

**JOHN HARRISS, CRAIG JEFFREY  
AND TRENT BROWN**

# INDIA

**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**



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# India

## Continuity and Change in the Twenty-First Century

JOHN HARRISS, CRAIG JEFFREY  
AND TRENT BROWN

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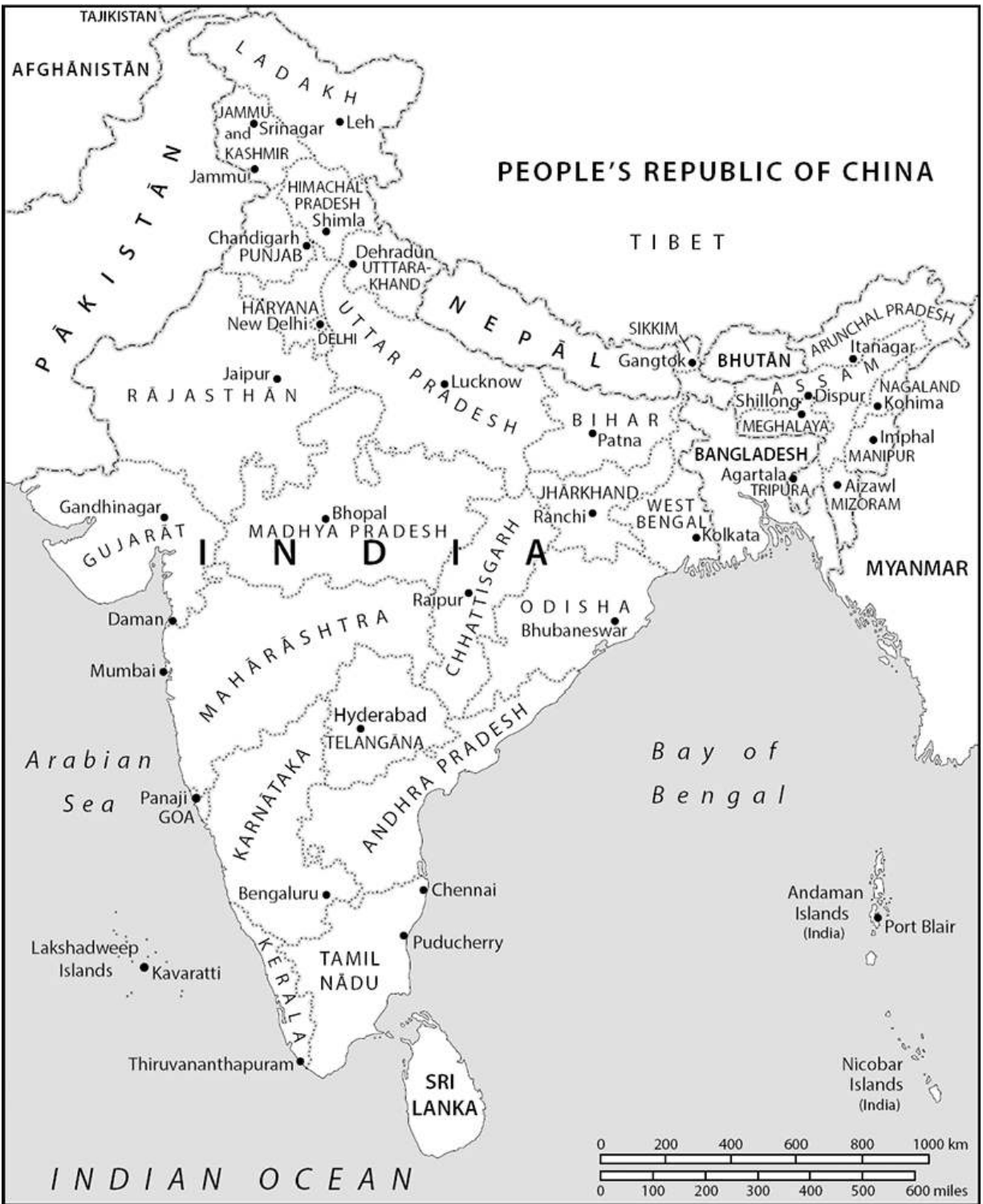
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# Abbreviations



AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
ASER	Annual State of Education Report
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BIMARU	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal
BPL	Below the Poverty Line
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CAD	Constituent Assembly Debates
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CEC	Central Empowered Committee
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CMP	Common Minimum Programme
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)/CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI(Maoist)	Communist Party of India (Maoist)
CSO	Central Statistical Office
CSWI	Committee on the Status of Women in India
DBT	Direct Benefits Transfer
DJM	Dharam Jagran Manch
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DNEP	Draft National Education Policy

DPI	Dalit Panther Iyakkam
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EKC	Environmental Kuznets Curve
EPI	Environmental Performance Index
EPW	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i>
FCRA	Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FERA	Foreign Exchange Regulation Act
FRA	Forest Rights Act
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoI	Government of India
GST	Goods and Services Tax
GVA	Gross Value Added
HYV	Hindu Yuva Vahini
IAC	Indians Against Corruption
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
INC	Indian National Congress
INR	Indian Rupee(s)
IT	Information Technology
JAM	Jan Dhan-Aadhar-Mobile Number
JD	Janata Dal
JNP	Janata Party
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
MBC	Most Backward Class/Caste

MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MKSS	Mazdur Kisan Shakti Sangathan
MoEF	Ministry of Environment, Forest (and Climate Change)
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSDE	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
MSPI	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
MRTP	Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (Act)
NAC	National Advisory Council
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movements
NBA	Narmada Bacha Andolan
NCAER	National Council for Applied Economic Research
NCEUS	National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDTV	New Delhi Television (Limited)
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NEP	National Environment Policy
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NFSA	National Food Security Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

NPV	Net Present Value
NREGA/S	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act/Scheme
NRI	Non-Resident Indian
NSS(O)	National Sample Survey (Office)
NWS	Nuclear Weapons States
OBC	Other Backward Class
PDS	Public Distribution System
POTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RtE	Right to Education (Act)
RTI	Right to Information (Act)
RWA	Resident Welfare Association
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SBM	Swachh Bharat Mission
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SP	Samajwadi Party
SPCB	State Pollution Control Board
SRM	Self-Regulating Market (Economy)
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TFP	Total Factor Productivity
TRAI	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of

	India
UAPA	Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act
UBI	Universal Basic Income
UGC	University Grants Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VCK	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
WHO	World Health Organization



## About the Authors

**John Harriss** is Professor Emeritus of International Studies at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. He also taught at the Universities of Cambridge and East Anglia, and at the London School of Economics, and held visiting positions at the National University of Singapore, and in the Centre of Modern Indian Studies at the University of Göttingen. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, John has lived and worked and done research in India over more than four decades, and has written on many different aspects of economy, politics and society in the country.

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His current research explores both formal and informal means of agricultural skill development in north India.

## Preface and Acknowledgements

This book has its origins in an earlier book that two of us wrote, with Stuart Corbridge, called *India Today: Economy, Politics and Society* (Polity Press, 2013). We began writing that book a decade ago, in 2010, and the writing was mostly completed in mid-2011. In the years that have elapsed since then, there has been a great deal of change in India. Some of it has been associated with the achievement of an absolute majority in the Indian parliament for the first time by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political party that is a part of the wider movement of Hindu nationalism, in 2014; but there have been changes too, that are the outcomes of much longer running trends in India's economy and in Indian society. At the same time there are sometimes surprising indications of continuity from the past - in social relationships, for instance, and in the ways in which formally democratic politics works. India has, in many ways, defied the expectations of theorists of 'modernization'. So it has come about, after we responded positively to the suggestion from Polity Press that we should 'update' *India Today*, that we have found ourselves writing a largely new book. Indeed, it has been difficult to draw a line and to stop writing in the late summer of 2019, because of the flurry of policy innovation that has followed from the re-election in April-May of this year, with an increased majority, of the BJP government led by Narendra Modi.

A further reason for this becoming a new book, rather than a second edition of *India Today*, is that our friend Stuart Corbridge found it very difficult to contribute to writing, following his appointment as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Durham in 2015. It is a matter of great regret

for us that we have lost the knowledge and insight that Stuart would have brought to this book. At the same time, we want to acknowledge that *India: Continuity and Change in the 21st Century* bears clear marks of the ways in which Stuart designed *India Today*, including its organization around a series of questions about India's economy, politics and society. This book displays its own particular historical path dependency.

We - John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey - were happy that Trent Brown, Craig's colleague in the Australia India Institute at the University of Melbourne, agreed to join us in the writing of this new book, bringing his experience of research on civil society organizations and rural development. None of us is an Indian citizen, so we are writing as sympathetic outsiders, with the disadvantages as well as possible advantages that this status brings. We bring to the book as well the experience of having lived, worked and carried out research in different parts of India for, collectively, very many years - mainly in the south and in West Bengal (Harriss), in western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (Jeffrey), and in the north-west and Himalayas (Brown), though we have all travelled widely throughout the country. We are able to draw extensively on the excellent research of large numbers of Indian scholars, and in regard to current and recent events, on the work of the many outstanding independent journalists and commentators in the country.

A further reason for our decision to write a new book rather than 'updating' *India Today* is that there is such a large volume of new research and analysis that has been published over the last ten years, both dealing specifically with India, and with the wider questions that are addressed in our book, such as the patterns and determinants of economic growth or trends in democratic politics. We cannot claim to have read everything of note that has been

published, but as our bibliography shows, we have drawn extensively on new writing. As in our earlier book, however, we have necessarily referred a good deal to research that has been published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW). This is a journal that, so far as we are aware, is without parallel elsewhere in the world, publishing each week considered commentary on current events in India, and elsewhere in the world, together with scholarly articles based on high-quality research, across a wide field. The 'EPW' has always encouraged diversity of opinion, and its pages contain vigorous debate. We draw, as well, on the work of the many fine journalists and commentators who write for India's English-language press – the newspapers, *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* and the *Times of India*; news magazines, including especially *Frontline*, published from Chennai by *The Hindu* group; and independent web-based journalism. We draw in particular on *The Wire* (<https://thewire.in>), but we have also consulted *Scroll.in* (<https://scroll.in>) and *The Print* (<https://theprint.in>). In regard to developments in the Indian economy, the website *Ideas for India* (<https://www.ideasforindia.in>) lives up to its name, carrying short reports of current research, mainly by economists, and commentary. It, too, encourages diversity of opinion, and debate on policy matters. We have referred, as well, to the Western press, and especially to the *Financial Times* for its coverage of economic affairs, as well as to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *The Guardian*. All carry thoughtful reporting and commentary.

This book, like *India Today*, is organized around a series of questions, about the Indian economy, politics and society. Each of the chapters can be read independently, and they can be read in any order. This means that there is, necessarily, some overlap in their contents – though we have aimed to reduce this to a minimum. At the same time, the book as a whole does offer what is, we believe, a



coherent argument about the changes that have come about in India over the last decade in particular. Careful readers will note that there is some tension in these pages, reflecting the fact that the three authors are not entirely of one mind in their views of the extent and significance of the changes that are associated especially with the dominance that the Bharatiya Janata Party has established in Indian politics. We are confident that this is a strength of our text, because it is of course far too soon to reach a final judgement on contemporary events, and we believe that we have set out evidence and arguments on the basis of which readers can form their own assessments. It is, unashamedly, an academic book, yet one that, we hope - like *India Today* - will be read and referred to by general readers as well as by our colleagues and by students.

In writing the book we have incurred many debts. For gifts variously of inspiration and of critical support and help we would like to thank: Ashwin Subramanian, Neera Chandhoke, Jeff Checkel, Febe De Geest, Chris Gibson, Alf Gunvald Nilsen, Robin Jeffrey, Rob Jenkins, Surinder Jodhka, Jens Lerche, Atul Kohli, Harsh Mander, James Manor, Rahul Mukerji, Johnny Parry, Suhas Palshikar, Amy Piedalue, V. K. Ramachandran, R. Ramakumar, Haripriya Rangan, Nate Roberts, S. Parasuraman, Aruna Roy, Srila Roy, Alpa Shah, Sharada Srinivasan, Olle Tornquist, Gilles Verniers, M. Vijayabaskar and Rupa Viswanath. Special thanks to those who have given us critical comments on one or other of the chapters of the book: Leslie Armijo, Jane Dyson, Chris Fuller, Amanda Gilbertson, K. P. Kannan, Sanjay Ruparelia, N. C. Saxena, Jeff Redding, Kunal Sen and Marcus Taylor. None of these friends is at all responsible for what follows, and most of them disagree with some parts of our text.

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*JH, CJ and TB, Kingston, Ontario; and Melbourne,  
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# 1 Making Sense of Twenty-First-Century India

## 1.1 Introduction

Early in 2019, the London *Financial Times* announced, ‘The Asian Century is set to begin’ (Romei and Reed 2019). The grounds on which this pronouncement was based were that whereas in 2000 the Asian economies, all combined, accounted for just one-third of world output, according to calculations based on purchasing power parity (PPP – the method of comparing the currencies of different countries that takes account of differences in standards of living), it was projected that by 2020 they would account for more than half of world output. Among Asian countries, by 2017 China had by far the biggest economy, the biggest in the world according to PPP comparisons, or second to the United States measured in terms of exchange values. According to the first set of calculations (PPP), by 2017 India had the third largest economy in the world, though that of China was two-and-a-half times as big; in terms of the ranking of the gross national income of countries at exchange values, India had only the seventh largest economy in the world and it was only one-fifth as big as that of China, though it was only a little smaller than the economies of the UK and of France – and set to overtake both of them (see [tables 1.1](#) and [1.2](#)).

Looked at historically, however, the world in the twenty-first century is returning to the way it was before the ‘great divergence’ that took place from the later eighteenth century. From about that time, or rather before according

to some calculations, the Western European economies that had until then lagged behind the major Asian economies, took off, and their peoples became, on average, very much wealthier than people elsewhere in the world. In the eighteenth century the Indian share of the world economy is reckoned to have been as big as Europe's. With China, India accounted for a very large share of the world's manufactured products. But in the nineteenth century, thanks to European imperialism, 'Asia was transformed from the world's manufacturing centre into classic underdeveloped economies exporting agricultural commodities', in the words of the economic historian, R. C. Allen (cited by Romei and Reed 2019).

**Table 1.1** Gross National Income (current US\$) of Leading Countries, 2017

SOURCE: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*

<b>Country</b>	<b>GNI (US\$ billions)</b>
United States	18,980.3
China	12,042.9
Japan	4,888.1
Germany	3,596.6
United Kingdom	2,675.9
France	2,548.3
India	2,405.7
Brazil	1,800.6
Russia	1,355.6

**Table 1.2** Gross National Income (PPP\$) of Leading Countries, 2017

SOURCE: World Bank, *World Development Indicators*

<b>Country</b>	<b>GNI (US\$ billions)</b>
China	23,241.5
United States	19,607.6
India	9,448.7
Japan	5,686.3
Germany	4,274.0
Russia	3,721.6
Brazil	3,173.4
France	2,939.3
United Kingdom	2,810.0

India was for long seen as perhaps the archetypal poor developing country, of very little account in the global economy. Latterly, even if it has not experienced quite such a dramatic economic transformation as has China in the last decade or so of the twentieth century and the first twenty years of the present one, India clearly has become a major economic power. According to the World Development Indicators of the World Bank, the average annual growth of GDP in China between 2000 and 2017 was 9.7 per cent, and that of India was 7.5 per cent – both rates much higher than those of comparator countries such as Brazil (2.9 per cent) or Indonesia (5.5 per cent). The average annual growth of GDP in the United States over this period, according to the same data set, was 1.7 per cent, that of the UK 1.5 per cent. In a delicious twist of history, an Indian company, Tata, has become the biggest employer of manufacturing workers in Britain, the former colonial power that ruled over the country for a century and a half. The *Forbes* magazine annual listing of



billionaires across the world showed that in 2018 India had 131 of them, the third largest number, behind only the United States and China. There is no doubt that India, with China, will be at the heart of the Asian century.

In other ways, too, a country that was for a long time more or less a backwater in international affairs has thrust itself upon the world's attention, as a state with nuclear weapons, and a very big spender on military equipment. In March 2019 *Reuters* reported, 'Modi hails India as military space power after anti-satellite missile test' (27 March 2019). The country had entered what was called 'an elite space club', with the United States, Russia and China, having successfully blown up a satellite in Low Earth Orbit. The *Reuters* headline reflected, as well, that India's prime minister since 2014, Narendra Modi, had won global recognition, far surpassing the leaders of most other countries. But at the same time some other aspects of contemporary India were being recognized in the international media. On those dollar billionaires, an analysis produced by the NGO Oxfam showed, 'Wealth of 9 richest Indians equivalent to bottom 50% of the country' (NDTV, 21 January 2019). *Aljazeera* reported, 'Seven of the world's worst polluted cities are in India, a new study has revealed' (5 March 2019). The *Washington Post* had the headline, 'India's railroads had 63,000 job openings. 19 million people applied' (4 January 2019). An article in the *New York Times*, about an attack by upper-caste men on a Dalit (the name referring to India's lowest castes, those who used to be called 'untouchable') was titled, "'Tell everyone we scalped you!' How caste still rules in India' (17 November 2018). In July 2018 *BBC News* reported on, 'How WhatsApp helped turn an Indian village into a lynch mob' (19 July 2018), and a day later *The Guardian* carried an article, 'Mobs are killing Muslims in India. Why is no one stopping them?' On the other hand, a writer for the

highly respected *Christian Science Monitor* wrote an article, 'Global decline in democracy? The lesson from India may be "Not so fast"' (16 March 2018).

These headlines from some of the leading international news media reflect different aspects of India today. India has changed, quite dramatically, since 2000. It is, in many ways, a very different country. Yet there are also significant elements of continuity, as the *New York Times* story about caste violence suggests. This book is framed around important questions about continuity and change in twenty-first-century India. We draw upon the rich recent scholarship by Indian writers and others to analyse how and why India has changed, and with what consequences, drawing as well upon comparisons with other countries. Why, for example, is Narendra Modi often compared with Recep Erdoğan in Turkey, and even with Donald Trump in the United States? All three leaders are often described as 'populists'. Why? What does it mean? Another comparative question: is it fruitful to make comparisons between race in the United States and the treatment of the lowest castes, the Dalits, or 'untouchables', in India? How has the pursuit of neoliberal economic policy affected India by comparison with other countries, and how effective, in a comparative context, has resistance to it been? In addressing these and other such questions, we will turn to the wider social science literature, and to scholars who study India among other countries, not restricting ourselves only to writing that is focused more or less exclusively on India. For quite some time a great deal of writing about India took little account of work on other countries, treating the country as exceptional, because of its particular complexity - a tendency that led one student of politics, James Manor, to write an article with the title 'What do they know of India who only India know?' (Manor 2010a). Even though this book is about contemporary India, we aim always to refer