, Rájputs, and Sikhs. The British Rule has endured, because it is wielded in the joint interest of the Indian races.

But while these thoughts have long been present in my mind, I have not obtruded them on my pages. For I hope that this little book will reach the hands of many who look on history as a record of events, rather than as a compendium of philosophy. The greatest service which an Indian historian can at present render to India, is to state the facts accurately and in such a way that they will be read. If my story is found to combine truth with simplicity, it will have attained all that I aimed at. If it teaches young Englishmen and young Natives of India to think more kindly of each other, I shall esteem myself richly rewarded.

PREFACE TO THE TWENTY-FIRST EDITION

I AM grateful to my critics in many countries for the reception which they have given to this book. It has been translated into five languages, including a literal rendering in Burmese, and a poetical version in Urdu. The English issue alone has reached its eighty-second thousandth copy, and from 1886 onwards for many years the Calcutta University prescribed the work as a text-book for its Entrance Examination. The present edition incorporates suggestions kindly forwarded to me by Directors of Public Instruction, and other educational authorities in India. To Mr. Griffith, formerly Director of Public Instruction in the North-Western Provinces, and to Professor A. A. Macdonell, Deputy Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, I am specially indebted for a revision of the earlier chapters. The whole proof-sheets have been kindly revised for me by Mr. Morse Stephens, B.A., Lecturer on Indian History to the University of Cambridge.

On my own part, no pains have been spared to render this edition an improvement on its predecessors. Although compressed into a small size, it essays to embody the latest results of Indian historical research, and of that more critical examination of the Indian Records which forms so important a feature of recent Indian