

HISTORY OF INDIA

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History of India by David Sinclair

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OF INDIA**

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HISTORY OF INDIA.

INTRODUCTION.

Ancient name—
Earliest inhabitants.
The Aryans.

Present population.
Languages.
Sanskrit.

1. Ancient name.—The name generally given by early Hindu writers to India is **Bharata-Varsha**, “the land of Bharata.” This Bharata is said to have been a celebrated king, who reigned over a vast extent of territory in ancient days.

2. The Aborigines.—Of the **Aborigines** almost nothing is known. Driven, as they doubtless were, before the conquering invaders into the jungles and mountainous districts, they are still to be found there, living in a state almost of nature. The **Konds** in Central India, the **Bhils** in Rajputana, the **Santals** in Bengal, the **Todas** in Southern India, and many others are generally regarded as aboriginal tribes.

3. The Turanians.—The first swarms of strangers that entered the country were the ancestors of the four great races of Southern India, speaking the four languages, **Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam** and **Kanarese**. Differences of opinion exist as to the nation to which those strangers belonged. Though some suppose they were Aryans, the opinion now most generally held is, that they were **Turanians** of **Mongolian** and **Scythian** descent, that they came from **Tartary** and **Tibet**, and entered India by the passes of the Himalaya mountains. They have been called **Dravidians**, from **Dravida**, the name of that part of South India peopled by them. Though

evidently of a different race from the Aryans, they would seem to have been greatly influenced by the latter after coming into contact with them, so much so, that their religion, manners and customs now very much resemble those of the people of Aryan descent.

4. The Aryans.—Following those Turanians came, probably at some period between 1500 B.C. and 2000 B.C., a people, who called themselves **Arya**, that is, 'noble.' Their home was in the plateau of Central Asia, somewhere near the source of the river **Oxus**. They were a brave and enterprising people; and we find, that as they increased in numbers, they began to look out for better and richer lands to dwell in. Many of them went west and became the ancestors of the European nations. Others came south and took up their abode at first on the banks of the river **Sindhu** (Indus); and their Persian neighbours, naming them after the river on whose banks they had settled, called them **Hindus**. After a time they crossed the Sindhu and took possession of the country on its eastern bank. But they were not allowed to do so unopposed. The original inhabitants of the country, who were called **Rakshasas**, **Pishachas** and **Daryas**, were soon up in arms against the invaders, and many fierce fights would seem to have taken place. Steadily, though slowly, the Aryans continued to advance. They took possession of the district between the Drishadvati and Sarasvati, and named it, **Brahmavarta**, 'abode of the gods.' There they settled quietly for some centuries, and it was probably during this period that the **Mantras** were composed. More territory was then needed. Onward the Aryans pressed till they reached the Ganges, and to this new province they gave the name **Brahmarshidessa**. During the next two centuries they took possession of new territory, which extended as far as the modern **Allahabad**, and which they called **Madhya-dessa**. Nor did they stop there. They continued their conquests, until they had over-run the valley of the Ganges and occupied Central India. The whole of this country was called by the Hindu writers **Aryavarta**, 'abode of the Aryans.' It included all the provinces, "as far as the eastern and as far as the western oceans between the two mountains," (The Himalaya and the Vindhya mountains). This part

of India the Persians called **Hindustan**, 'the land of the Hindus,' while that portion of the country south of the **Vindhya** range began to be known as the **Dakhan**. When the Greeks invaded the country, they dropped the aspirate in Hindu, and called the people **Indoi**. Hence the name **India**, now applied to all that country lying between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin, the Indus and the Brahmaputra.

5. The Persians, Greeks and Parsis—Various other nations afterwards came into India. The Persians under **Darius Hystaspes**, king of Persia, entered India about 520 B. C.; and the Greeks under **Alexander the Great** in 327 B. C. In the seventh century A. D. another element was added to the population. A little band of **Parsi** immigrants, who had been driven from their native land by the Khalif Omar, landed on the west coast and settled down at Surat. They are at the present day about seventy thousand in number; and from their intelligence and enterprising spirit, they form an important community in Bombay, and on the west coast.

6. The Muhammadans.—Next, but at a great distance of time, came the **Muhammadans**. By degrees they conquered the country and obtained complete political supremacy. Nevertheless they were not only unable to uproot the habits and customs of the Aryans, but they themselves adopted to a great extent the language and habits of the people they conquered. Probably not more than one-half of the Muhammadans in India, at the present day, are of foreign descent. They may be divided into four classes—Sayyids, who claim to be descended from the Prophet; Mughals, descendants of the Tartar conquerors of India; Pathans, of Afghan descent; Sheikhs, including all that do not belong to any one of the other three classes.

7. Other nations.—Other elements have since been introduced into the population of India. The **Portuguese**, the **Dutch**, and the **Danes** have each had a footing in India. The **French** and the **English** have also come into the country. But even at the present day, when the supremacy of England is greater than that ever possessed by Mughal, "the great bulk of the population

is essentially Hindu, and the moral influence of what may be called the Indo-Aryan race is still paramount."

8. Population and Languages.—The population of India at the present day is about two hundred and forty millions. This immense population is not made up of one, but of many nations, speaking a great many different languages. Thus:

Hindi, and Hindustani			
	spoken by about		
Bengali	"	100,000,000	in Hindustan.
Marathi	"	87,000,000	in Bengal.
Gujarati	"	18,000,000	in the Dakhan and Konkan.
Panjabi	"	7,000,000	in Gujarat.
Kashmiri	"	12,000,000	in the Panjab.
Sindhi	"	2,000,000	in Kashmir.
Uriya	"	2,000,000	in Sindh.
Tamil	"	5,000,000	in Orissa.
		15,000,000	in Southern India and Ceylon.
Malayalam	"	4,000,000	on the Malabar Coast and in Travancore.
Kanarese	"	9,000,000	in Maisur and Kanara.
Teluga	"	16,000,000	in the Northern Circars and the Nizam's territory.
Gond	"	2,000,000	in the Central Provinces.

Over and above the languages already mentioned, there are various other dialects, such as those of the **Todas, Koles, Khonds, Rajmahals, &c.**, but those are dialects spoken only by insignificant tribes. If, however, we include those, and the languages spoken by the various tribes on the frontiers of India, as the **Nipalese** of Nipal, the **Fushtu** of Afghanistan, the **Assamese** of Assam, &c., we find that in all India there are certainly not fewer than one hundred languages and dialects of languages spoken.

9. Sanskrit.—Though the Hindus are thus divided into so many nations, speaking so many different languages, there is but **one sacred language**, one sacred literature common to all Hindus and greatly revered by them. "That language is **Sanskrit**, and that literature is Sanskrit literature."

CHAPTER I.

EARLY VEDIC TIMES.—1500 B.C. TO 1200 B.C.

The Vedas.	Religion.
Rishis.	No caste distinction.
The Mantras.	Social condition.

It has been said, that notwithstanding the many political changes that have taken place in India, the moral influence of the Indo-Aryan race has remained paramount. What then was the earliest religious system of this people? What the nature of their government and of their social life?

10. The Vedas.—The earliest religious system of the Hindus is to be found in the **Vedas**, books written in the Sanskrit language. The word Veda means knowledge, and is applied to divine, *unwritten* knowledge. The Vedas are said to have issued from God (Brahma) himself, and to be eternal with God; to have been communicated by God to certain holy men called **Rishis**; and by constant oral repetition, to have been handed down by them to a sect of teachers, who were called **Brahmans**, and who became the repositories of the divine word. They are the compositions of different poets, who lived at different times; but the exact date of the composition of any of them cannot be determined. There are **four Vedas**, called the **Rig-Veda**, the **Yajur-Veda**, the **Sama-Veda** and the **Atharva-Veda**. These again may be divided into three parts; the **Hymns** or **Mantras**, written probably at different dates between 1500 B.C. and 1200 B.C.; the **Upanishads** written between 800 B.C. and 500 B.C.; and the **Brahmanas** written after the sixth century B.C.

11. The Mantras.—The Mantras were written before the Aryans had entered on that series of conquests which was to lead to a complete revolution in the whole social and religious systems of the people. They are, therefore, very interesting to us, as they throw light on the nature of the religion and of the social condition of the ancestors of the Hindus.