

From Hindustan to India: Naming Change in Changing Names*

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This paper examines the significance of the changing meanings of the term Hindustan between 1750 and 1880 and the reasons for its gradual disuse. It is often taken for granted that India is the appropriate name for pre-partition South Asia, and yet for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Hindustan was regularly used. Hindustan can be found in histories, travel narratives and official correspondences, but the term is most evident in published maps and atlases. The main questions for the paper focus on the reasons why Hindustan was used in maps and often preferred to India, how the meanings of the term changed over time, and why the former term gradually fell out of cartographic use during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Terms India and Hindustan

The terms India and Hindustan have long and complex histories. Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell note that the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, meaning 'the sea' and designating a river (Indus), is the likely origin of the term India.¹ They suggest that slight linguistic changes resulted in the Persians calling this region on the banks of the Indus *Hindu*, which was then adopted as India by Roman and Greek writers. Initially, India was associated with the Indus, but it also became a term designating the area between the Indus and the Ganges (India within the Ganges) as well as the lands further to the east (India beyond the Ganges). These two Indias are at the root of the term 'the Indies', which connoted and still connotes a region that spreads across much of southern and eastern Asia, and even into the Americas. Many European languages also have an equivalent term—*les Indes* in French, for instance—although Yule and Burnell point out that European nations usually referred to their own colonial territories when speaking of the Indies. British understanding of the terms India and Indies, therefore, were influenced by ancient Greek and Latin writings as well as by contemporary European usages.

Hindustan is also a term that was originally associated with the Indus River. B.N.

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¹ Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson Jobson* (London, 1903), pp.433–7.