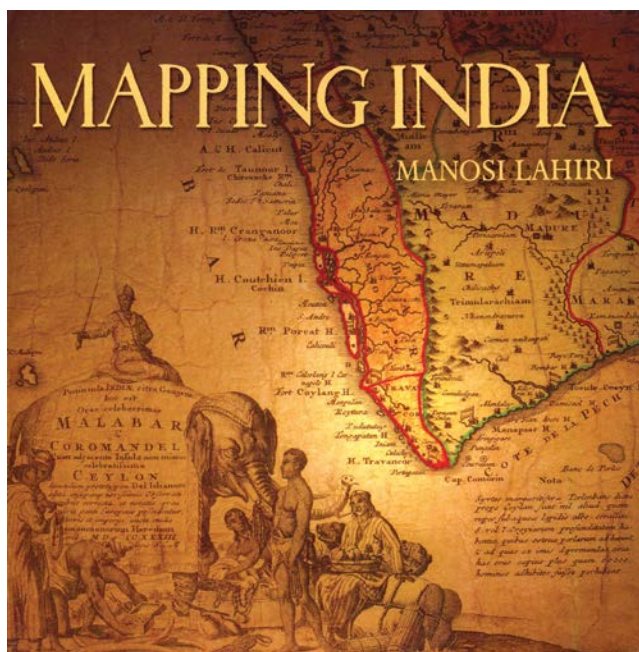


REVIEW BY Dr Adhya Bharti Saxena

# MAPPING INDIA



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AUTHOR Manosi Lahiri

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*India* – a visual collation entails out of numerous episodes in the formation of India's identity as Bharat, Hindoostan & India from micro to macro level Historical-Geography, Urban-History, and Environmental-History and Geography. The author Manosi Lahiri, a professional geographer, teacher and a traveller, writes on the lines and images drawn by itinerants, swashbucklers, explorers, traders, sea-farers and revisits the bygone era in India from the antiquities to its post-Independence esplanades.

Frank F. Conlon opined in 2001 about renewed interest in issues of cultural and economic exchanges, state-formation and urban growth for South Asia. Since then, interdisciplinary interactions amongst Social Science disciplines have gained frequency. *Mapping India*

The historical theme chosen by the geographer is an audacious task as she efficaciously places before social scientists and historians in particular a set of new representations of 'how & why' the space was apprehended, planned and constructed in contemporary times. She also attempts an interpretation of the historiography of map-making by seeking answers to the questions such as the status of cartography and cartographers as crucial players during the 18th & 19th centuries for and in India; techniques and technology; the subject-matter of cartographic exercise by the then amateurs and skilled cartographers based on the priorities of traders and rulers; sea-farers and navigators; conquerors and settlers; visionaries and diplomats; and finally the shapers of modern India. In order to scale all this, Lahiri meticulously includes known and unknown maps, surveys, surveyors-reports, illustrations and images in 'far and near' territories. In fact, this treatise is about the evolution of cartography in and on India hidden in archives and under control of state authorities through sketches, plans, maps and atlases.

The author weaves through ten chapters initiating with India's shaping procedure from Ptolmey's time through *Cosmo-*

*graphia*. Along the journey she discovers and explains the minor but precious contributions of Indian cosmographers (p. 3 & 7) and effectively points out the vacuity in Indian cartography compared to European standards. The contribution of Arab cartographers on India does surface in her discourse (p. 7) but it remains limited to the information and knowledge acquired from the travelers, surveyors and cartographers of the 18th & 19th centuries. There is a strong likelihood of major interventions from Arabic, Turkish & Persian chronicles, illustrations, manuscripts and medieval geographers on India such as al-Ma'mun, al-Hamdani, and al-Marwazi, al-Idrisi (*Tabula Rogeriana*), c; indigenous maps by the Gujarati *malam* along the western coast and naval pilots of the eastern coast of India; indigenous maps such as *Adhidwip no nakso* (p. 6) and also maps from China for the period between c.800–c.1500 C.E. Possibly another future research project from Lahiri will fill the gap in the *longue durée* of historical conversation.

The chapter “*India Takes Shape and Form*” through maps and illustrations provides an impression of India from the eyes of European traders and conquerors from the last decade of fifteenth century

along the Cape of Good Hope. Portuguese maps indeed are most expressive of the western coast and outline the Bay of Bengal (pp.36-38). More advanced are the maps of the Dutch (pp. 40-43, 46-47 & 49-50) who built their cartographic wedges over the Portuguese knowledge on India and arbitrated in the interior region in terms of the navigability and inner-reach of the hinterland region of the port-towns where the merchant companies established their factories. Once the trend of making maps was established during 16th and 17th centuries, atlases started appearing for the coast, islands, ports & cities. Major contributions were from the French and English East India Company's servants and surveyors. The hydrographical maps (pp. 52-54, 56-57, 63-69) provided by author through the collection of maps in this chapter establishes that the Europeans knowledge about India had grown vast which initiated the process of carving of sphere of influences and prepared the stage for the future colonisation of the Indian sub-continent. These clearly collate with the process of war and conquest.

The interpretation of images and maps of the Mughal era in Chapter 3 are inimitably diverse from the kind of studies that have appeared so far either done by

Susan Gole (*Indian Maps and Plans from Earliest Times to the Advent of European Surveys*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1989, pp. 207, and, *Maps of Mughal India: Drawn by Colonel Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil, Agent for the French Government to the Court of Shuja-Ud-Daula at Faizabad, in 1770*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998) or Irfan Habib (*An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, Delhi, 1982, pp. 120) has attempted to trace how the Mughal territory was conceived by the Europeans and represented on the world map in ‘*relation and isolation*’. Many of these maps had been fairly used by the scholars on medieval India to project the political trajectory under Mughal emperors and their allies – sovereigns and independent states. Maps included in this chapter mainly include the 17th century maps as this century is primarily recorded as century of Mughals. It introduces the first British map of *Mughal Indostan* drawn by William Baffin (1619), a surveyor-cartographer based drawing on the information of Thomas Roe for Jahangir's India. It is reported this map was frequently referred and reused. *Purchas His Pilgrimage* by Samuel Purchas, (London: Printed by W. Stansby for H. Fetherstone, 1625-26) carried this map in 1625 (pg.578). The salient features of this map are the authenticity in terms

of titles of the emperors, provinces territorial demarcations, imperial seal and Grand Trunk Road of Sher Shah Suri landmarks in correct space and form. Baffin's map is reported to be reused further by Edward Terry (1655) and by Van der Aa (1729). As the seventeenth century Mughal India was the frequently visited period by travellers on the shores and the interiors of the subcontinent, a few of them emerged as imperial servants and used the opportunity to map the inland regions. Lahiri has presented Bernier's map of Kashmir (1658) for our consideration. The re-usage of the maps by cartographers also recorded the transformation from the earlier maps or it might have been corrections as a result of new understanding with the passage of time. Lahiri refers to Henricum Hondium (1630) using Baffin's map differently (pp.80-83). She also traces the similar trend in case of Blaeu's *Magni Mogolis Imperium* (1670) and Fredrick de Witt, 1647 (pp.84-85).

The above section comprises the following manuscripts – *Atlantis Geographicus Maior* on the peninsular India; *Shahid-i-Sadiq* in Persian style, maps by Joseph Gentil on north-west India, Awadh, Aurangabad, and Malwa which are presumably less referred sources in the pre-colonial context. The chief charac-

teristics of these maps is "imagination" scored through information congregated from hearsay and observation; usage of scientific means and applied principle of astronomy, geodesy, instrumentation and cartography which gives them the credit of reliable modern maps as valued by the author. I feel that these maps can be used more stimulatingly by Art, Urban and Environment historians and other social scientists as well.

"*Early Plans and Sketches*" is designed to understand the nature of colonisation of India in the eighteenth century. Through the trajectory of map-making Lahiri establishes the primordial interest of trading companies from Europe along the coastal regions and shores of India. Calicut and Goa were the most sought after destinations of the Portuguese besides Diu, Cochin, Surat on the western coast; Hugli, Madurai, Kasimbazar, Budge Budge, Tranquerbar, Serampore, and Masaulipatnam, along the eastern coast of India. These emerged as the Portuguese factories and settlements in due course of time. This chapter also records the French interest along the Indian coast at Pondicherry and Mahe which served as strong holds in another 150 years. Salient features of the manuscripts include the illustrative format, non-scaled and positioned in relation

to landmarks like gate, temple, tomb, river, lake, garden, residential quarter, factories of the European companies, and forest-range. The available maps clearly depict the expansionist role of the trading companies and evolution of cosmo-culture in the new metropolises.

The chapter "*Old Cities And Forts*" develops our understanding in the emergence and continued existence of the cities. Available maps once again reflect on coastal orientation, or considers prime actors movements responsible for sketching the approaches of the forts and cities in the process of '*war and conquest*' as re-asserted by the author herself. Maps of Mangalore, Dharwar, Srirangapatnam, Vijyanagar, Heeroor, Benaras, Calcutta, Bukhur, Lahore and Jammu trace advancements in the science and art of cartography. These are particularly helpful to an urban historian who is in need of spatial data.

Mid-eighteenth century India saw new key players as the British in the process of acquisition, who attempted victory through systematic surveys. Chapters such as "*Surveys and Maps*", "*Wars and Acquisitions*", "*The Great Game and The Himalayas*", "*Mutiny and Famine*", and "*General Maps and Atlases*" unfold the political, economic and cultural

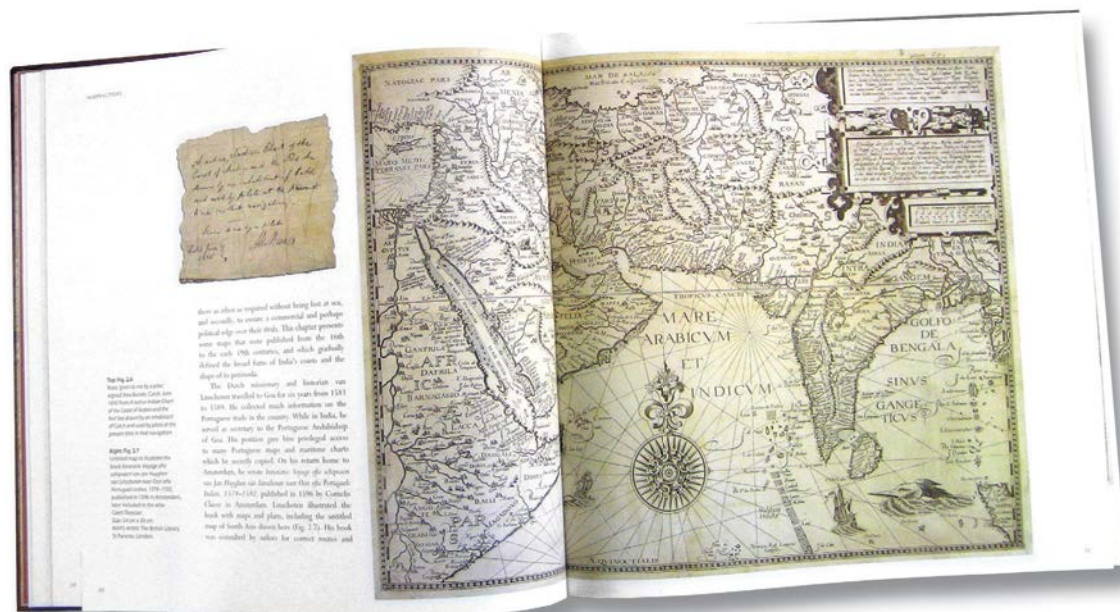
history of creation of Modern India. Many of the maps are presented for the first time in published form. Their appearance in this book helps in a rewriting of Indian history through maps and sketches. These maps suggest drastic changes in technique and its adoption by indigenous surveyors and cartographers. At this stage cartography traverses from the mere exotic tale telling phase of seventeenth century to the highly specialised and professionally skilled trigonometrical surveys from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (pp.29-32 & 172-188). City maps are more live and realistic in historical context. Maps related to Himalayas and the Mutiny reflect on popular themes in the mental images for economic, cultural and political understanding at macro and micro levels. These consist of topographical maps, revenue maps, and the great trigonometrical survey of India. In fact, a three dimensional image of British India emerges from the selected drawings on Rajpootana, Lucknow, Delhi, Awadh, Sirhind, etc. Similarly plans of granaries and godowns represent the emerging

administrative and managerial skills of the new rulers.

The section on “General Maps and Atlases” gives us an idea of different components that features the pan-Indian concept of modern times instead of regional polities and economies. The information accumulated appears to be methodical and precise.

*Mapping India* is accompanied by references and list of suggested readings and a detailed glossary which guides the reader in the understanding and reading of maps. It is a beautifully printed book and produced with the assistance of the Niyogi Books.

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Reading the book suggests its mission, which is to draw attention to the many maps and drawings housed in several archives in India, Portugal, Denmark, Holland, England, France and elsewhere. Certainly these present new historical value in terms of spatial records of cities, regions and the art of map-making. The book also consists of additional materials which can help scholars beyond an audience of historians and cartographers interested in urban and military developments. Lahiri provides the original plans which are reproductions of first-rate photographic impressions, with a clear introduction to the sources and creation of various maps and also documents the career of the artists and cartographers.