

# *Quicklook at* **India**



## About Quicklook at India

**I**NDIA is destined to play a major role in shaping the 21st Century. It is the second largest country in the world by population and may well become the largest. It is the world's largest democracy. Rapid economic growth has made it one of the world's leading economies, a position that seems certain to strengthen. India is a nuclear power, with the world's second largest army.

India embraces many different peoples, languages and religions. Nowhere has older or deeper cultures, or so much diversity.

India is a land of great contrasts. Modern developments sit side by side with the very ancient. World class technologies are emerging in a country struggling with massive problems with basic infrastructure. Millions graduate from university each year but basic education is a problem for many millions more. A growing and ever more prosperous middle class has emerged but hundreds of millions live in poverty.

Aline Dobbie's book opens up India, its history, culture and position in the world. It is an amazing insight from someone with a deep understanding and obvious love for the country in which she lived for many years.



Quicklook at

# *India*

Aline Dobbie



Quicklook  
books

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# *Introduction*



**I**NDIA is the world's second largest country by population. It is the biggest democracy. It has a very long history and extremely rich culture. It is the birthplace of major religions and accommodates many more. Already an economic giant, its rapid rate of development makes it impossible to ignore. India is likely to play a major part in shaping the 21st century.

Many things influence India and its people. Generalisations are dangerous. The history of the many communities, their separate cultures, diverse religions and important external influences all play their part. India is a combination of the ultra modern and the very ancient, often side by side. Some things are changing with breathtaking speed. Some things are timeless.

## **Pre History**

200 million years ago the world's continents formed a single landmass surrounded by one great ocean. The landmass split into different parts. The Americas drifted westward. Africa, Antarctica and Australasia as we know them moved southward. Then a vast segment of the secondary landmass broke off and drifted northwards until some 30 million years ago it collided with the "underbelly" of what we think of as Eurasia. The collision resulted in the vast mountain range we call the Himalayas.

Thus was the Indian sub-continent born. Its mighty river systems of the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra originate in the Himalayas, which is also the well spring for the Yellow, Yangtze and Mekong Rivers.

It is likely that the sub-continent was sparsely inhabited by man's predecessors, who were followed by Homo Sapiens approximately 50,000 years ago.

The Indus Valley Civilization, known chiefly for the archaeological sites

of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa (now in present day Pakistan), was comparable to other civilizations on the banks of mighty rivers in Mesopotamia, Egypt and China.

The North of the sub-continent was accessible overland through the Kyber, Gomal and Bolan passes in the North West Mountains of the Hindu Kush. The South evolved differently and was mainly influenced by maritime contacts from places like modern day Sri Lanka and Indonesia. The north-erners were chiefly descended from the tribes of Eurasia. Their languages Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi and Bengali belong to the large family of complex Indo-European languages like Latin.

The Dravidian peoples, based in the South, have a different racial origin.

The South has different languages of which Tamil is the largest.

The Indus Valley Civilization had a writing system as evidenced by its Soft Stone Seals. However, modern experts have yet to decipher it, despite high-tech computer analysis.

3000BC – 1900BC was the zenith of the Indus Valley Civilization which declined around 1900BC. It was followed by the Indo-Aryans who were illiterate and because they gradually switched from burial to cremation to dispose of their dead there is no treasure trove of tomb materials from which to extract vital information, unlike Egypt and China.

There is however a school of revisionist thinking that the Aryan invasion is a myth deliberately used by British Christian educationalists. Modern secular international historians now consider that the Aryans were the indigenous inhabitants of the Indus Valley region, and not a horde of foreign invaders.

The Aryan colonization of the Northern plains started around 1500BC and this brought Vedism: a polytheistic religion that later evolved into Hinduism. Vedic priests, like Europe's Celtic Bards and other cultures like the Mayans used oral poetry memorised in long verse cycles. Thus in 6000BC, when writing reappeared, there was a massive amount to record and transcribe. As to how much of the Indus Valley Culture melded with the earlier Dravidian Culture from the South, we will not discover until the Soft Stone Seals give up their secrets.

The reliable chronology emerges after contact with literate civilizations such as the Persians, Greeks, Chinese and Sri Lankans.

## Modern India

India is the world's largest democracy, with over 1.3 billion people occupying a landmass of 3,287,623 sq km or 1,269,219 square miles. It is part of a group of nations known as the BRICs: Brazil, Russia, China and India. . Trade and political links are developing very rapidly.

There are 18 major languages in India. English is one of them and is widely spoken.

India was partitioned in 1947. West and East Pakistan came into being. East Pakistan then fought its way to independence (with the considerable help of the Indian Army) in 1971 and evolved into Bangladesh.

India became independent of British rule on 15th August 1947 and declared itself a republic on 26th January 1950. India regained control of certain territories thereafter: Goa (which had been colonized by the Portuguese) in 1961, Pondicherry (ceded by the French in 1954) and Sikkim, which became the 22nd Indian state in 1975.

Following a sharp border war with its neighbour China in 1962, while the world was distracted by the Cuba missile crisis, disputed areas in the North of India were seized by China, which continues to lay claim to further territory. This history is the source of continuing tension between these giant countries.

## Armed Forces

India has the second largest army in the world, second to the Chinese. It is an efficient, brave fighting force with a long history. In the two world wars men and women from the Indian sub-continent fought in huge numbers (over a million) and gave their lives alongside their allies in many thousands. India Gate in New Delhi is the country's national war memorial and the focus annually for remembrance and ceremonial on the 26th January, which is Republic Day.

India, like China and Pakistan, has nuclear weapons.

## States

There are now 28 states. In 2000 Uttar Pradesh lost its northern area to the new state of the Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh lost its eastern lands to new Chhattisgarh, and Bihar lost its southern areas to new Jharkhand. There



are seven Union Territories which comprise Delhi (the National Capital Region), Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh (the capital for both the state of Haryana and also Punjab), Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep Islands, and Pondicherry.

Each state has its own government, which looks after its affairs. Whilst the union government (the national government) is in charge of ninety-seven topics of national importance, the state governments take care of sixty-six topics and for the remaining forty-five topics the union and state governments share power.

The legislature in a state consists of a legislative assembly and in some cases a legislative council as well. The legislative assembly is equivalent to the *Lok Sabha* or national parliament. At the state level it is known as the *Vidhan Sabha*. The number of members in a legislative assembly is different in each state, depending on its size. They are directly elected from within the state. There is also a governor for each state, who is equivalent to a president and a chief minister who is the executive first minister.

The union territories have a slightly different form of administration. They are administered by an administrator, on behalf of the union government. They are more directly under the control of the union government. In some union territories there is also a legislative assembly with a chief minister, and the administrator is replaced by a lieutenant governor, but the union government still exercises more control than in the states.

## **Geography**

### **Northern India**

Encompasses the area stretching from the Great Himalayan Range in the very north to the upper part of the Deccan Plateau; Northern India covers 2.3 million square km, or 900,127 sq miles.

The Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra are the 3 great river systems. The Indo-Gangetic plain is the heartland with about 705 million people, who speak 10 major languages. Kolkata was the old British capital and seat of Government, then known as Calcutta. It was decided to make New Delhi the capital city in 1911. This took some years to achieve. Now Mumbai (formerly Bombay) has surpassed both cities in population and is the industrial hub and commercial capital of India.



## *About the author*

**A**LINE DOBBIE was born in India as the daughter of a Scottish army officer serving in the Indian army. She lived in India for the first 16 years of her life, speaking Hindi, Urdu and English. She has returned many times since and thinks of it as home as much as Scotland.

Aline has travelled extensively within India and has come to know a great many people in different walks of life, including politics, business, the arts, wild life conservation and the armed forces. Widely acknowledged as an authority on the country, she has written extensively about it in many publications. She is the author of three books covering her travels and experiences in the sub continent.

Aline takes a close interest in India's rapid development and the associated challenges of preserving what is best from the country's rich past. She is an authority on its history, culture and architectural heritage. She has been actively involved in efforts to save that most iconic of creatures, the Tiger; still under severe threat despite current efforts to protect it and its habitat.

In recognition of her work Aline was presented with the prestigious Pride of India Gold Award in 2006.

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## Quicklook at India

The second largest country by population and the world's largest democracy, India is destined to play a major role in shaping the course of the 21st Century.

India embraces many different peoples, languages and religions. Nowhere has older or deeper cultures, or so much diversity. The very ancient sits side by side with the ultra modern, as India starts to realise its immense potential.

● *Quicklook at India* covers the history, culture, politics and economics of this fascinating land of contrasts.

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## About the author

Aline Dobbie was born in India as the daughter of a Scottish officer serving in the Indian army. She lived in India for the first 16 years of her life, speaking Hindi, Urdu and English.



Still a regular visitor, Aline has come to know a great many people in different walks of life in India, including politics, business, the arts, wild life conservation and the armed forces.

Aline is the author of books and other publications about India and is often asked to speak about the country which she views as her second home.

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