

07 **HITLIST** the guide

HOW TO READ INDIA BETWEEN THE LINES

Manosi Lahiri's Mapping India will engage, inspire and enthrall an untapped reader base of wannabe cartographers and history buffs to the rare treasures that size up the contours and corners of subcontinental India, as Fiona Fernandez was to unearth

INTERVIEW



Mapping India appears ominous to the lay reader — tell us about the background research? What went through your mind as you began work?

Over the years, it has come to my notice that as a nation we are quite unaware of our cartographic history. I felt the remedy to the situation lay in encouraging people to read about how and why other nations made maps of this country. I began by reading books and visiting map repositories to see their collections. I planned to include many maps to illustrate the text. It was then that I realised the enormity of the task I had set myself. I hope other researchers will take on from where my book ends.

What were the biggest challenges that cropped up, the unexpected ones in particular?
It was daunting to get permission from authorities in India to photograph the relevant maps. I sourced many manuscript maps from the National Archives of India. Often, the map sheets stored there were so large, brittle or faded, that it was a technical challenge to

reproduce them in the book. But we finally got over these problems by selecting illustrative sections from the map sheets and involving expert photographers and technicians. These problems did not occur when sourcing from foreign libraries because they already hold much of their resources in digital form and are ready to give permission to publish them.

Which region of India was most difficult to procure maps for? Why?
I have not been able to find maps of the Himalayan mountain ranges, the northeast hills and parts of central India. I believe topographical maps of these areas exist with the government, but for the purpose of this book, my interest was general historical maps and I have found very few for these areas.

Maps of old were created in a most interesting manner, with illustrations and other informative specs; has that era passed on, forever?

Admittedly, older maps are visually appealing, but modern maps have a great deal of accurate and current information embedded in them. Illustrations on old maps did not always make them more reliable. Adding graphics was often the means to distract from obvious lack of information. I believe very attractive maps are still produced, but the content and motifs have changed over the years.

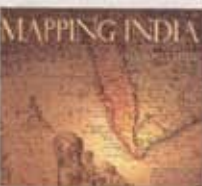


Duffing Section staff at work at the Survey of India, Calcutta, 1890s-1911

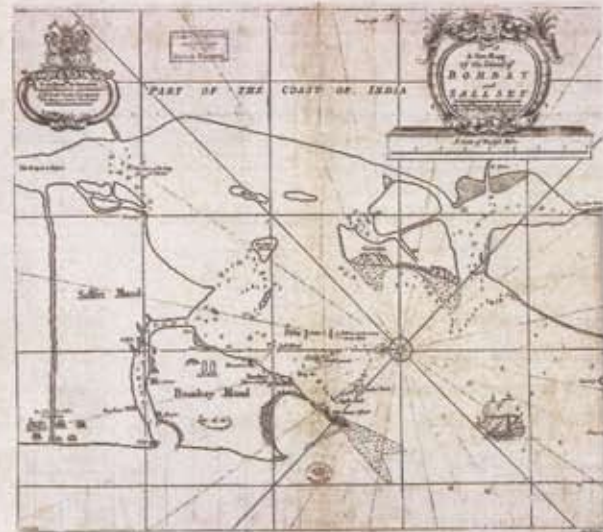
Most of the maps in the book appear to have been sourced from the British Library in London; how did this happen?

Yes, several are sourced from The Map Library, which is a vast and fine collection of maps of the erstwhile British Empire and rare world atlases. But there is another reason. While India was surveyed by the British through the nineteenth century, the maps were compiled and published in Britain. It was only later that they were also published in India. So naturally, my search led me to the British Library and the Royal Geographical Society, where these maps can be found today. Also, these institutions have well-established systems that help authors to use their resources.

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(Top) Untitled map to illustrate the travels of Dutch missionary and traveller van Linscoten to Goa; published in 1596. (Right) A map of the island of Bombay and Saliset by Samuel Thornton, published in 1750