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Ramachandra Guha has taught at Yale, Stanford, Oslo, and the Indian Institute of Science. His other books include *A Corner of a Foreign Field* and *Environmentalism: A Global History*. His awards include the UK Cricket Society's Literary Award and the Leopold-Hidy Prize of the American Society of Environmental History. In May 2008, *Prospect* and *Foreign Policy* magazines nominated Guha as one of the world's one hundred most influential intellectuals. In 2009, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan for services to literature and education.

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THE HISTORY OF THE
WORLD'S LARGEST
DEMOCRACY

RAMACHANDRA
GUHA

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'A magisterial work' — FINANCIAL TIMES

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THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S
LARGEST DEMOCRACY

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

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A Note on Place Names

In recent years, the names of several towns and cities in India have been modified or changed – thus Bombay has become Mumbai, Madras has become Chennai and Calcutta has become Kolkata. Likewise, the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, was for much of the period covered by this book known as Dacca, while the Chinese capital, Beijing, was until the 1980s referred to as Peking. The usage in this book conforms to historical convention rather than linguistic precision. For example, the capital of Maharashtra is referred to as Bombay until we come to the time when its name was officially changed to Mumbai.

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Prologue

Unnatural Nation

I

Because they are so many, and so various, the people of India are also divided. It appears to have always been so. In the spring of 1827 the poet Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib set out on a journey from Delhi to Calcutta. Six months later he reached the holy Hindu city of Banaras. Here he wrote a poem called 'Chirag-i-Dair' (Temple Lamps), which contains these timeless lines:

Said I one night to a pristine seer
(Who knew the secrets of whirling Time),
'Sir, you well perceive,
That goodness and faith,
Fidelity and love
Have all departed from this sorry land.
Father and son are at each other's throat;
Brother fights brother. Unity
and Federation are undermined.
Despite these ominous signs
Why has not Doomsday come?
Why does not the Last Trumpet sound?
Who holds the reins of the Final Catastrophe?'

Ghalib's poem was composed against the backdrop of the decline of the Mughal Empire. His home territory, the Indo-Gangetic plain, once ruled by a single monarch, was now split between contending chiefdoms and armies. Brother was fighting brother; unity and federation were being undermined. But even as he wrote, a new (and foreign) power was asserting its influence across the land in the form of the British, who were steadily acquiring control of the greater part of the subcontinent. Then in 1857 large sections of the native population rose up in what the