

R. S. SHARMA (1919–2011) was Emeritus Professor, Department of History, University of Patna. He was also the Founder Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi.

This book provides a comprehensive and accessible account of the history of early India. Beginning with a discussion on frameworks of writing history, the volume sheds light on the origins and growth of civilizations, empires, and religions. It covers the geographical, ecological, and linguistic backgrounds, and looks at specific cultures of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Vedic periods, as well as the Harappan civilization.

The author discusses the rise of Jainism and Buddhism, Magadha, and the beginning of territorial states. The period of Mauryas, Central Asian countries, Satavahanas, Guptas, and Harshavardhana are also analysed. He highlights important phenomena such as the varna system, urbanization, commerce and trade, developments in science and philosophy, and cultural legacy. He also examines the process of transition from ancient to medieval India and addresses topical issues such as the origin of the Aryan culture. This engaging and lucid text, by one of the best-known scholars of ancient India, will be indispensable for students and teachers of ancient Indian history.

'The narrative is highly readable, demarcating the major periods of social formation, political and cultural evolution, underlying which is a judicious use of all available sources and their relative importance for each period.'

—**R. Champakalakshmi**, *Economic and Political Weekly*

Cover visual: (foreground) Apsara, Ajanta; (background) Stupa Site III, Nalanda, Gupta Period. Photographs courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India

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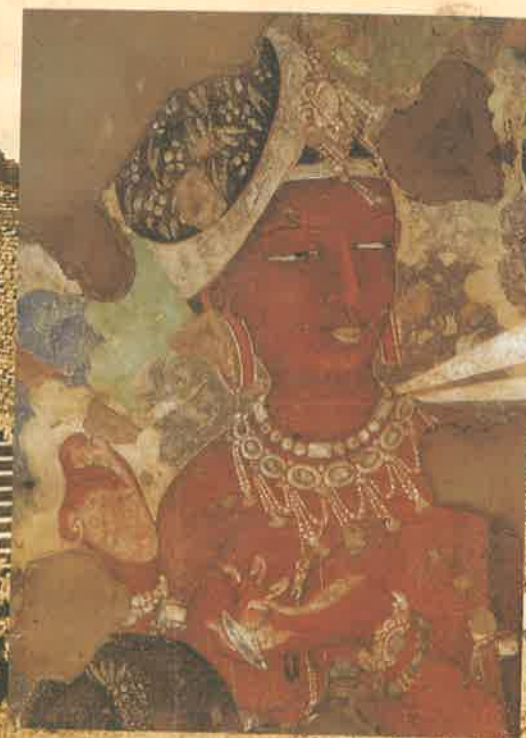
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Published in India by
Oxford University Press
2/11 Ground Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002, India

© Oxford University Press 2005

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First Edition published in 2005
Oxford India Paperbacks 2006
Twenty-ninth impression 2017

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ISBN-13: 978-0-19-568785-9
ISBN-10: 0-19-568785-X

Typeset by Le Studio Graphique, Gurgaon 122 001
Printed in India by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd

Preface

The present book is based on a good portion of my *Ancient India*, which was first published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training in 1977, but the obscurantist elements got it withdrawn from circulation by the same body in 1978. The book was restored in 1980, and several lacs were printed for school students. However, when in 2001 the NCERT published it, some passages were removed without the author's consent. Finally in 2002 the NCERT withdrew the book because of extreme conservatism. When the Oxford University Press approached me for publication, I decided to get the revised copy of the existing edition published by them. I substantially revised the book and added four new chapters to it. In doing so I took account of new ideas and materials available to me.

The book covers Indian history from the beginning to the 7th century AD. Since it is mainly meant for undergraduates and general readers, I have used non-English words without diacritics. I have also avoided chapter-wise references, but an up-to-date chapter-wise bibliography has been provided at the end of the book for the materials I have used. I will feel happy if the book retains its old popularity.

Patna
July 2005

R.S. Sharma
(RAM SHARAN SHARMA)

Acknowledgements

In preparing *India's Ancient Past* I have received helps from several quarters. Sita Ram Roy has prepared the chronology and also suggested some improvements in the text. The index has been mainly prepared by Anjani Kumar who has also compiled the bibliography. In addition to these two persons, Angaraj Choudhary, Arundhati Banerji, Chandraprakash Narayan Singh, K.K. Mandal, Parvej Akhtar, Prachi Sharma, Rajeshwar Prasad, R.L. Shukla, Sarjun Prasad, and Surendra Gopal, have helped me in different ways. I thank all of them. Nitasha Devasar, Aparajita Basu, and Shashank Sinha of the OUP have helped me in the publication of the book. They deserve my sincere thanks.

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