

# Introduction

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This book is not a standard history of India. It does not present a connected narrative of India's historical trajectory between 1750 and 2000; a different agenda is at work here. Writing a global history of India is a project that is not simply a concession to current fashion. Indian historiography is riddled with controversies that often have their origins in the difficulty of locating India's history in a broader canvas. One of India's finest historians, Ashin Das Gupta, is reported as saying: '[W]ithout going out of India, one cannot explain India.'<sup>1</sup> As a corollary, one could argue that without coming into India, it is impossible to explain the world outside India. Both these assumptions guide the writing of this book.

## Some Methodological Remarks

There is an apparent contradiction between seeking a global approach to history on the one hand and focusing on one specific country or region, whatever its size, on the other. 'Global' historians generally tend either to deal with spaces that are larger than one country, particularly maritime spaces,<sup>2</sup> or to engage with specific time periods.<sup>3</sup> There is clearly no set formula for writing 'globally' about one specific region.

While it is easier to justify writing a global history of India rather than, say, of Liechtenstein, the question is not primarily one of size. Global history refers to a methodology rather than to a specific spatiality. There is, however, no consensus as to what exactly this methodology is, and there are many different ways of writing global history, as underlined in a recent book by Diego Olstein (2014). One possible approach is through comparison. A global comparative approach has been advocated by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) with his project of 'provincialisation' of Europe. Through a critique of mainstream liberal and Marxist historiographies that suggest that Europe's historical trajectory

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Subrahmanyam (2001: 3).

<sup>2</sup> For the Mediterranean, see Braudel (1972/3) and for the Indian Ocean, Chaudhuri (1985).

<sup>3</sup> See the worldwide surveys of the nineteenth century by Christopher Bayly (2004a) and Jürgen Osterhammel (2014).

towards bourgeois capitalist modernity is the common future of mankind, the author advances the idea of a possible different outcome through a case study of colonial Bengal. The problem, as recognised by Chakrabarty himself, is that this requires the construction of a ‘hyper-real’ Europe in a manner that tends to obscure the messy and random nature of the European historical experience. In this book, I shall make use of an alternative approach, that of connected histories. Drawing some general inspiration from Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s (2005) seminal work, I seek to explore the multiple connections that linked the region known now as ‘India’ to other regions of the world over the period 1750–2000 and to draw attention to the ways in which these connections shaped India as well as shaping these other regions, as in a game of mirrors. Although the connection to Europe assumed special importance during the 1765–1947 period of colonial domination over India, it never erased other connections. Some, like the connections to the Islamic world or to South-East Asia, had been crucial in an earlier period. Others, linking India with China, Japan, North America and different parts of Africa, became also significant during the colonial era. Drawing on the fact that India occupied an essential place in the history of the British Empire, authors such as Thomas Metcalf (2007a), Donald Anthony Low (1991), Christopher Bayly (1989) and David Washbrook (2012) have been able to contribute significantly to a ‘new imperial history’ that treats the Empire as polycentric. In this book, however, while acknowledging the importance of this body of work, I aim to go beyond an imperial framework. The world is the background against which this global history of India is written because India’s history at different moments impinged upon the history of the world in significant ways; at other times, the reverse was true.

### **The Meaning of ‘India’**

‘India’ itself was a constantly changing notion, not strictly bound by the facts of geography. As the global historical context changed, so did the meaning of ‘India’. Underpinning this work is also the idea that we cannot assume the ‘India’ as it could be thought of circa 1750 to be the same ‘India’ at the threshold of the twenty-first century. Nor is this primarily because of the 1947 Partition of British India between the two successor states of India and Pakistan, although the Partition has undoubtedly added to the complexity of the question. By the mid-eighteenth century, ‘India’ (a term used by outsiders rather than by the inhabitants of the subcontinent, who preferred the terms ‘Bharat’ or ‘Hindustan’) did not refer to a territory with clearly defined borders. For the Portuguese, the ‘Estado da Índia’, that fragile colonial construction by then more than two centuries old, extended from Mozambique in East Africa (administered from Goa till 1752) to Macau in China and Timor in

the Indonesian archipelago. For the British East India Company (EIC), from the time of its foundation in 1600 till the mid-eighteenth century, its Indian domain started at the island of Saint-Helena off the coast of Africa and extended all the way to the island of Pulo Condor off the coast of Vietnam (Stern 2011). For the Portuguese and the English as well as for the Dutch, East India, or the East Indies, as it was often known, referred primarily to a maritime space in which they held only a few scattered establishments on land. The land-based Timurid (Mughal) emperors of Delhi, although reduced since Nadir Shah's invasion of 1739 to a pathetic rump, well epitomised a few years later by the sarcastic verse 'from Delhi to Palam [today an area of Delhi] is the kingdom of Shah Alam', for their part still lay claim to their ancestral homeland in Central Asia as well as to Kabul in present-day Afghanistan. Their Hindustan had no definite borders either. From an economic perspective, *hundis* (sorts of bills of exchange underwritten by various powerful communities of Indian bankers) circulated across an immense space, both continental and maritime, extending from the heart of Russia all the way to Malacca on the eponymous Straits, as well as reaching to Oman and Zanzibar on the western rim of that Ocean known as 'Indian', the only one of the three oceans to derive its name from a particular land area (although its naming as 'Indian' seems to be a contribution of nineteenth-century European geographers). These fragile pieces of paper, undecipherable by the non-initiated but easily convertible into any currency, defined an 'India of credit' that was much more extended than any territorially bound India.

'India' circa 1750, we can easily infer, meant different things to different people, and not only in terms of space. While it would be fatuous to claim that we know what it meant to its 'ordinary' inhabitants, who left no written traces of their thoughts, its elites harboured contrasted visions of it. To those Europeans who came mostly to trade, in increasing numbers, but also to fight in the service of their countries or of indigenous rulers as mercenaries, it was a land of opportunity where one could hope to make a fortune but also a land of dangers, with its fever-prone climate to which they succumbed so easily and its tiger-infested jungles. They felt as a rule no attachment to it and thought of themselves as 'birds of passage', even if some of them had acquired a degree of familiarity with its languages and its cultures, often through the forging of intimate relationships with local women. One category of Europeans with considerable local knowledge were the Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant: they were few, but some made their mark, like the Italian Jesuit Costanzo Gioseffo Beschi (1680–1747), known in Tamil as *Viramamunivar*, 'The Great Heroic Sage', for his significant contribution to Tamil belles-lettres (Ebeling and Trento 2018). Barring exceptional cases like that of Beschi, Europeans, whatever their nationality, were seen by the locals in an undifferentiated manner as *Firinghis* ('Franks'), a term with a definitely dismissive

connotation. Although the same locals did not shrink from having business deals with them, they were somehow wary of deeper entanglements. To the Muslims, often recent immigrants or descendants of immigrants, who ruled most of its states and had a dominant presence in most of its cities, Hindustan was definitely a part of the Islamic world: the numerous tombs of Sufi saints that dotted the landscape gave it even a degree of sanctity, although the powerful presence of non-Muslims lurking everywhere was viewed as problematic. These elite Muslims, known as *ashraf* (noble) to distinguish them from the plebeian *ajlaf*, also saw India as a land of opportunity, but they varied widely in their degree of attachment to it and in their level of proficiency in its languages, although a shift had started amongst them in the eighteenth century from the exclusive use of Persian as court and literary language to a partial use of varieties of Urdu, a local language. As to the non-Muslim elites, the Brahmins and Rajputs who occupied the topmost position in the Hindu caste system, even though they were not yet commonly known under the appellation of 'Hindus', they entertained different ideas of its sanctity, focused around certain rivers, above all the Ganges, and certain cities, of which Benares was the holiest. Their linguistic register was varied, encompassing the ancient Sanskrit language, different vernaculars as well as Persian, in which many of them were proficient. Their perception of that sacred land's relationship to the outside world remains a little-researched topic. A frequently invoked *topos* is that of the religious taboo on the crossing of the *kala pani*, the 'black waters', that is, the sea (and the Indus River beyond Attock in present-day Pakistan). Those who crossed it were supposed to lose their caste and had to undergo costly rituals to be reintegrated into society. The taboo attached mostly to members of the upper castes; it never prevented traders from travelling all over the world. It remains therefore a matter of dispute how constraining it was. One thing is sure, however: for Hindus, travelling abroad entailed confronting daily problems regarding ritual purity, particularly in matters of food. There was also the problem that, in case they died on foreign soil, cremation was often not possible, being prohibited in many Christian and Muslim lands, and Brahmins being rarely present to perform the necessary rituals. This may explain that non-Hindus such as Muslims, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Christians were often disproportionately represented in the ranks of the expatriates. How did inhabitants of the rest of the world interact with India and Indians? Before the era of mass travel, which started in the 1960s, most of them knew India only through texts and images, more rarely through contacts with travelling Indians. A whole imaginary of India existed in different parts of the world, the exploration of which has generated a considerable body of scholarship. European 'orientalism', a hotly disputed topic in the wake of scholar Edward Saïd's seminal contribution, will be treated as one specific modality of this imaginary.

Two and a half centuries later, in a world of nation-states with clearly defined borders they guarded jealously, 'India' is generally understood as referring to the 'Republic of India', the post-colonial state born of the Partition of British India in 1947. This is also the choice made in this book: it has been decided, for pragmatic reasons, not to deal with the global histories of Pakistan and Bangladesh, which were parts of British India but followed separate trajectories after the 1947 Partition. At the beginning of the third millennium, India – that outwardly powerful state, the second largest in the world in terms of population, the fourth in terms of military forces, the sixth or seventh in terms of the size of its economy (calculated at purchasing power parity) – was embroiled in border disputes with two of its neighbours, Pakistan, against which it had waged three wars between 1948 and 1971, the latest ending with the partition of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, and China, to which it had disastrously lost a short war in 1962. While the borders with these two countries may have been contested on the ground, with occasional skirmishes taking place, India lay claim to all the contested territories and prohibited the maps that did not recognise its claims. Such an attitude revealed deep underlying anxieties about security and the place of India in the post-Cold War 'global disorder'. The 'global India' of 2000, defined also by its participation in an increasingly globalised economy after several decades of relative economic isolationism, and the existence of an extended diaspora, had little to do with the 'global India' of 1750, caught in a moment of transition between old and new empires.

### **Global India before 1750**

We are at the outset faced with a paradox: while there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the region which is now known as India was connected in various ways, by land and by sea, to different regions of Asia and Africa from the earliest historical times, the dominant Brahmanical culture that flourished on the subcontinent never acknowledged the fact; even less did it produce a coherent xenology, that is, an understanding of the world outside India and the inhabitants of that world. Occasional allusions are found in literary texts to the visits of foreign traders: thus, some of the 2,381 poems of the corpus known as the Tamil Sangam literature, composed between 300 BCE and 300 CE, evoke the ships of the *Yavanas* (Ionians) *Yavanas*, the Greek sailors the Greek sailors who, in Roman times, between circa 116 BCE and 300 CE, made annual voyages from the Egyptian shores of the Red Sea to the port of Muziris on the coast of Kerala, bringing pottery and wines from the Mediterranean and returning laden with the productions of India and China, including silks and cottons. Their voyages are otherwise known to us through the famous *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (c.30–70 CE), a navigation treatise in Greek compiled in

Alexandria which gives a detailed description of the routes and the ports (Huntingford 2017), and through an often-quoted text in which Latin author Pliny the Ancient (30–79 CE) deplored the haemorrhage of sesterces (units of Roman currency) caused to the Roman Empire by this Indian trade (Travilian 2015). Following the closure of the route by the Axumites of Eritrea around 300 CE, that ancient link was forgotten in India as well as in Europe and rediscovered only recently. More surprisingly, Alexander the Great's raid into the Punjab and the victory his army gained over the elephants of a local sovereign on the banks of the river Hydaspes (Jhelum) in 326 BCE, an event much celebrated in the literatures of the ancient and medieval world, failed to gain any notice from Sanskrit authors in India. The pull of Brahmanical ideology and of its belief in the unique sacredness of the land of Bharat, which was conceived of as an island surrounded on all sides by the lands of the *Mleccha* (impure, non-Hindus), proved stronger than historical realities.

In the period between 800 and 1500 CE, however, Indians – Hindus as well as Muslims – travelled widely in search of trade: the presence of Indian traders in Arabia is attested since at least the ninth century CE (Wink 1990), and the ruins of a fourteenth-century Hindu temple have been excavated in the South Chinese port of Quanzhou (also known as Zaitun), testimony to the presence of an active community of traders from South India in the South China Sea, much beyond the Straits of Malacca (Chen and Lombard 2000). The great Ming naval expeditions of admiral Zheng Ho of the early fifteenth century touched Calicut in Kerala, but direct trading relations with China seem to have ceased after 1433. In the fifteenth century, the port of Cambay in Gujarat was a major hub of trade whose linkages reached across the entire Indian Ocean. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese author of the early-sixteenth-century *Suma Oriental*, famously wrote that Cambay extended two arms, one towards Aden and the other towards Malacca (Corteseo 1944). In the late fifteenth century, Gujarati traders stood at the heart of a kind of thalassocracy, meaning that they had a dominant position in maritime trade in most of the Indian Ocean; only the arrival of the Portuguese fleets after 1498 put an end to it. Nor was Indian commercial enterprise limited to the sea-routes: in Central Asia, the English traveller Anthony Jenkinson met Indian merchants in Bukhara (Buxoro in present-day Uzbekistan) circa 1550 and testified to their dominance of the local market for textiles (Morgan 1886). An active caravan trade linked Northern India with Central Asia across Afghanistan and Iran and even extended into Russia, where Astrakhan, a port on the Caspian Sea, was home to a thriving Indian merchant community in the first half of the seventeenth century. Regarding that trade, American historian Stephen Dale has talked of an 'Indian world-economy', which might be an exaggeration but has the merit of drawing attention to the extended reach of trading networks from India (Dale 1994). Worth mentioning also is that Muslim traders from Surat are known to have started regular

voyages to Guangzhou (Canton) in Southern China from 1698, thus renewing an old link.

The most important commodity that Indian traders dealt in was cotton textiles. While India had the benefit of an abundant supply of the raw material, its global prominence in the trade in cotton textiles was mostly owing to the superiority of the dyeing and finishing techniques its artisans had been perfecting since the thirteenth century (Gittinger 1982). Printing, painting and penciling were widely practised by them and gave added value even to ordinary cloth, as consumers all over the world were attracted to the unique designs and colours of Indian-produced textiles, which often supplemented locally produced cloth. Indian cloth was not only appreciated for its utility; it often had ritual and political significance, too, particularly in South-East Asia, which was probably its largest foreign market.

In South-East Asia, the connections with India were not only commercial: across the region, epigraphic sources in different Indian languages reveal a widespread circulation of Brahmins and craftsmen from the subcontinent over a period of several centuries, resulting in a process often characterised as the 'Hinduisation' of the area. This term is now contested, but in the late nineteenth century it gave rise amongst Indian literati to the myth of a 'Greater India' (Susan Bayly 2004). The magnificent temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Borobodur and Prambanan in Java testify to the direct impact of Indian architectural models, even though Hinduism as a religion survived only on the tiny island of Bali and in a very idiosyncratic form. Another index of lasting Indian cultural influence in the region is the high degree of Sanskritisation of most regional languages, a legacy of the existence of what Sheldon Pollock called the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' of the 300–1300 CE period (Pollock 2006). Most important globally was the spread of the Buddha's message from India to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Central Asia, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan, although Indian Buddhist missionaries did not venture farther than China, and Buddhism practically disappeared in India itself. Islam also came to South-East Asia partly through the agency of Indian traders and religious scholars. Apart from religious doctrines, Indian literary texts also travelled widely: versions of the great Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* exist in all major South-East Asian languages. The Chola rulers of Tamil Nadu (a region of South India) even mounted a naval expedition towards Sumatra and the Straits of Malacca circa 1025 CE (Kulke 2009), a rare instance of projection of military force from India towards its neighbourhood: ancient and medieval Indian states did not as a rule seek territorial expansion beyond the subcontinent, whose legendary wealth tended on the contrary to attract potential invaders from poorer lands. India was exposed to repeated invasions from the west and the northwest by land (through the famous Khyber Pass) and by sea. While early invaders such as

the Kushans and the Huns did not have a durable impact, the rise of Islamic empires was to have a profound long-term influence on India's historical trajectory: the western borderland of Sindh was conquered by a naval expedition sent by the Arab Umayyads as early as in the eighth century CE, and the Northern Indian heartland in its turn was exposed from the end of the tenth century CE to the repeated land incursions of the Turkic peoples from Central Asia, resulting in the late-twelfth/early-thirteenth-century Ghurid conquest and the foundation of the sultanate of Delhi. The end of the fourteenth century saw the brief but devastating invasion by Timur (also known as Tamerlane), the memory of which was used by his descendants, who called themselves Timurids but are known mostly as Mughals, to lay claim to Hindustan in the early sixteenth century after they had been chased out of their Central Asian domain by the rising Uzbek power. In the meantime, taking advantage of the decline of the Delhi sultanate, Afghan warlords had been carving kingdoms for themselves in Northern India: Babur, the first Mughal emperor (r. 1526–30), and his son Humayun (r. 1530–40, 1555–6) had to fight them for several decades before they eventually prevailed, laying the foundation for Akbar to create an Indian empire of formidable proportions. In the Deccan, an ephemeral empire known as Bahmanid had given way in the late fifteenth century to five sultanates that were ruled by Muslims, some of whom hailed from Iran and were Shi'a, while others came from East Africa and Central Asia and were Sunni.

At the end of the fifteenth century, a new kind of foreigners – the Portuguese, from one of Europe's smallest kingdoms – made a surprise landing in Calicut (present-day Kozhikode) on the west coast and tried to insert themselves by force into the profitable trade in Kerala pepper, which had been dominated since the twelfth century by the Venetians operating in conjunction with Indian, Arab and Iranian traders. They reopened the maritime route through the Red Sea, which had been closed since the fourth century, and supplemented it with a land route followed by caravans. The Portuguese voyages, starting with Vasco de Gama's expedition of 1497–8 (Subrahmanyam 1997), were a direct outcome of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which, following Columbus's voyage of 1492, had, under the auspices of the papacy, divided the 'world to discover' between the two Iberian monarchies of Spain and Portugal according to an imaginary line. The Portuguese were free to follow the route east of the Cape of Good Hope, recognised in 1488 by Bartolomeu Dias. The lure of the profits to be gained from the spice trade undoubtedly figured high in the Portuguese Crown's calculations. A powerful supplementary incentive had been the desire to strike at the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt, which had established its control over the maritime route in the fifteenth century. The Mamluks were then the greatest Muslim power and King Manuel I of Portugal (r. 1495–1521) was inspired by the dream of a reconquest of Jerusalem from the



Muslims. He placed great hopes in an alliance with the Christian kingdom of the elusive Priest John, who was in fact the Christian ruler of Ethiopia, but was thought to have his seat in India where there was only a small community of Syrian Christians in Kerala. Hence the answer given (in Castilian) by a sailor of Vasco's fleet to the two Tunis merchants he met on his landing in Calicut in May 1498: when they asked what the Portuguese had come in search of, he replied, 'Christians and spices'.<sup>4</sup> Despite using brute force at sea in a way that was unprecedented in the region, the Portuguese never actually managed to establish a monopoly over the spice trade; rather, the Venetians, in conjunction with the rising Ottoman power, maintained their significant position in it till the end of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese did, however, open up a direct maritime route between Europe and Asia round the Cape of Good Hope. This became widely used and integrated India into a global trading circuit: thus it was that, while on its way to India in 1500, the second Portuguese fleet of Pedro Alvares Cabral, blown off course by strong winds west of the Cape Verde islands, struck the coast of Brazil. For several decades, the Portuguese fleets on the maritime route known as the 'Carreira da Índia' called at Bahia en route between Lisbon and Goa.

The quasi-concomitance of the arrivals of the Portuguese (1498) and the Mughals (1526), although fortuitous, had the consequence of placing India at the crossroads of two major maritime routes linking Europe with Asia by way of Africa, and at the heart of a rivalry between Christian and Islamic empires for supremacy in Eurasia, especially after the Crowns of Portugal and Spain had been joined in 1580 (and for sixty years) under the same sovereign. In spite of its maritime weakness (but the Portuguese naval threat had been diminished by the entry of the Dutch and the English into the Indian Ocean), India, partly unified under Mughal rule, became an important participant in an emerging world political order. It was a kind of 'global' power capable of holding its own, whose sovereign, the 'Grand Mogol', was recognised by the European chanceries as being of equal status to the 'Grand Seigneur' (the Ottoman Sultan) and 'His Catholic Majesty' (the King of Spain and Portugal) and in an exalted position vis-à-vis his immediate neighbour the 'Grand Soufi' (the Safavid ruler of Persia).

While it could muster impressive armies, thanks to the existence of a vast reservoir of armed peasants available for service in the infantry, Mughal India's status as a great power was largely owing to its economic weight. Apart from the wealth generated by the control of a fertile and densely populated rural Gangetic hinterland which yielded a bounty in taxes, the annexations of Gujarat and Bengal at the end of the sixteenth century added two economic powerhouses,

<sup>4</sup> *Voyages de Vasco de Gama, Relations des expéditions de 1497–1498 & 1502–1503, traduites et annotées par Paul Teyssier et Paul Valentin, et présentées par Jean Aubin*, Paris, Chandeigne, 1995, p. 125.

although Bengal's textile industry had not yet reached its maximum level of development. By the end of the seventeenth century, India could be said to have become the true 'workshop of the world', its textiles, known generically as 'calicoes' (from Calicut) or '*indiennes*', circulating across the four continents of the then known universe. As India bought little from Europe, besides some woollens and wines, the deficit in the trade balance was largely plugged with specie (precious metals). Consequently, part of the production of the American silver mines of Potosi and Mexico, as well as of the Japanese silver mines (till the Tokugawa shogunate forbade the export circa 1660), ended up in India. One channel through which the silver reached India was the Dutch in Yemen: they paid for the Mocha coffee in silver piastres with which the local Yemeni traders in turn purchased cloth brought from Gujarat. Gujarati traders carried the piastres to Surat, a port under Mughal sovereignty, which had replaced Cambay as the main hub of the trade of the western Indian Ocean. Another circuit was through the 'Manila galleon', which twice a year brought a cargo of Mexican silver from Acapulco in Mexico to Spanish Manila, in the Philippines, across the Pacific (Giraldez 2015). There, some of it was exchanged for Chinese silks and Indian cottons destined for the markets of Spanish America, while Chinese merchants carried the remainder to Macau, whence part of it was sent to Goa. Eventually a lot of this silver found its way into the mints of the Mughal Empire and served to underwrite the Mughal currency, contributing to the prosperity of the Empire. Contrary to a widespread idea, India was thus an important participant in the world economy even before the advent of colonialism.

At the level of ideas, India entered the intellectual horizon of Europeans in a significant way in the seventeenth century, while the reverse was less true, an asymmetry which would have significant long-term consequences. In the sixteenth century, interest in India had been largely confined to the Portuguese, and to a lesser extent the Italians. Portuguese texts, a rich corpus in which were found some remarkable descriptions of the country and its inhabitants, the most famous being Duarte Barbosa's *Livro* with its detailed picture of Kerala's society, did not, however, have a very wide circulation in Europe as the print industry of that small country did not diffuse much outside its borders. Some of these texts were known through Italian collections, like the *Navigazioni et Viaggi* published in Venice in 1550–9 by Giovanni Ramusio, but their circulation remained relatively limited. Things changed in the seventeenth century when French and English authors entered the fray, supported by powerful print industries in their respective countries (and in the Netherlands). Thus, the account by French doctor and philosopher François Bernier (1620–88), a member of an influential intellectual circle in Paris, of his travels in India at the time of the accession to the Mughal throne of Emperor Aurangzeb, published in Amsterdam in 1669 (Bernier 1969), became a bestseller that did a lot to

popularise the notion of 'oriental despotism'. English playwright John Dryden (1631–1700) even made Aurangzeb the central character of a tragedy that was staged in London in 1675 (Beaurline and Bowers 1967).

On the Mughal side, Emperors Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and Jahangir (r. 1605–27) welcomed Jesuit embassies at their court and allowed the Fathers to take part in debates with representatives of Indian religions, but their knowledge of Europe remained second-hand as they did not send embassies there. The absence of a print culture in India was a major obstacle to the dissemination of knowledge beyond small court circles. Mughal India's most significant external connections therefore remained those with the rest of the Islamic world, particularly with Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. There was a regular stream of migration from these lands towards India: Iranians, Afghans and 'Turanians' (Central Asians) were attracted by India's wealth and the numerous opportunities for employment at the Mughal court for literate Muslims. Many of these men gained prominent positions at the court at diverse moments. The Persian language, which was the language of the court as well as the major literary language, was a powerful link between Mughal India and that part of the Islamic world where it was dominant. It also served in relations with the Ottoman Empire, where Persian, although second to Turkish and Arabic, was in widespread use amongst literati. Mughals and Ottomans, as two major Sunni-dominated empires, had significant political and commercial relations, by-passing Shi'a-ruled Persia. Even in South-East Asia, Persian had a foothold in Arakan (Rakhine in present-day Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand), and this helped in nurturing relations across the Bay of Bengal. Mughal India was a major participant in a Persian-speaking ecumene that covered a large part of Asia.

Outside that ecumene, however, the Mughals had no regular relations with China, and appear not to have known much about Korea and Japan. In these countries, similarly, little was known about India, despite the Indian deities and the Sanskrit language having found their way there in the wake of the spread of Mahayana Buddhism. Indeed, the earliest known printed book was a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit Buddhist text known as the *Diamond Sutra*, done in 868 CE, but in later times knowledge of Sanskrit in China declined. A Chinese novel published in 1579, largely based on the account of Admiral Zheng Ho's voyages of the early fifteenth century, testified to a vision of India in which fact was mixed with fantasy. As shown by Matthew Mosca (2013), official Chinese views of India remained characterised by a degree of confusion and uncertainty till the mid-eighteenth century. The same author, however, mentions a Chinese text written in 1724 by a Muslim author that took note of the existence of a powerful Muslim state in India. In Japan, where Buddhism had come via China and Korea, knowledge of India was also fuzzy. Nevertheless, an actual connection between India and that country was established at the end of the sixteenth century through the agency of Portuguese Christian missionaries such

as the famous Saint Francis Xavier. In 1583, four Japanese catechists stopped in Goa on their way to Rome, the first Japanese to have landed on Indian soil. Japanese rulers were even deceived by Portuguese propaganda into believing that India was under Portuguese domination, and India was thus included in warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (Berry 1982) 1591 plan for the conquest of the world (he did not, however, make it further than Korea). At a later stage, Japanese knowledge about India was part of *rangaku*, the 'Dutch science' encouraged by the Tokugawa shoguns, following the restriction of the foreign presence in Japan to the small Dutch establishment of Deshima in Nagasaki Bay (Goodman 2013). Dutch sources were supplemented by occasional testimonies of other foreigners, such as that of the captured Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Sidotti (1668–1714): those found their way into a major compilation by a Tokugawa official, Arai Hakuseki's *seyio kibun* ('Book of the West') (1715). In it were included some snippets of information about Mughal India, as well as about some of the European coastal establishments.

Circa 1750, India's 'global' connections were far from insignificant. Apart from a widespread presence of literati and warriors from different parts of the Islamic world, the subcontinent was home to active communities of foreign merchants. One could talk of a 'cosmopolitan' India, but it certainly did not encompass the entire subcontinent. Vast areas of the Indian hinterlands remained largely unaffected by phenomena of long-distance circulation. The coastal areas were naturally the most involved in these connections, but they were also important for the Northern borderlands, whence caravans departed annually for the interior of Asia. The most cosmopolitan places in India were undoubtedly the settlements of the Dutch, British and French commercial companies, in which small groups of expatriate merchants mingled with a much larger group of local merchants and intermediaries of all kinds. There, different European and Asian languages could be heard, although a kind of Portuguese *sabir* often served as a lingua franca. Churches stood close to mosques and Hindu temples, serving the spiritual needs of the expatriates as well as of a small population of local converts to Christianity. The largest of these settlements, British Madras (present-day Chennai) and Calcutta (present-day Kolkata), French Pondicherry (present-day Puducherry) and Dutch Cochin (present-day Kochi) constituted kinds of 'micro-states' with their small garrisons, municipal institutions and courts of justice, and they could call on the fleets of the most powerful European states to defend themselves in case of danger. Europeans lived there in a separate area known as the 'White Town', to distinguish it from the 'Black Town' inhabited by the 'natives'. Goa, the capital of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, although comparable in size, was less cosmopolitan as the only languages heard there were Portuguese and the local Konkani, and no non-Catholic places of worship were tolerated, under the vigilant watch of the Portuguese Inquisition. Other

European settlements were much smaller, including Bombay (present-day Mumbai), and Europeans lived cheek by jowl with the indigenous population. The economic influence of the Europeans extended well beyond the boundaries of their establishments as they bought each year a significant part of India's textile production for sale on the markets of Europe, Africa and the Americas, and imported specie in large quantities for their purchases. The Dutch VOC (Dutch EIC), which had its main Asian establishment in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in Java, remained a significant commercial actor in India: while on the retreat in Gujarat and on the Coromandel coast, it remained involved in the Malabar pepper trade from its large establishment of Cochin (Das Gupta 1967). Despite their growing commercial presence, it would be an exaggeration to picture Europeans (amongst whom were also Danes, Swedes, Germans and Ostenders from the Austrian Netherlands) as occupying a dominant position on the overall Indian economic and political stage. Apart from powerful Indian trading communities, there were also active communities of Armenian, Arab and Iranian merchants, as well as (perhaps?) a few Chinese traders. Armenians, Christian subjects of the Persian Safavid Empire with their headquarters in New Julfa, near Isfahan (Aslanian 2011), were particularly significant as intermediaries for the European commercial companies, especially in Bengal where they played a major role in the fast-developing English settlement of Calcutta, which was becoming the top exporting port for Indian textiles at the expense of Madras. Iranian, Afghan and Arab traders were geographically more dispersed, and not as attracted to the European settlements.

Change was afoot: in the 1740s, both the French and the English companies, caught in the reverberation of an escalating conflict between the two most powerful European states, had started a process of territorial expansion in South India, and had levied locally indigenous soldiers known as *sepoys* (from Persian *sipahi*) to supplement their small contingents of *Topasses* (Portuguese *mestiços*) and Europeans. The decade of the 1740s had also witnessed a sudden resurgence of Portuguese power with the 'Novas Conquistas' that, by 1763, had extended Portuguese rule significantly in the hinterland of Goa (Disney 2009: 320–1). As Mughal power showed itself incapable of recovering from the terrible blow inflicted by Iran's Turcoman ruler Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 and the attendant sack of Delhi, India was entering a phase of great political uncertainty. The Europeans, now in possession of significant land forces to supplement their fleets, were for the first time in a position to vie for supremacy with the main Indian contestants, the Mahrattas, the Mughal successor states of Awadh, Hyderabad, Bengal and Arcot, the new Muslim state of Mysore, and the Durrani rulers from Afghanistan who assumed the mantle of Nadir Shah and launched a succession of devastating raids into Northern India. No one could have then predicted that the British EIC would emerge victorious from this multi-

cornered fight for supremacy. In the following decades, it would become increasingly clear that the fight for supremacy in India was part of a fight for global supremacy between the British and the French, in which Indian powers were gradually reduced to a subsidiary role. This story has been told many times, and it will not be revisited in detail in this book. The global history of India in the period 1750–2000 will instead be explored through its many other dimensions, some of which have tended to be overlooked in the existing literature. Priority will be given to the ways in which Indians of various backgrounds interacted with the outside world.

### **A Brief Outline of the Book**

Chapter 1 focuses on India's role in the world economy, which recorded significant changes. In the nineteenth century, it changed from that of an industrial powerhouse to that of a provider of raw materials to the economies of the West (and of Japan). In the High Imperial Era (1860–1914), India's commodities became important to British imperial finances, especially after 1890 when, under the gold standard, her export surplus served to compensate Britain's growing deficit in its exchanges with some advanced economies. After 1914, her importance to Britain's balance of payments diminished, but her role in keeping sterling a world currency only increased. After independence, India, free from financial obligations towards Britain, sought to build an independent economy, but, despite some significant achievements, a change in orientation took place circa 1990, as India reinvigorated its links to the world economy in a context of increased globalisation. Indian capital had significant ramifications abroad, but it was mostly as a source of labour that India mattered to the global economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter 2 takes up the story of India's role in global human circulations, with a clear focus on the way that Indian labour migrations were tied to a global process of labour circulation. While the export of indentured labour to the sugarcane-producing colonies of the British Empire as a substitute for African slaves, following the abolition of slavery in 1833, is often given prominence in historical accounts of the Indian diaspora, the chapter draws attention to other forms of labour circulation from colonial India, such as those under the *kangani-maistry* system. It also looks at migration towards India from different countries, although it never happened on a scale comparable to outmigration. Following the abolition of indenture in 1916, labour migration remained significant, although in often unspectacular ways. The Second World War and independence inaugurated a phase of diminished circulation that gave way, from the mid-1960s, to a new surge directed at both First World countries and the Gulf oil-producing countries. India thus remained an important exporter of labour, but skilled workers and professionals accounted for

a growing share of those departing, especially towards the United States. On the other hand, immigrant labourers were almost exclusively drawn from neighbouring Nepal and Bangladesh.

Chapter 3 looks at the role of India in the world of armed conflict, with a focus on the participation of Indian sepoys in many wars outside India, starting with an expedition to Manila in 1762 and ending with the intervention of Indian troops in the repression of an anti-Dutch rising in Java in 1945, through a massive participation in the fighting in the two world wars. Eschewing an exclusive focus on military history, the archive of sepoy deployments outside India is scrutinised for the unique information it yields on the ways in which 'ordinary' Indians, those not belonging to the elite, interacted with foreign lands and foreign people, a topic on which sources are few. To a legacy of interventions in the service of British imperialism succeeded one of participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations by the army of independent India. We also ask whether India, by pursuing the nuclear option in its defence policy, in effect contributed to world peace.

Chapter 4 examines the role of Indians in the global exchange of ideas. It focuses first on religion, with a look at the emergence of Hinduism as one of the world religions at the end of the nineteenth century as well as at the impact that the discovery of Hinduism had on the intellectual life of Western countries. It proceeds with an examination of Indian Muslims' role on the global Islamic stage through the study of transnational Islamic movements that originated in India; it looks then at the role of Indians in the history of Christianity and Buddhism. Moving to the field of science, the chapter examines the contribution made by Indian scientists to global science. It takes up the question of the reception in India of global political ideologies, with a focus on liberalism, communism and fascism. The question of Gandhi's influence outside India is also considered. Lastly, it examines the story of one academic trend born in India that spread globally, the 'Subaltern Studies'.

Chapter 5 looks at the role played by Indians in the global field of culture, with a focus on literature, the visual arts and cinema. In literature and the visual arts, Indian productions rarely reached international audiences, but there were noteworthy exceptions: the amazing trajectory of the ancient Sanskrit play *Sakuntala* is charted through a look at its many translations and adaptations in different countries. Attention is then drawn to the extraordinary fame gained by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore at the time when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. Rather than focusing on the literature of the Indian diaspora, which has attracted a lot of attention, the chapter examines the ways in which Indian writers took up the challenge of new literary forms, in prose and poetry. In the field of visual arts, the focus is on the adoption of new techniques in the search for an original Indian artistic idiom. In the domain of cinema, attention is mostly drawn to the emergence of India's film industry as

a major provider of entertainment on the world stage from the 1950s, with a focus on the diffusion of Indian cinema beyond the Western world, in the Soviet Union and in many countries of Africa.

Chapter 6 looks at the multiple interactions between Indians and others through an examination of actual encounters rather than imaginary ones. It looks at the tense relationships that developed between Indian immigrants and their hosts in various countries, often marked by violence. Indian travel narratives, a relatively thin corpus, are searched for what they reveal of perceptions by Indians of the world outside India: these are shown to be characterised by a degree of myopia, with a tendency to privilege consideration of Indian communities over the inhabitants of the foreign countries visited. The chapter ends with a look at the way that Indians perceived and received the outsiders who came to India in smaller but not insignificant numbers.

Chapter 7 looks at two episodes in Indian history that attracted worldwide attention, the Great Revolt of 1857 and the Partition of 1947, and seeks to put forward an interpretation of them as 'global events'. While the impact of 1857 was mostly felt at the level of representations, as epitomised by the vast corpus of literature it inspired in many different languages, the Partition failed to elicit many reactions from contemporary observers outside the subcontinent and was mostly an object of comparative analysis for later political historians.

The Conclusion takes notice of recent political developments in India, with the turn to Hindu nationalism revealed by the second consecutive victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. We try to ponder how this relates to India's global history as charted in the book. The answer is in terms of a certain amount of continuity, as the BJP's victory is shown to be part of a worldwide resurgence of right-wing forces but also of a significant break, as the Hindutva regime claims for India a unique trajectory of a-historical modernity, based on a reading of Vedic texts as containing in essence all present-day scientific and technological developments. We end up by asking what this inward turn in India's global positioning means for the common future of humanity.