PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The *Oxford History of India* was first published in 1919 carrying the Indian story down to 1911. It was entirely the work of the late Vincent Smith and was at once hailed as a monument of wide learning, of concise statement, and of forthright opinion. It came to be regarded as an invaluable compendium of the subject, and its solid merits have been such that it remains a live work after forty years of rapid change, not only in India itself but in opinion about its history. Smith's history has been disparaged as dull and pilloried as prejudiced, but there are few persistent readers who have not found the dullness allied to a regard for accuracy, and most of the prejudice to be expressions of honest even if sometimes mistaken judgement. Vincent Smith's history has lived because it was basically founded on sound knowledge and shrewd judgement, and because these qualities were compounded with a vivid personality which made the book 'alive' in spite of its matter-of-fact approach. The fact that a work composed at the end of the imperial British age and in the spirit of that age is still read in contemporary independent India is sufficient evidence of its solid worth and enduring quality.

A second edition appeared in 1923. The book was revised by the late S. M. Edwardes who added a section bringing the record to 1921.

Since then an era in Indian history which seemed likely in 1912 to persist indefinitely has come to an end; not only maps but thought and a whole climate of opinion have changed; it is therefore inevitable that there should be considerable changes in any new edition. Nevertheless it has been found practicable to retain much of Smith's work in Parts I and II. In the third edition a new chapter on the Indian pre-history which has come to light since Vincent Smith's death has been written by Sir R. Mortimer Wheeler. The remainder of the Ancient Indian period (Books I–III) has been revised by Professor A. L. Basham of the London School of Oriental and African Studies. The medieval or Muslim period (Books IV–VI) has been similarly revised by Mr. J. B. Harrison of the same School. It is revealing of Smith's outlook and characteristic of his work that the revision of the medieval period should be more extensive than the ancient. For the British period, however, such methods would not suffice. The change in perspective has been too great; repair of the garment would have produced a patchwork, not a renovated piece. The whole part (Books VII–X) has therefore been rewritten by a single hand from what must be plainly stated to be a different point of view. The whole British period has been treated as a completed episode. It has been regarded, not as the story of the rise and decline of British power in India, but as the story of the transformation of Indian under the impact of western power, techniques, and ideas, of which the East India Company was the harbinger and Britain the creative intermediary.
This fresh treatment of the British period has involved some problems of adjustment between Parts II and III. If Part III was to be a history of India in the time of the British rather than a history of the British in India, more attention had clearly to be paid to Indian India at the outset. This meant that either sections of Part II must be omitted or some repetition incurred in Part III. I have thought the integration of the Mughul and British periods, and the weaving together of the British and Indian strands so important as to justify some overlapping in the periods and some repetition of topics. Only thus can a proper historical perspective be achieved. These traits will be noticed in passages dealing with the Marathas, the Afghans in the eighteenth century, the Sikhs, and the closing scenes of the Mughul empire.

The provision of notes on authorities at the end of each chapter has been retained throughout the book. Chronological tables have been similarly retained in Parts I and II, but in Part III synchronistic chronological tables for each of the four Books VII–X have been inserted at the end of the Part. The maps and illustrations have both been completely revised.

The problem of the transliteration of Indian names and words has been a difficult one. A book hoping to be read by a wide public should be as clear as possible in its treatment of names and technical terms, but at the same time there must be some consistency and conformance to scientific usage. A further difficulty is that many Indian words have become naturalized in the English language with spellings which are familiar rather than scientific. Thus we have 'Meerut' for 'Mirat', 'hookah' for 'hūqa', and 'thug' for 'thug'. The last example illustrates a further complication, that of a word undergoing a change of meaning (ritual strangler to general gangster) as well as a change of spelling. The methods adopted have been as follows. In Parts I and II words have been transliterated on accepted Hunterian principles with the usual diacritical marks. The exceptions are certain well-known names such as Akbar and Bengal. In Part III the problem has been more difficult because of the large number of Indian words naturalized into English. Here it has been felt that some sacrifice in accuracy would be well compensated by gain in intelligibility. The Hunterian system of spelling has been generally followed but diacritical marks have been usually omitted. Familiar spellings such as Cawnpore and Lucknow have been retained, but where a word has changed in meaning as well as spelling in passing into English, as 'thug', the correct transliteration has been given. The Concise Oxford Dictionary has been used as a guide to naturalization of Indian words into English.

Book X, Chapters 6–9, are a revised version of chapters contributed to the third edition of P. E. Roberts’s History of British India.

In preparing Part III I have received much help from many quarters. But chiefly I should like to thank my wife whose encouragement and sensitive judgement have contributed so much to the completion of the work.

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